# CHILD  POVERTY  AND  MEDIA  ADVOCACY
# IN  AOTEAROA

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**ABSTRACT**

New Zealand has one of the worst rates of child poverty in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Research has shown that modern mass media provide a mediated cultural forum through which policy responses to child poverty are socially negotiated and from which public support for children in need is either cultivated or undermined. This thesis focuses on the role of media advocacy by the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) who attempt to widen public debate and legitimate options for addressing child poverty. I investigate the case of the Government's *Working for Families* package and the controversy surrounding the media release of CPAG's negative evaluation of the package in the form of a research report *Cut Price Kids*. Attention is given to competing ideological frames underlying the Government's package, in the form of neo-liberal emphases on distinctions between "God's" and the "Devil's" poor. Attention is also given to CPAG's response, in the form of communitarian notions of collective responsibility for all families in need. Specifically, I analyse the role of the mass media in framing child poverty as a social issue across three levels of mass communication - production, representation, and reception. At the production level interviews were held with six journalists involved with reporting on *Cut Price Kids* and two members of CPAG. Fifteen Government and 5 CPAG press releases were also explored to document media production processes and restraints on public deliberations. In addition, the ideological stances influencing the framing of coverage were investigated. At the media representation level 21 press, seven radio, and five television items were analysed to establish the scope of public debate, whose perspectives were included, and the ways in which differing perspectives are combined. At the reception level four focus group discussions with lower socio-economic status (SES) parent groups, as well as follow-up photo-based interviews with eight participants were explored in order to document the role of media coverage in the lives of families with children living in poverty. Across levels, findings suggest that journalists are restrained by professional practices which maintain the importance of balance and detached objectivity, rather than interpretations of appropriate responses to child poverty. Tensions between the Government's emphasis on restricting support to families with parents in paid employment and CPAG's emphasis on the need to not discriminate against the children of out of work

families framed coverage. The lower SES parents participating at the reception level challenged the restrained nature of coverage, which excluded people such as themselves, and openly questioned media characterisations of them as "bludgers" who are irresponsible parents. Overall, findings support the view that media are a key component of ongoing social dialogues through which public understandings of, and policy responses to, child poverty are constructed. Specifically, psychologists need to engage more with processes of symbolic power which shape the public construction of child poverty in a conservative manner that can lead to victim blaming, and restrains opportunities for addressing this pressing social concern.

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# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

"Knowledge and insight on the lives of… poor people… is derived from mediated experience, what we read in newspapers, what we hear on radio, what we see on television" (Power, 1999, p. 79).

I have commenced with this quote because it highlights the centrality of mass media in the public imaging of poor people and by extension the framing of pressing social concerns such as child poverty. It is this very role of the media to which this thesis is concerned. This chapter provides a rationale for the thesis. Section one presents a general argument for the present focus on media representations and in particular a specific policy initiative to address child poverty. Section two provides an introduction to the issue of child poverty in Aotearoa/New Zealand, which details why this is a significant social/health issue for our children and society. The third explores policy responses to child poverty and details the Government's *Working for Families* package. Section four explores a specific case of media advocacy to challenge the Government's package. The final section overviews the present investigation of the role of media framing in public deliberations and responses to child poverty.

## *Why Study Poverty and the Media?*

During the last two centuries there has been considerable research into the relationship between poverty, social exclusion and health (Chadwick, 1842; Engles, 1844; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003), and more recently, media representations of a range of health determinants, including poverty (Golding & Middleton, 1982; Huckin, 2002; Seale, 2004). In the past, health inequalities and social determinants of health have been studied independently of media research (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2006). A discussion of the role of the media is crucial because media are primary sources of taken-for-granted frameworks for understanding social concerns, and are central to the definition of social issues and the legitimation of specific approaches to addressing these issues (Hodgetts, Cullen & Radley, 2005). The media serves as more than simply a vehicle for transmitting unbiased information to an audience; it is a social institution that constructs meaning and influences public understandings (Finlay & Faulkner, 2005).

For community psychologists interested in the experience of poverty and health, we ought to be interested in which stories get told and which are suppressed, and in how members of various media audiences respond to media representations (Loto, Hodgetts, Chamberlain, Nikora, Karapu & Barnett, 2006). News media provide somewhat restrained forums for refining audiences' understandings of public concerns and what can be done about these concerns (Curran & Seaton, 2003; Devereux, 1998). In this forum certain understandings of causes, responsibilities and solutions are promoted (Golding & Middleton, 1982; Iyengar, 1994). This is often with recourse to the views of powerful groups including government representatives, the medical profession and increasingly, less powerful collectives such as issue-based community advocacy groups (Couldry & Curran, 2002). The media are also often central to how groups affected by poverty make sense of their situations and health status (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2003a). It is important to investigate these processes because "…it is through these various media that our relations with others, both neighbours and strangers, are facilitated or, indeed, denied. Relations are created and sustained. Prejudices likewise" (Silverstone & Georgiou, 2005, p. 434).

Locally, Leitch (1990) showed that New Zealand press coverage contained victim blaming images of unemployed people in which individuals were accused of being shy of work and overly dependent on "the taxpayer". Such images set up distinctions between the taxpaying public and "scroungers". Finding similar trends in the United Kingdom, Golding and Middleton (1982) coin the term "scroungerphobia" to talk about how coverage of poverty is framed to respond to the anxieties of a concerned public that is weary of being exploited by unscrupulous beneficiaries who are overly frivolous with "our" money. This sets up a conceptual backdrop and set of accusations in media framing against which the image of poor people, and in particular the "superscrounger" who defrauds the system, is framed and against which such people are judged. What is evident in such research is that those living in poverty are not constructing their own images; rather, these are constructed by others in a manner that often appeals to public prejudices.

The emphasis on individual responsibility is a salient finding from research into media representations of poverty (Fiske, 1999; Huckin, 2002; Kramer & Lee, 1999; Platt, 1999). However, it would be misleading to assert that this is the only image

made available via the media. Media often employ two contrasting frames for poor people (Devereux, 1998). First, the more prominent conservative frame individualises poor people as the cause of their own situations. Poor people are often presented as abnormal from the general public, inferior and "other" (Hodgetts, Cullen & Radley, 2005). They are our criminals whose fraudulent activities and violent actions constitute a threat to civil society. Such negative characterisations can be linked to traditional notions of the "undeserving" poor which fit with Jeffers' (1990) concept of victimography or "…the portrayal of the object of social examination or documentation as the problem in itself" (p. 99). Poverty is not presented as a symptom of social and economic arrangements (Min, 1999). Second, the liberal frame portrays poor people as "needy victims" of inequitable social structures and relative deprivation. The use of these frames reflects wider tensions in social policy and public consciousness between notions of the "undeserving" and "deserving" poor. Golding and Middleton (1982) discuss the historical links of this media framing in medieval notions of "God's poor" and the "Devil's poor" which was used to designate charity (Devereux, 1998). The imaging of their children is often aligned with the needy victim because children are innocent and suffer, but are not at fault for their parents' circumstances (Tester, 2001).

Media framing is particularly important because media coverage of poverty is often taken by policy makers to reflect public opinion regarding policy issues. As a result, policies are more likely to be developed and implemented if policy makers consider there to be sufficient public support "expressed through" media coverage (Davidson, Hunt & Kitzinger, 2003). Tester (2001) makes a similar observation in relation to the notion of the *CNN effect*, which refers to a link between images of starving children on television news and more sustained and aggressive American policy initiatives to address the needs of such children. In its basic form, the CNN effect occurs when policy-makers only respond to issues when these have been identified by news media as pressing concerns requiring immediate action.

Briefly, how media frame social issues is a particularly important consideration for those trying to promote the importance of social inequalities and policies aimed at alleviating the impact of social injustices on health and community wellness (Wallack, 2003). Noting such considerations, this thesis explores how particular stories are promoted through the media by specific stakeholder groups seeking to

exert influence over public deliberations regarding child poverty. Specifically, I will document how the current Labour government cultivates public support for specific initiatives to address child poverty (Scammell, 1995). Governmental agencies are by no means the sole voice on issues such as child poverty. Groups such as the Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)[1] promote reports such as *Cut Price Kids: Does the 2004 'Working for Families' Budget Work for Children* (St John & Craig, 2004) in order to raise the profile of child poverty as a public concern and to offer alternative solutions to those currently promoted by the Government. Thus, this thesis explicates links between media framing and policy agendas in relation to debate regarding the Government's *Working for Families* (2004) package and the response by CPAG in the form of the *Cut Price Kids* report. The resulting dialogue between the Government and such groups is approached as a manifestation of processes of symbolic power via which the meaning of, and public responses to, child poverty are socially negotiated (Couldry & Curran, 2002).

*Conceptualising Child Poverty and its Consequences*

Research suggests that since the late 1980's and early 1990's when social and economic inequalities increased dramatically, New Zealand poverty rates have shifted from medium levels of poverty at 10-13 percent towards being relatively high at 15-26 percent of the population (Ajwani, Blakely, Robson, Tobias & Bonne, 2003). In its latest Innocenti Research Centre Report Card[2], the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) highlighted that according to the child poverty league of Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, New Zealand is ranked fourth from the bottom (UNICEF, 2005). This means that as an OECD country, we have an exceptionally high rate of child poverty.

At this point it is necessary to explain what I mean by child *poverty* in this context.  Poverty is often conceptualised and measured in two ways. *Absolute poverty* refers to a lack of basic resources for a minimum existence, which is often invoked by images of starving children in developing countries (Bradbury, Jenkins &

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[1] CPAG is a non-profit group, formed in 1994 consisting of academics, activists, practitioners and various supporters.  In partnership with Maori and lower SES communities, the group advocates for more informed social policy to support children in Aotearoa, particularly those that are presently living in poverty (CPAG, 2004).

[2] This publication is the sixth in a series of Innocenti Report Cards, designed to monitor and compare the performance of the OECD countries in meeting the needs of their children. This report marks the first of an annual Innocenti Report on Child Poverty in Rich Countries.

Micklewright, 2001). In contrast, *relative poverty* is a low income, which may vary in real income terms with the time periods and countries being compared. Quite literally, this type of poverty is considered relative because it looks at a person's standard of living relative to others in the community (Easton, 1986). If an individual does not have a standard of living which resembles that of the rest of the community, and as a result does not feel that he or she belongs in that community, then that person can be described as living in relative poverty (Easton, 1986). McGee and Fryer (1989) propose that relative poverty is both an economic and psychological phenomenon experienced through a lack of entitlements and restraints on the consumption of both material and symbolic products. It is manifest in a sense of stigma as "the poor", which challenges one's sense of self and place in a consumerist society. Thus, the relative child poverty experienced in countries such as New Zealand places families in a situation of relative deprivation that is associated with poor health outcomes (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003).

Adopting a relative perspective on poverty, Stephens, Frater and Waldegrave (2000) note that the word poverty can be used to describe a lack of income, a low level of consumption, bad housing or other physical living conditions, lower-quality healthcare, education and other basic social services. When applied to children, relative poverty, or deprivation, can mean the absence of a range of other factors affecting an individual's well-being. It can mean missing out on what most people take for granted, not having the same opportunities as the general public and getting sicker more often and dying earlier (Joint Methodist-Presbyterian Public Questions Committee & New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services, 1998). According to UNICEF "a child is to be considered poor if the income available to that child, assuming a fair distribution of resources within the family and making allowances for family size and composition, is less than half the median income available to a child growing up in that society" (2005, p. 7).

Parental or household income is usually used as a key indicator of child poverty, although it is clear that various factors affect an individual's standard of living (UNICEF, 2005). These factors can include the cost of one's housing, the cost of health care, access to education, access to love and care, and whether that person participates within their community. The families of children living in relative poverty are often dependent on various state benefits, including unemployment, invalids,

sickness, and domestic purposes (DPB). These benefits only meet 75-85 per cent of a standard budget, based on $16 a day to feed a family of five (Joint Methodist-Presbyterian Public Questions Committee & New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services 1998). The Ministry of Social Development has created a poverty threshold for New Zealand at 60 per cent equivalent net-of-housing costs median income (CPAG, 2003). According to such criteria around 29 percent of children are living in relative poverty in this country. In other words, approximately one in three New Zealand children face relative deprivation.

It is important to note the ethnic makeup of children living in poverty because this reflects a raft of issues surrounding social power relations and exclusion. According to Statistics New Zealand (2001), around one in four New Zealanders (23 percent) are under 15 years of age. The Ministry of Social Policy (2000) note that almost six out of every 10 children under 15 (59 per cent) are of sole European descent. Almost one in four (24 percent) are of Maori descent. Around 10 percent are of Pacific Island descent, seven percent are Asian, and 0.5 percent are from other ethnic groups (as cited in CPAG, 2003). Statistics New Zealand (1999) highlight that in 1996, 13 percent of all children of European descent were in the lowest income quintile (fifth), in contrast to 34 percent of Maori children. Thirty four percent of these children were of Pacific Island descent, while 28 percent were classified as Asian. Thus the highest proportional incidences of child poverty were among ethnic minorities (as cited in CPAG, 2003). However, according to Easton and Ballantyne (2002), because there are numerically more Pakeha within New Zealand, the above figures shift to show that 58.5 percent of the poor were Pakeha and 19.9 percent were Maori. They continue to highlight that 11.8 percent were Pacific, and 9.9 percent were Asian and other ethnic minorities (as cited in CPAG, 2003). These figures suggest that child poverty is a complex issue that can affect any ethnic group.

The effects of relative poverty on children can be devastating. Children who are socio-economically disadvantaged have significantly higher rates of illness, hospitalisation and death from preventable conditions such as pneumonia, injury, skin infections, fetal growth restriction and sudden infant death syndrome (Bradbury, et al., 2001). A childhood with material shortages is linked to reduced life chances and opportunities for social participation later in life (Bradbury, et al., 2001; Easton, 1986; Lawlor, Batty, Morton, Clark, Macintyre, & Leon, 2005).

While it is important to conceptualise child poverty within the New Zealand context and review specific statistical rates in order to demonstrate the severity of the issue, it is also important to consider policy responses to the issue.

*Responding to Child Poverty*

Golding and Middleton (1982) point out that:

> How to deal with the poor has always been a central policy issue of the state, and before the state for the church and feudal authorities. For centuries the poor laws provided the foundation on which other social policies were built. As feudalism gave way to capitalism the problems of economic management and political order were solved in new ways, creating new institutions and new ideologies that have continued to frame explanations of poverty through succeeding shifts in economic and social structure. (p. 6).

Contemporary government responses to poverty have reflected an ongoing tension between two ideological formations (Cheyne, O'Brien & Belgrave, 1997; Mulengu, 1994). The first relates to liberal ideas about the market as a self-regulating realm requiring limited government regulation or intervention (Cockett, 1994). The emphasis here is on individual responsibility for unemployment. The second reflects *Keynesian* or communitarian ideas about the welfare state and the need for state intervention to regulate the market and to assist those who are unable to look after themselves (Shirley, Easton, Briar & Chatterjee, 1990). The emphasis here is on communal responsibility and structural explanations for unemployment. Underlying a communitarian approach is the notion that the group or community precedes and outlasts the individual. As a result, individuals are responsible to the group; communal responsibility is paramount. Conversely, a libertarian perspective focuses on individuals as being primary to the group and thus responsibility is individual foremost and community secondary (Hodges, 1997). The tension between these two ideological formations and resulting ambiguities in the assignment of blame has been found in New Zealand policy documents and news reports (Cheyne et al., 1997; Devereux, 1998; Leitch, 1990). For instance, Leitch (1990) identified two competing ways in which the unemployed were represented in news reports: as "dole bludgers" (emphasising individual responsibility), or as "victims" of wider social transitions (emphasising communal responsibility).

Child poverty has immense policy implications. Previously, individualism, market-based reforms and lifestyle choices were emphasised (Thorns, 2000). This resulted in punitive approaches such as benefit reductions to "motivate" poor people who were dependent on benefits to lift themselves out of poverty. Currently, wider social issues and determinants of health are also discussed. The *Agenda for Children* report raised children's status in society and promoted a "whole child" approach to developing government policy and services affecting children (Ministry of Social Development, 2002). Such initiatives reflect the realisation that inequalities can be addressed through appropriate state action such as an increase in welfare packages for those in need, or a widening of welfare criteria (Harris, 1989).

The 2004 Budget includes a central package *Working for Families*, which is intended to put money in the pockets of New Zealand's low and middle income families with children. It is also intended to make work pay for parents who move off benefits into work. The total amount delivered by this package will build to $1.1 billion a year in 2007 (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). Objectives of the package include ensuring work pays, ensuring families have sufficient income to give their children a good start in life, to reduce barriers to work, to simplify the benefit structure and to ensure people receive their full entitlement. The package has four components: increasing family incomes and making work pay, more affordable housing, more help with childcare costs, and a simpler social assistance system overall. These components are put into action through various income increases, subsidies, and supplements.

A central component of the package is the In Work Payment (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). The In Work Payment is a new payment from 1 April 2006 for low and middle income families with dependent children who are not receiving a benefit or student allowances and who are working a required number of hours. This is a per-family payment with additional assistance for larger families that replaces the Child Tax Credit, which is a per-child payment for low and middle income families with dependent children who are not receiving benefits for longer than three months (Ministry of Social Development, 2004). Implementation of the package began on 1 October 2004, and runs through to April 2007. The package means an average increase of around $100 a week in direct income assistance to families with children in the $25,000 to $45,000 band by 2007 (Ministry of Social Development, 2004).

The government proposes that families with higher earnings will also benefit. This package signals the first major redistribution of income in favour of poorer New Zealanders in 30 years. The argument's effort to reduce numbers of children in poverty is commendable. However, significant improvements for children remain to be seen despite a growing economy.

This package suggests a shift in focus of New Zealand's social assistance system from passive welfare entitlements to active support to move into employment (Ministry of Social Development & Inland Revenue, 2004). This *workfarist* policy (see Shirley et al., 1990) assumes a paternalistic stance on the part of Government in protecting the interests of "us" the working public and God's poor from "them" the beneficiaries or the Devil's poor. As Golding and Middleton (1982) state, "…a core concern of income maintenance schemes has been to protect work incentives by ensuring a considerable gap between income in and out of employment" (p. 186). Those hard-working, respectable and responsible individuals who "earn an honest living" are rewarded in the 2004 Budget, while those who are not currently in work will benefit from any finances "left over". It appears this separatist approach is used by Government to almost justify rewarding one group of poor, while not another. Those who are working are considered the "norm", by which other non-working groups of society are measured against (Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001). Those who are working become the "morally worthy" implying that those who do not somehow lack this worth or dimension to their identities (Hodgetts & Cullen, 2001).

*Cut Price Kids as a Response to the Working for Families Package*

The *Cut Price Kids* report is the third in a series of major reports published by the Child Poverty Action Group. It is this third report that was published specifically in response to the May 2004 Budget. Essentially, the *Cut Price Kids* report questions whether the *Working for Families* package really does work for children. The authors highlight how 175,000 of the country's poorest children are left with very little financial help as a result of this new package, in particular, as a result of the In Work Payment (St John & Craig, 2004). The report provides a critical analysis of family assistance in New Zealand, and the directions being taken over the next three years through the Government's package, with clear recommendations for improvements.

The report's authors argue that many families would receive income increases of less than $10 per child per week, and in some cases no money at all. In some situations, special or core benefits are even reduced for families. While the Government's generosity is clear when it comes to low income working families, it is also evident that those who rely on a benefit are left with very little money, which does nothing to help these particular families out of poverty. St John and Craig (2004) propose that the reduction of child poverty has to be a central policy goal, separate and distinct from policies designed to encourage more people into work. While encouraging more people into work is acknowledged by CPAG as being important, it cannot be the sole focus when there are so many children within New Zealand in desperate need of help. Discriminating against those on benefits (a large proportion made up of Maori, Pacific Island and sole parent families) further entrenches an underclass, and enables unnecessary inequalities to persist in this country (St John & Craig, 2004). It is proposed that the *Working for Families* package relies on classic distinctions between deserving and undeserving families, where the undeserving poor are held in lesser esteem because they "do not want to work" and are content to live as "parasites on society" (Becker, 1997). The Government's package focuses on reducing the dependency of the undeserving poor and exposing them to the benefits of work (Harper, 1996). One strategy is to target public support to those in paid employment as a means of "encouraging" those on benefits to seek such employment. Such victim blaming strategies have proved unsuccessful in alleviating the negative consequences of unemployment because they neglect the material restraints placed on people's lives (Becker, 1997; Cullen & Hodgetts, 2001). St John and Craig (2004) promote the principle that all children should be treated the same and that ideally, the In Work Payment should be abandoned. They also propose that Government reduce the damaging influence of other factors on child poverty rather than blaming victims.

Upon publication, CPAG actively promoted the core findings of the report through the media, recognising that news outlets provide important channels through which policy initiatives enter the public domain and via which such packages can be challenged (Davidson, Hunt & Kitzinger, 2003). Outlets serve as major routes through which the public can be informed or misinformed about government initiatives, and the nature of issues such as child poverty (Wallack, 2003). Scholars have gone as far as to propose that media coverage is not simply a by-product of

policy initiatives. It is also an integral part of how policy is formed and re-formed as well as how it is packaged in reports and then framed by press releases (Davidson et al., 2003; Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004). Media responses are also used by policy makers as a means of gauging public reaction and to decide whether to push the policy forward, refine, or drop an initiative. Thus, media coverage constitutes a sphere within which controversy surrounding policies can be played out. Media coverage provide "a cultural forum for working through the tension between the neo-liberal perception of the market as a self-regulating realm requiring limited government intervention and the neo-Keynesian view that state intervention is necessary to regulate the market and to assist those unable to look after themselves" (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2003, p. 41).

Studying such processes of mass mediation is important for documenting how the media can be used to reform policies, engage public debate and ultimately enhance the lives of those experiencing poverty. Research is crucial for documenting the influence of groups such as CPAG who attempt to exert influence over government agencies who have traditionally exercised power to define groups and issues, and to create policies (Couldry & Curran, 2002). The release of the *Cut Price Kids* report can be approached as an example of media advocacy where a pressure group attempts to use the media to raise the issue of child poverty, broaden public debate, and present alternative public responses (Wallack, 1994; Wallack, Woodruff, Dorfman, Diaz, 1999). Media advocates work to invoke additional voices in order to add complexity to public deliberations regarding issues such as child poverty and to foster social justice and change, which is associated with improved public health. In the process the media are seen as being significant beyond the transfer of additional information. As Wallack (2003) writes:

> The way media matter is based on how we conceptualise the nature of public health issues and hence their solutions - and this is often controversial. If public health problems are viewed as largely rooted in personal behaviours resulting from a lack of knowledge, then media matter because they can be a delivery mechanism for getting the right information to the right people in the right way at the right time to promote personal change.  If, on the other hand, public health problems are viewed as largely rooted in social inequality resulting from the way we use politics and policy to organise our society, then media matter because they can be a vehicle for increasing participation in civic and political life and social capital to promote social change. Of course, media matter in both these ways and other ways as well. (p. 595).

The traditional focus of health and public communication is shifted from promoting individual level behaviour change to promoting change at the social and policy level. This shifts responsibility from the individual/family experiencing poverty, to the institutions which have maintained policies that allow poverty to exist. Rather than simply "filling a perceived information gap" and providing health information, the focus is on the "power gap". That is, rather than provide people with information to assist them in beating the odds; the focus is on changing the odds so that more people have a broader array of healthy choices.

In this thesis I am also assuming that the media matter in the broad sense of fostering or undermining social relations and a collective commitment to communal life. This invokes another complexity. For instance, images of children are particularly evident in efforts to raise public compassion regarding issues of poverty and disease. Such images encourage us to provide monetary support. However, as Tester (2001) proposes, such images can also foster a "culture of distance" in which we are encouraged to feel sympathy and compassion towards those less fortunate, but are not encouraged to relate our own lives to "their" plight or act to change inequitable social structures. Compassion is enough and the management and support of less fortunate others should be left to professionals and policy makers. This is related to an "antiseptic presentation of reality" in news, whereby the general public, or what present politicians often refer to as "middle New Zealand", are separated from issues such as child poverty. This distancing may occur through the use of redundant and negative images of the Devil's poor that associate poverty with deficits in individuals who are different from, and inferior to, middle New Zealand. Tester considers the ethical implications of this distancing of others in need through media portrayals, which appear to function to restrain our capacity to get involved - "The media create the world 'out there' as a problem from which the world 'in here' has to be isolated and kept apart" (Tester, 2001, p. 8). The world out there is censored according to how we might feel inside when confronted with disturbing images of children in need. In the process such distancing can depoliticise poverty whereby "…the suffering of others tends to become more like a natural event to which we need to respond, rather than a political event about which something pre-emptive might have been done. It might be said that media coverage means that we become aware of the killers only after they have killed, since the absence of suffering is not news" (Tester, 2001, p. 49).

It follows that if issues such as child poverty are to be framed and addressed in relation to wider social determinants then professional norms of news production that maintain distance between journalists and the communities they serve need to change. A common assertion among journalists is that they are "simply reporting the news" or "conveying the story", and thus they are no more than "detached observers" (Hodges, 1997). Civic journalism provides an alternative focus compatible with a community psychology orientation towards direct public interventions for social justice. This approach to journalism informs this thesis because it promotes professional ideals of fairness and social justice, rather than objectivity and balance. Proponents engage with issues of concern in consultation with communities in a way that invites community participation, rather than value free observation. This constitutes a shift from a "journalism of information" to a "journalism of conversation" in an effort to cultivate an informed citizenry that is "engaged by the day's news in ways that invite discussion and debate" (Glasser & Craft, 1997, p. 124). This obligation or responsibility of journalists to engage the public in societal affairs can be thought of as being part of a broader "social ethic" of actively assisting the public to "work through" issues and make more informed judgements on issues (Glasser & Craft, 1997). Links can be made with the philosopher Habermas and his ideas about the media as a "public sphere" (as cited in Benhabib, 1992). At its simplest, the theory starts from the premise that we need a shared space for democratic exchange. This space is based on procedures where those affected by general social norms and collective political decisions can have a say in their formulation, stipulation, and adoption.

It is timely to relate these broader discussions of media practices and norms back to the actions of CPAG and journalists who covered the release of the *Cut Price Kids* report. When the authors of the report worked with key journalists to promote alternative explanations for child poverty and associated policy responses, the journalists themselves were engaging in a process of civic journalism. These journalists promoted the interests of a non-mainstream organisation and the lower socio-economic status (SES) groups they represent, rather than simply the interests of policy makers and their sponsors (Lambeth, 1998a). As I will show in chapter three, the aim of several of these journalists was to invigorate a public sphere through the dissemination of useful information that facilitates the discussion of important issues such as child poverty among citizens (McMillan, Guppy, Kunz &

Reis, 1998). This involves extending coverage of social issues so that there is a wider range of perspectives on child poverty (Denton & Thorson, 1998). Such journalistic practice requires research into an issue that can be communicated to readers, listeners, and viewers (Lambeth, 1998b). The *Cut Price Kids* report contributes to such research.

In summary, this thesis is based on the premise that the media's role in informing the public and fostering public deliberation and communal action can be enhanced. This can be done by encouraging public debate regarding pressing social concerns like child poverty in order to enhance collective problem solving and social action. My focus is on the activities of CPAG as a case study exemplifying the potential of media advocacy. I explore the efforts of CPAG to advocate for children in poverty using the media and consider the implications of this for the cultivation of an informed citizenry. The following section outlines the conceptualisation of the mass communication process that underlies this thesis.

*Conceptualising the Thesis*

News media promote specific images of child poverty, prescribing specific causes and solutions. These causes and solutions are the product of production dynamics involving various stakeholder groups. The resulting images are subject to critical reflection by the audience (Curran & Seaton, 2003). Media are central to how a society works through the various concerns relating to topics such as child poverty (Silverstone, 1999). This is because reports help set the agenda for what people discuss in everyday conversations and the explanations which are seen as pertinent to such discussions (McQuail, 2000). Although attention to media representations of child poverty is important in terms of providing insights into the provision of information on this topic to the public, important questions still remain unanswered. For instance, how are the efforts of media advocates interpreted by journalists and responded to in the media production process? What do those experiencing poverty think of media reports? Researchers propose that in order to address such questions media coverage needs to be approached as part of a mass communication circuit which draws upon, reframes, and re-circulates understandings of, and prescriptions for, responding to social issues such as child poverty (Miller, Kitzinger, Williams, & Beharrell, 1998).

To understand how such issues are communicated requires an engagement with the social construction of child poverty through the media at all three levels of the mass communication circuit – production, representation and reception.

At the first level institutional practices and editorial policies determine what issues get covered and whether coverage enhances or detracts from public deliberations. Production staff engage in professional practices that influence which issues get selected, the angle taken in covering these issues, the sources drawn upon or interviewed, and the composition of an exposition (Husband, 2005). The aims, intentions, professional practices and selection strategies of media producers shape the content of media reports (Miller et al., 1998). Further, various stakeholder groups, including government representatives, health professionals, and media advocacy groups such as CPAG can influence the scope and shape of coverage. At present, research into the construction of social and health issues at this level is rare (Seale, 2004).

An analysis of media representations provides a focus for exploring the framing of issues of social concern.  It can reveal which perspectives are promoted and which are neglected in public dialogue. After all, news items provide an important "public record" that "reflects" events and social relationships. Such analysis can be used as a way of exploring the implications of social power relationships and ideologies shaping media framing of issues (Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004). The considerable body of research at the media representation level has gone some way to identifying overlaps between the changing character of media coverage and the changing character of public perceptions (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2003a). However, the interactive processes through which such overlaps are developed and their role in the re-negotiation of public understandings of child poverty have not been adequately explored. This thesis draws upon the circuit of mass communication model to explore the collective processes through which people experiencing poverty come to understand the issues by drawing upon media representations. This takes us into the third level of the circuit of mass communication.

At the reception level, research considers the role of the media in shaping public understandings of child poverty and warranting specific policy responses. As Finlay and Faulkner (2005) point out, we need to begin to understand the contexts in which media messages are used (conversations, coaching and teaching for instance), audiences interpretations of specific media discourses (about poverty), and the way media messages become embedded and used as a resource for action. Therefore, speaking with those who live with and experience poverty in various forms on a day-to-day basis is important for gaining their understanding of the power of the media to define issues and solutions. It is also important to understand how these solutions resonate with those affected by the issue, and to gain their understanding of child poverty generally. This information then has the potential to reach those in power through the media and through the publication of these research findings, to hopefully better inform policy makers when making powerful decisions that affect the lives of those impacted by child poverty.

While previous research has shed light on the detail of what the media produce (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2006), further work is required to understand the production practices that create these outcomes, and the cumulative consequences of this coverage on discourses of social relations and cohesion. Therefore, the thesis is structured according to the circuit of mass communication (Miller et al., 1998). Chapter two outlines various qualitative methods used to combine the three levels of the mass communication process; production, representation and reception. Chapter three forms the production level of analysis, which explores perspectives of journalists involved in producing coverage of health and social issues, as well as the perspectives of members of CPAG. This chapter also presents a document analysis of press releases used to frame media reports. Chapter four forms the text representation level of analysis, presenting an analysis of coverage of the *Working for Families* package and *Cut Price Kids* report. The focus here is on news reports evident in major daily newspapers, radio and television broadcasts. Chapter five focuses on the reception level, which includes four focus groups with lower SES parents, follow-up interviews and photo-voice projects. In chapter six I will reflect on the findings and argue for the relevance of mass communication to community psychology in addressing issues of social concern.

# CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methodology used to document the role of media in the public construction of child poverty. First, I present the research design, paying particular attention to the three levels of the circuit of mass communication, and then summarise the analysis process and strategy for disseminating key findings.

*Research Design*

Community psychology research is primarily focused on improving life for individuals, groups and the systems in which they reside. It acknowledges that research always takes place within larger socio-political contexts (Bergold, 2000). However, beyond the design of information campaigns, community psychologists have only just begun to attend to the role of mainstream media in community life (Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004). If we are serious about fostering social justice then we must address the power of the media to name and define communities and relationships between social groups (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003). This focus on representational politics (Lykes, Blache & Hamber, 2003) is important for social equality because it facilitates the demystification of social power differentials. Analyses of media representations can extend our understanding of how social power relations beyond the borders of specific communities can support or undermine those communities (Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004). We also need to think about wider professional processes underlying the production of such representations and the ways in which representations are consumed or taken up within community settings.

Hodgetts, Bolam and Stephens (2005) advocate a ritualistic approach to such psychological research into the function of media in everyday life that is broadly social constructionist. This approach is useful to my research because mass communication is conceptualised as an ongoing dialogical process through which society communes and from which social change can occur. From this perspective media provide more than the transmission of specific information or messages regarding child poverty. Daily engagements with the media, including people's engagements with characters in specific stories, can involve the sharing of aesthetic experiences, personal sentiments and intellectual notions. Media can provide focal points for citizens to access shared vocabularies for understanding child poverty.

As discussed in the previous chapter, media coverage functions as part of a mass communication circuit which draws upon, reframes, and re-circulates understandings of, and prescriptions for, responding to social issues like child poverty (Miller et al., 1998). The majority of media research has focused on media representations. Fewer studies have focused on the production and reception levels of the mass communication circuit. Rarely, if ever, have all three levels been researched simultaneously (Miller et al., 1998). This thesis documents the construction of child poverty at the production, representation and reception levels of mass communication.

*Level One: Production*

Data at the production level comprised 15 Government press releases obtained from www.beehive.govt.nz and www.scoop.co.nz, concerning the 2004 Budget and the *Working for Families* package. Additionally, 5 media releases regarding *Cut Price Kids* were obtained from CPAG and their official website (www.cpag.org.nz). These releases provided access to differing perspectives which were available to journalists for constructing news items (Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004). A senior public relations staffer from the Government who was involved in promoting the *Working for Families* package was interviewed, but preferred to stay "off the record". Therefore, information from this interview informs my analysis but is not cited directly. Two members of CPAG were interviewed to gain an understanding of the group's reasons behind writing the report and then promoting it using the media. Prior to conducting these interviews an extensive consultation process occurred between CPAG, my supervisor and myself. Contact was initially made with one of the authors via email, and a relationship evolved to a point where a formal meeting was arranged. In the meeting my intentions as the researcher were clarified, as well as the background to the research, what participation by CPAG would involve, and how they would benefit from participating in the research.

Following the initial meeting a proposal was drafted and sent to CPAG explaining the details of the project once more (see Appendix A). This proposal served as the information sheet. Consent was given and two members were selected by the group to speak on behalf of CPAG (see Appendix B*).* The interview schedules were designed to be semi-structured. This was so that specific areas could be explored without overly restricting participants from discussing issues they regarded as

relevant. Interview questions were open ended and were used to explore: what CPAG were trying to achieve (aims and objectives), general strategies for encouraging media outlets to cover child poverty and how the media reacted to their efforts. In addition, questions explored the nature of media coverage of the report and lessons gained from working with the media. The interviews were approximately an hour and a half in duration.

Six health journalists involved with reporting on the *Cut Price Kids* report were interviewed in May and June 2005. The journalists were approached initially via email. A proposal outlining the study (information sheet) and a consent form were developed for the journalists, which comprised revised versions of those developed for CPAG. Consultation and clarification of issues occurred prior to the interview, via telephone and email. The journalists came from national print and broadcast outlets. Each journalist was interviewed at a location of their choice. Interviews ranged from 45 to 90 minutes in duration[3]. Specifically, interviews explored: journalists efforts to produce media coverage of child poverty, efforts to produce media coverage of health/social concerns, why journalists believe health and social issues are a prominent topic for the media, and finally, journalists responses to advocacy groups like CPAG. These interviews contributed to my understanding of news production processes and public deliberations regarding child poverty.

*Level Two: Representation*

A thorough and systematic search for articles released between 01 May to 30 June, and 01 November to 31 December 2004 regarding the *Working for Families* package and *Cut Price Kids* report was conducted using Newstext Plus (http://io.knowledge-basket.co.nz.ezproxy.waikato.ac.nz). The purpose of utilising the University of Waikato's online database was to ensure that no key articles were missed. The database also enabled me to conduct more general searches of child poverty outside of the analysis period to establish if the issue had been on the media agenda for some time. CPAG also provided me with coverage regarding their work. The sample was restricted to the following national newspapers: *The Dominion Post*, *The New Zealand Herald* and *The Sunday Star Times* because of their high national circulations. The sample included 21 press articles. In addition, the sample included

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[3] I have not included demographic details for the journalists due to the intimate nature of the industry and because such details might compromise participants anonymity.

seven radio items relevant to the evolving debate between the Government and CPAG. These were obtained from a variety of sources including *Radio Samoa, Newstalk ZB, Radio Pacific* and *Radio New Zealand.* I also obtained news from the Radio New Zealand Newswire Database*.* Five news and current affairs items were also obtained from Television New Zealand (TVNZ) Archives and CPAG. Specific sources included *Agenda, Breakfast, One News,* and *3 News.* I was particularly interested in TVNZ because it is the highest rating television network. It is important to trace the representation of this issue across media outlets and reports because media stories are rarely captured by or contained within a single report or item. Stories regarding child poverty evolve over time across newspaper articles, radio and television items as new information comes to light and fresh perspectives are sought.

Exploring the representation level of the mass communication circuit was important because the amount and extent of media coverage that was generated indicated how newsworthy the *Cut Price Kids* report was, and thus the issue of child poverty. An analysis of media representations provided a systematic focus for exploring the public construction of child poverty. It revealed which perspectives were promoted and which were neglected in public dialogue, and which could be compared with the views of social actors consuming these representations. In sum, coverage provides a public record as to whether CPAG's effort to promote their report was successful, and whether the media were receptive to their efforts.

*Level Three: Reception*

There were two components to the audience level of this research. The first included focus groups with between five to seven participants from four lower SES parent groups (see Table 1). The second involved photo-based discussions with one or two members from each group. Each focus group meeting was approximately two hours in duration. All groups were approached and recruited in the same way using procedures approved for this project by a Health Research Council of New Zealand accredited human ethics research committee. Community organisations were each approached and asked if there would be any participants that would be willing to take part in the study. The research background and my intentions for both components of this level of research were clearly explained (see Appendix C). Following this, consent was obtained (see Appendix D). The primary motivation for selecting these

particular groups was that they have first hand knowledge of child poverty having grown up in lower SES families and now parenting their own children in similar circumstances. Participants were receiving various degrees of support from the Government and consumed media images from the position of families affected by child poverty. Participants dependent on various state benefits were also likely to have an opinion about the *Working for Families* package. Due to the over representation of women in poverty and the predominantly gendered nature of primary care giving most participants were female. Such focus groups are commonly used in audience research because they provide one means of generating participant accounts that reflect the various ways in which people make sense of media coverage communally (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2003b). Members shared information, pooled experiences, compared and contrasted them, negotiated ideas and asked questions.

Table 1

*Focus Group Demographics*

| Focus group | Gender | | Total number of participants | Age range |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Male | Female | | |
| Women's Refuge (non-Maori) | | 7 | 7 | 19 - 47 |
| Women's Refuge (Maori) | | 5 | 5 | 27 - 49 |
| Community (non-Maori) | 1 | 5 | 6 | 34 - 45 |
| Community (Maori) | 2 | 3 | 5 | 23-50 |

General areas covered in focus groups included concepts of health at the individual, whanau and community level; the impact of poverty on daily life and media framing of child poverty. The groups also discussed general media characterisations of people like themselves, coverage of issues of direct relevance to their families and issues that are not addressed in media coverage.

One or two participants from each group were given disposable cameras and asked to take pictures that represented their everyday lives. They were informed that photographs could be of key features of their day, of activities and places, or of anything that they felt was important. Taking the pictures and returning with the cameras constituted the second part of the study at the audience level. Films were then developed and follow-up interviews arranged. During these photo-based discussions each participant was asked to describe what was occurring in each photograph and their response to the person, object or place being depicted. Following the procedure developed by Radley and Taylor (2003), the photographs were then spread across a table and participants were asked to identify the photograph(s) that best captured their sense of health related issues, including poverty. The three phases were designed to reveal links between self-understandings, interpersonal relationships, media representations, and material life circumstances. This component of the research was influenced by recent writing on photo-voice in community psychology, which emphasises the benefits for participant conscientisation (Foster-Fishman, Nowell, Deacon, Nievar & McCann, 2005; Wang, Cash & Powers, 2000). Conscientisation involves developing a critical awareness of, and taking action against, the oppressive elements in one's life (Wikipedia, 2006). Having participants take photos leads to the production of meaningful material that can be reflected upon during the follow-up interview. Such photos can be used as documentation of people's everyday lives, as an educational tool to record and to reflect their needs, and to promote dialogue. Participants acted as recorders and potential catalysts for advocacy for their own communities (Wang & Burris, 1997). By engaging with participants on multiple occasions and offering them cameras to picture their life-worlds, these people were given the opportunity to "turn upon" their environment and to provide an account of how and why they did so (Radley, Hodgetts & Cullen, 2005). Participants took these opportunities to openly reflect on their life situations and engage in dialogue and support with friends and family regarding their aspirations.

*Analysis*

Analyses of the interviews with media professionals and a media advocacy group, media coverage, photographs and associated accounts of those facing poverty focused on the complex and mediated nature of contemporary constructions of child poverty. I sought insights into some of the processes through which public deliberations regarding children's needs are collectively negotiated through the circuit of mass communication. In particular, I attended to gaps between what various stakeholders and journalists intended audiences to view, read or hear, what is actually circulated as news, and what audiences actually saw, read and heard (Tester, 2001). This interpretive process moved beyond the description of specific transcripts, news items and photographs to broader observations about the way in which child poverty, its causes, consequences and solutions are rendered meaningful through mediated and interpersonal communication (Fiske, 1999).

More specifically, I initially read and viewed the entire research corpus in order to gain a general "feel" for the issues. Analysis was then segmented into the production, representation and reception levels. At the production level I re-read all press releases, both from CPAG and Government to clarify the contrasting viewpoints of these two major stakeholders in the ensuing public debate and media framing of child poverty. Each interview tape with CPAG and the journalists was then listened to and transcribed. Following this, main themes about journalist production processes and CPAG's media advocacy efforts were identified. Subsequently, I reviewed the entire collection of media coverage and looked for general themes that were consistently arising across the collection of news items. I then summarised the majority of coverage in a table detailing the date of publication, type of item, media outlet, and leading media sources (see Appendix E). I approached these texts as points in an evolving story through which child poverty was being constructed. I followed the evolving story documenting changes and relationships. Major threads in the evolving story were then analysed in detail in order to provide specific illustrations.

Subsequently, I re-visited the focus group and interview transcripts and viewed the photographs. Following Radley, Hodgetts and Cullen (2005), I moved between pictures and interviews for each respondent, on a case-by-case basis, and then between respondents in terms of their pictures and what they had told me about

themselves. One aim of this analytic exercise was to determine any links between specific parts of the transcript and particular photographs, so that pictures might be seen to exemplify something about that person's experience of child poverty. Another aim was to find broader themes that might serve as stories constructed by me about these persons' life worlds. I explored how participants see through their photographs and verbal reflections to events, relationships and practices that typify or give meaning to their lives. In sum, the analysis involved me being open to various possibilities and issues, following up leads and comparing emerging themes with the findings of previous research until an overall pattern could be constructed. Whilst recounting level specific issues it became necessary to narrow the focus across levels and trace specific thematic threads.

*Dissemination of Key Findings*

The outcomes of this research were disseminated to a range of different audiences. First, my supervisor and I co-facilitated a workshop with CPAG. The research findings were also summarised and made available to journalists and focus group participants. The academic community have been informed of the findings through a conference paper and I am currently preparing a peer-reviewed journal article for publication in an international journal.

# CHAPTER THREE: MEDIA PRODUCTION

This chapter draws upon insights from media and communications research (Couldry & Curran, 2002; McQuail, 2000; Rupar, 2006; Singer, 2006; Tester, 2001) to develop an understanding of contemporary news production processes in Aotearoa. The chapter aims to extend existing knowledge of how news media can be used to enhance public deliberations regarding child poverty. Such an aim is important because independent scrutiny of media production provides a means of ensuring that the specific interpretative frameworks used to construct the news, and our collective social reality does not simply benefit some social groups more than others (Curran, 2000). One criteria for assessing the operation of media organisations is whether they enable people to debate issues that affect their lives. In other words, the facilitation of democratic participation is a core consideration when evaluating media performance (Wallack, 2003). After all, news media in particular have a core function in communicating the ideas, perspectives and solutions of groups in civil society and of staging reciprocal debates between groups (Curran & Seaton, 2003).

The first section explores journalistic norms in relation to the production of coverage of child poverty. Section two documents CPAG's strategy for media advocacy and how this group works with journalists to promote the issue of child poverty and associated issues. Section three explores press releases from Government and CPAG as core ingredients in news production and the framing of child poverty. In particular, I pay attention to how this is done through the "balancing" of opposing views regarding the *Working for Families* package.

## *Journalistic Practices and Norms*

This section explores four interwoven themes to arise from the interviews with the six journalists: (a) the importance of professional norms of balance and objectivity as barriers to civic journalism, (b) over-reliance on particular expert sources, (c) the use of columns, community newspapers and talkback radio as sites for fostering civic participation and; (d) the role of a perceived audience in shaping coverage.

Lealand (2004) found that New Zealand journalists treasured traditional norms of balance and objectivity. Likewise, my participants mention the need for "balanced" reporting as their primary professional norm because it allows the presentation of both sides to a story. As journalist A noted, balance is said to ensure detached objectivity for journalists, and thus the credibility of news organisations:

> [Balance]…that's a basic journalistic tenet…you're meant to have a balanced news story so you get both sides of it. Media gotta be absolutely straight down the middle, it can't be seen to be taking sides when it's reporting events.

Participants construct a sense of balance including information from various stakeholders, for example, talking with both Government and CPAG representatives regarding the issue of child poverty. Notions of balance are used to warrant claims of objectivity, as journalist B points out:

> …Ask for a talking head from both sides of the fence ….Always step back objectively and don't get too, um, we can't take sides.

Such claims to objectivity are questionable when one considers the over-reliance on some sources more than others (Couldry & Curran, 2002). Researchers have noted that those in power can set news agendas and name and define issues, and that government institutions are heavily relied upon as credible sources, more so than that of non-government, or "resource-poor" groups (Curran, 2000). Likewise, Avraham (2002) proposes that when primary sources are official bodies, community sources are less likely to gain access to the media. Reliance on Government as key sources for media coverage means that they gain primary voice to defining issues.

Although emphasising the centrality of balance and objectivity to professionalism in news production, several of the journalists did raise concerns regarding notions of balance:

> … One of our standards for broadcasting is balance, and it's become increasingly difficult for us, because the broadcaster says well I've gone and talked to A, and then I've gone and talked to B, you put it together and so I've got a balanced story, and I actually think that's nonsense. I think journalists need to dig deeper, and get at the truth, is there poverty in New Zealand? I don't think people have actually asked, you know, what does poverty mean for a family? (Journalist C).

Juxtaposing testimony from opposing stakeholders was seen as a primary means of validating news stories, but concerns regarding whether this practice simply substitutes verification and depth (Rupar, 2006) did emerge for two of the participants. The process of reducing topics to two opposing views that are presented in a "balanced" manner has replaced the ideal of obtaining all perspectives and relevant information. Singer (2006) raises similar concerns about such practices as they can support "…a too-rigid notion of objectivity that has come under attack for allowing even-handedness to get in the way of communicating the merits of competing claims" (p. 7). The pursuit of objectivity functions to depoliticise news production as a supposed neutral account of reality not worthy of debate. From this one might deduce that current dominant assumptions about poverty are somehow natural and not worthy of critical reflection. Journalist C went on to propose that news media often present social inequalities as taken for granted issues that simply "exist". In doing so, she proposed that coverage does not go deep enough to question why such inequalities exist. In exploring this issue the journalist invokes public and professional perceptions as a context for news production:

> …I think often times you get challenges to the notion that we have any poverty at all… I don't think there's a real understanding of the gap that there is in our society, I really don't. I just don't think there's that level of understanding and I'm not sure why that is. If we're talking about things like balanced coverage in issues like this, I would say it is because a lot of the time you get one side that goes, say CPAG, look there's all these families out there and they're suffering and they're really poor, and then you get the other side saying things like dear old Mr. Maharey saying things like I don't know what your problem is we've increased funding by this much and what are these people going on about… And so always there's that case is undermined because you don't actually have the reporters, or journalists, going behind that, and seriously understanding it and saying, you have talking heads rather than a real appreciation for what you're doing.

Journalist C regarded the idea of balance as important providing that she was able to pursue issues in depth and take coverage beyond opposing "talking heads".

This was a senior columnist who had the editorial autonomy to openly promote a perspective on wider issues in a manner that moved beyond traditional notions of "objectivity", "balance", "impartiality", and professional "distance" between journalists and the communities they serve (Hodges, 1997). Like civic journalists, this participant reported on issues of concern for marginalised communities in a way that invited community participation, rather than value free observation.

When asked about the concept of civic journalism, all participants admitted that they were not aware of the term. However, when the term was explained to them, some were able to see how they were in fact practicing civic journalism. For example, those journalists that write for local community newspapers, or produce columns and feature articles in larger newspapers were able to discuss stories, investigate an issue and advocate on behalf of marginalised groups. The shift from objective to civic notions of journalism is contextualised in the function of columns and editorials for commentary and opinion as opposed to so called "hard news" articles which were meant to simply "report the story". These journalists saw their role as extending public deliberations to include marginalised individuals and groups. This was seen as crucial in an age where "spin doctors" and government public relations staff attempted to shift the news agenda setting function from journalists to themselves (Scammell, 1995):

> And that's why effectively our job has become even more important because we cannot allow them [public relations staff] to either design or manipulate the agenda or whatever it is... And now the more powerful PR people know that so as long as they push and push a perception, I think they're gonna get people to try and pull that other side out as much as possible, but yeah that is our responsibility and, you know, little people find it very difficult to get their voices heard.

This extract reflects how journalists are not the only professionals shaping media reports and invokes processes of symbolic power (Couldry & Curran, 2002) where well resourced institutions can attempt to promote or "kill a story".  By emphasising journalists' responsibility to be impartial and pursue balanced stories, journalist B discusses how he attempts to provide a space for the "little people" to "have their say".

Although several participants talked about advocating for marginalised groups to "balance out official rhetoric" or public relations staff, such activities remained restrained by professional norms and institutional practices. In considering restraints on civic journalism, several participants noted that they did not think their media outlets covered stories in adequate depth. Reasons for this included both time and resource constraints (including accessing people affected who are willing to talk to journalists), and constraints with management and editors. A core consideration for journalists included the need to tailor stories to suit the media outlet's target

audience. A sense of the audience among journalists is an important consideration because "…in making their decisions, they need a sense of their relationship to a public constituted of citizens in a democracy… rather than consumers in a giant content-candy store" (Singer, 2006, p. 12). Throughout the accounts were perceptions of the audience for the media outlet, their interests and the framing of items to pander to those interests. This audience was identified for print outlets as primarily white and middle class. As a result, journalist D remarked that sometimes it is difficult to report on issues of particular significance to marginalised groups in society such as Maori or Pacific Island groups:

> …One of the biggest struggles for reporting Maori/Pacific issues is a., that they are not often the readers, that's the assumption and actually our stats show that they are not from the readers, and b., there are stereotypes readers know or New Zealanders think they know that Maori have more health problems and they are more likely to be overweight, blah, blah, blah, whatever the stereotypes are and so you can't just tell that same tale…

Similarly, a broadcast journalist (journalist E) noted that although commercial media provide a public service, the main purpose is to make money. The way such organisations do this is to give the perceived audience what they want:

> …Commercial media's reason for being is basically to make money for the owners… but the way we do that is by providing the public with what they want so that they'll listen to us, and we can sell advertising on the back of the number of years that we have and so it is in our best interest to provide a service for the public that they're interested in using.

Here, we see a tension between meeting the demand of institutions by targeting certain audiences, and professional public service orientated norms (Curran, 2000). When combined with commercial imperatives, such perceptions of the audience can steer journalists towards conservative perspectives and away from community activism (Tester, 2001). The focus of news becomes one of communicating with dominant social groups about subordinate groups (Loto et al., 2006). Combined with a broadly expressed lack of access to marginalised groups who experience poverty, perceptions of the audience as "middle New Zealand" results in messages about lower SES groups and "their afflictions", rather than facilitating a dialogue with and between groups in society.

As will be explored within the reception chapter, this contributes to media deliberations about solutions to address child poverty that do not involve or reflect the daily realities of people directly experiencing such hardships.

*CPAG's Media Advocacy Strategy*

This section explores CPAG's strategy for working with the media to promote their report. First, an outline of the group's media advocacy aims is provided in order to understand how such groups can gain a voice in the media and challenge symbolic power. Second, their media advocacy strategy is explored in more depth. Third, the group's efforts to understand media production processes, news values, and the socio-political context in which public debate surrounding child poverty is occurring is documented. Finally, I explore how the group perceives its success in generating news coverage about the report and eliciting Government reaction.

The advocacy orientation of CPAG has been clearly expressed throughout my interactions with them. As one respondent in the CPAG interview stated, "we're respectful but staunch, you know, and our kaupapa is the children, we speak for those, fight for those children who remain voiceless". This group has been engaging with the media since its inception in 1984, and their strategy has developed over time primarily in relation to key lessons learnt from previous engagements. Like other media advocacy groups, CPAG works with the media to realise a general aim of raising awareness, broadening debate, and presenting alternative solutions (Wallack, 1994):

> Well our strategy has always been to try and enable the public to understand the huge issue that child poverty is in our country, and to provide some factual information on which the arguments can be based…

CPAG want to exert influence over those in power who can significantly improve the lives of people living in poverty by bringing pressure to bear through the media and ultimately cultivating public support for changes in policies. The group aims to target policy makers by publishing reports that are made available to the general public and policy makers through the news media:

> …Basically politicians listen to voters and if we can influence voters… by doing something like *Cut Price Kids* to get factual material before people who are really listening and then to broaden it so that you get people whose perceptions need

changing, and how do you do that if we haven't got the resources to do it? We work on the idea that most Kiwis want to give people a fair go and most people think of kids being important.... So one of our thrusts is to try and look at, ok we've got the facts, we've got this research, how do we hook the public into that and getting the public is one thing, but even if they vote for a particular party, what is that party going to do with their vote? And so that's the next stage of our strategy, to make sure the different parties buy into our arguments and if not, why not?

The CPAG account invokes an understanding of the influence of media framing on policy processes via public reaction to reports (Davidson et al., 2003). In the process CPAG construct the audience as citizens who are competent to be presented with "the facts" and to engage in open deliberations which can lead to more humane public responses to child poverty.

This group has become skilled in working with the media and recognising what is "newsworthy":

We have been active over the years, believe me and a lot of us have had experience trying to get messages out, talking to journalists, sending faxes. In the old days with faxes, press releases, writing to newspapers, ringing up radio stations, ringing up journalists telling them what's coming on and why haven't they commented on it. It's getting that response, you know, it's very difficult, and it gets overlooked but I mean, you learn certain things, there's no doubt about that… If you get an item on the radio, then follow it up with a letter to the paper, or follow it up by sending the document to the journalists who made the thing, or follow it up by the next time you make a press release to contact that journalist…

This extract reflects the importance for groups like CPAG to thoroughly know the "media business" and what makes the news. Having this knowledge enables such groups who do not usually possess much symbolic power to more effectively package and "sell" their stories within a highly selective news market. This knowledge also adds to their credibility and professional practice, thus adding to their legitimacy as potential news sources.

Participants went on to recount that when an issue arises that they would like to voice their opinion about, they send out press releases to journalists with whom they have established professional relationships with. Following this, follow up conversations will occur:

> … a lot of what happens really is that the press releases, cos they are quite wordy, might not be feeding in exactly to the journalists angle and so they might get my press release and go ooh, yeah, oh yep ok, yep child poverty and ring up [author] or [prominent commentator] as kind of an entrée.

This strategy was also recognised by several journalists and constructed as a dialogical process. For instance, journalist C recounted how she used information provided by CPAG when the group is used as a media source. She was able to detail the processes that the group goes through to contact journalists:

> What they do is, send out information and I know who they are, and I read their stuff and make my own judgement, and I agree with their stuff. I think what they're trying to do is worthy, I also look at the people who they use as their sources and know they, they're very good as well, you've got to pay attention to those people… You've got to have good, credible sources you know, and if these people are saying these things then you're much more likely to listen.

If an issue arises that journalist C would like to explore, she then contacts the appropriate members of the group. The journalist discussed her own relationship with a member of CPAG, and how this person keeps her updated about issues via regular emails. She notes this as being a reciprocal relationship that "works very well", although the two have not met in person. Wallack et al. (1999) state that it is important for advocacy groups to pitch specific cases in story form rather than broader issues in order to assist journalists in understanding the broader issues advocates are attempting to address. CPAG engage in such activities through their use of press releases and research reports.

As part of their media strategy, CPAG also hold press conferences or specific launches to promote issues. Participants highlighted that occasionally, journalists will contact them if they are looking to get something verified, or if they want to talk to "experts" about child poverty and related matters. Thus the most important thing CPAG are doing in their work with the media is building their reputation or profile as an expert voice on the topic of child poverty. Wallack et al. (1999) highlight that media framing and shaping by advocates is crucial for whether a story is noticed by journalists. Such framing is also important for how the story covered; whether the story is framed in terms of personal responsibility or institutional/social responsibility for example.

Despite emphasising their growing status as experts who had cultivated good working relationships with several journalists, CPAG participants recounted how news sources are often in competition and are played off against one another. As Fenton, Bryman, Deacon and Birmingham (1998) suggest news production and agenda setting are not neutral processes; they are the product of negotiated and contested interactions between journalists and sources. This is particularly the case with advocacy groups, who are known or expected to have "explicit" political or professional interests which shape, define and inform their contributions to journalists (Deacon & Golding, 1994). In light of this political context, CPAG consciously consider the best way to highlight issues so that journalists will choose to include their perspective over that of other sources:

> Sometimes we are thinking of ways in which issues can be highlighted, I mean we did a very, very effective little study on the costs of NCEA examinations…The sole purpose of that was to be in a position to be able to make a press release about some factual material that had been gathered in low decile schools about kids electing not to sit an exam because the fees were so high and so inevitably that would reflect on their academic achievement…. The Government was actually going to increase examination fees for the subsequent year, and in fact they held them and subsequent year, the third year, we did another follow up and it reinforced the message and they reduced it the following year, and that was a sort of planned, strategic move to do those things and we knew also that January's not a good time for lots of other issues to be hitting the headlines so we knew it would probably be a good one to kind of strike when people were returning from holidays, you know…

This extract gives an example of media advocacy directly impacting policy and leading to delay and eventually change in implementation. They provided research evidence on the negative impact of an education policy on lower SES children in order to bring public pressure to bear on policy makers. This perceived pressure resulted in revisions to the policy.

Part of the strategy of working with the media is to consciously negotiate angles and ways of telling their story appropriately. This often involves drawing on past experience and the expertise of aligned organisations like the Public Health Association:

> …And we have worked with the, Public Health Association, who've been helpful with, cos they have their own media strategist and full-time communicators and they've been helpful at giving advice.

These participants expressed a definite sense of collaboration and community with colleagues from aligned groups. They invoke notions of mutual support in advocacy across the non-government organisation (NGO) sector and a need to be aware of current socio-political climates when doing media advocacy work. They raised two primary contextual considerations when constructing their messages. The first concerns the public support for the moral obligation to care for and protect children. The second is the tradition of political denial regarding the existence of child poverty in New Zealand. Regarding the first, participants stated:

> Because it's child poverty, people feel very sympathetic, I mean they've got that insight, about social justice… It's [child poverty] actually something that all activists feel, is an important thing, so it crosses a whole lot of boundaries and so then, they're very willing to lend their name, their mana, or their experience to that and so it hasn't been a lot like a number of other causes I've been involved with where the issues that arise create barriers. In a way that's an issue that diminishes barriers.

Children are generally positioned as worthy of support because they are dependent and innocent, rather than responsible for their circumstances as many assume adults should be (Tester, 2001). It is for this reason that more people are willing to get involved and lend their expertise and research skills, and provide themselves as sources to the media. It is for this reason and many others that CPAG has so many supporters/members. A discussion of the first consideration involving the need to lift barriers to public deliberations regarding poverty led to a discussion of the previous National government's denial that there was poverty in New Zealand for many years, which posed a barrier to their efforts:

> …In terms of government level it had been totally denied, I mean John, Jim Bolger had said there's no poverty, Jenny Shipley all the way through. …But then, while in opposition, the Labour party was very vocal about child poverty and disgrace and all this, but the Government still didn't register it until there was a change in 1999, and in 2001 after this big survey went out they actually acknowledged that, in a thing called the *Agenda for Children*, that child poverty existed, they still didn't accept an official poverty line but they did accept, um, a poverty measurement as something they could run with so after years of denial it was, there's still denial, you know when we're talking about how successful we are, I mean, just go to so many, I mean even family gatherings, and it's, you know, poverty doesn't exist in this country, all these figures are wrong, its only bad management, you know, people are not spending their money in the right way, too many children and stuff…

Participants proposed that in regard to beneficiaries, there is a tendency for society to blame families for their circumstances. CPAG constantly search for ways to articulate the sense communal responsibility around children's needs, which relies on acknowledging the extent of child poverty and deliberating on appropriate strategies to address it. They seek to change public perceptions about, and the heavy emphasis of the media on, individual responsibility as the primary target for addressing poverty. This reflects a media advocacy aim of challenging misconceptions and extending frames of reference for public deliberations:

> …because that whole discourse, that came in mid 80's has taken such a great hold of the collective psyche it's really, it's quite hard for us sometimes to come up with the alternative way of, framing it and discussing it in a way that people can relate to it. 'Ooh what are you doing way out there on left field, we don't know what you're talking about', you know. And on with the show. So yeah, it's kind of finding ways to articulate a sense of community, around children's needs, present and future.

Hegemonic ideas regarding child poverty cultivated over the previous 20 years are presented as leading to victim blaming and the individual responsibility of families to bring themselves out of poverty. This presented the core challenge for their advocacy work; presenting an alternative view.

Success for the group was partly determined by whether their report was debated by Government. Their main goal is to target policy makers, and draw attention to non-discriminatory approaches to redressing child poverty. *Cut Price Kids* elicited the desired response:

> When the Minister starts criticising, you hit a nerve… and you get named in Parliament, even in Cabinet papers I mean that's to us success because our kaupapa is policy change, better policies for children, that's the bottom line. And if the policy makers are actually criticising, or commenting, or referencing our work then we know we hit the target.

However, the members were also able to recall how the media focused on negative comments made by the Government about the quality of the *Cut Price Kids* report's findings, and the quality of the researchers. This meant that the focus on child poverty and the way in which the *Working for Families* package was further entrenching poverty among some families was compromised:

> …It's sad for us when the spotlight gets thrown on the credibility of the research, or the researchers or the debate between benefits and work, cos yet again you know, it's hijacked, and the focus is off the child poverty, which is the issue.

In many respects CPAG's strategy reflects a recognition of, and reaction to, the Government's use of media to "test the water" for public reactions to policy initiatives (Scammell, 1995) and willingness to change policies to reflect such reactions (Davidson et al., 2003).

### *Press Releases as Ingredients for News Production and Framing*

As evident in previous sections, news content is often constructed through the juxtaposition of competing perspectives on the same issue. This usually becomes a structuring device for news framing which functions to give the impression of balance by simply contrasting different perspectives (Rapur, 2006; Singer, 2006). In the present case this convention contributes heavily to the setting up of conflict between the Government and CPAG. This section explores the release of the *Cut Price Kids* report as a response to the Government's *Working for Families* package. The debate between Government and CPAG is explored through 15 press releases about the *Working for Families* package, and five press releases about the *Cut Price Kids* report. First, Government press releases about the package are analysed in order to understand the Government's perspective, and to explore the catalyst for *Cut Price Kids*. Second, CPAG's initial response to the package is documented through a review of their press releases. Finally, the evolving debate is explored through conference notes and *Scoop Independent News* articles. These press releases provide access to differing perspectives which were made available to journalists for constructing news items (Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004). Later chapters will explore how resulting ideological tensions are taken up in actual news reports and audience responses.

### *Promoting the Working for Families Package*

Press releases by the Government communicate priorities for funding and support. The Government does not attempt to mask its views about the importance of having able-bodied New Zealanders in paid employment. In a press release titled "Budget 2004: Families package good for growth" (27 May 2004), the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance Dr. Michael Cullen states:

It [The package] encourages beneficiaries into work, and invests heavily in the workforce of the future – an investment which will benefit society at large, and particularly the baby boom generation whose quality of life in retirement will depend to a significant extent on the productivity, skills and innovation of the workers of the future.

This document continues to point out that families who live on taxable incomes of less than $45,000 per year will benefit the most from an average increase of around $100 a week in direct income assistance. Such press releases propose that "barriers" to full participation in the workforce will be removed, and incentives put in place to assist families to lift themselves out of poverty. For example, in this press release titled "Budget 2004: Families package a huge step forward" (27 May 2004), Helen Clark suggests: "Working for Families reflects the government's strong commitment to fairness and to opportunity. It is designed to improve New Zealand's economic performance by addressing the barriers to full participation in the workforce". Some of these incentives include increasing the amount of income people can earn before their Family Support payments abate, introducing a new In-Work Payment specifically for working parents, raising the abatement threshold for the Accommodation Supplement and increasing Childcare Assistance.

The Government states that unemployment levels are low compared to almost a decade ago. However, some press releases argue that many New Zealanders still receive social assistance, while at the same time many employers need employees. As this quote by Helen Clark demonstrates, this raises the assumption that beneficiaries do not "accept opportunities" to work:

…. Unemployment is at low levels by both historical and international comparisons….Many New Zealanders, however, still receive social assistance for all or part of their income while, at the same time, many employers are experiencing skill and labour shortages…. ("Budget 2004: Families package a huge step forward", 27 May 2004).

The focus on families was highly publicised and has been a clear focus of press releases. As this press release titled "Budget delivers for families" (New Zealand Government, 1 June 2004) notes: the Government "stands with families and are investing heavily in them to raise the next generation of dependable adults". Such rhetorical framing relies upon notions of God's working poor and the Devil's idol poor.

It is proposed that a clear implication from these changes to the welfare system and emphasis on families will be a reduction in child poverty. Several press releases carried titles such as: "Poverty dramatically reduced" (28 May 2004) and "Supporting community action to address child poverty" (10 December 2004), which discuss such implications in depth. In one of these press releases, the Minister of Social Development Steve Maharey [4] states: "depending on which internationally recognised measure is used, the package will reduce child poverty by either 30 and 70 percent" ("Poverty dramatically reduced", 28 May 2004). In sum, the Government used their press releases to position themselves as advocates for New Zealand families who are prioritising children and their needs. The Government emphasised the use of an incentive or reward system to encourage parents to lift themselves out of poverty by finding employment. As will be explored in the next section, CPAG commends the Government's goal to reduce numbers of children in poverty, but takes issue with the divisive method in which they attempt to achieve this goal.

*CPAG's Response to Working for Families: Cut Price Kids*

With titles like "Report says Budget fails NZ's poorest children" (14 November 2004), and "Working for children?" (14 November 2004), press releases by CPAG clearly present a challenge to the Government's package. CPAG propose that *Working for Families* does not directly respond to issues that are important to reducing child poverty. All press releases discuss "serious design flaws" of the package, and highlight that the package further entrenches an underclass by leaving 175,000 children of beneficiaries to remain in poverty:

> Serious design flaws entrench an underclass even further by leaving the most vulnerable behind. This at a time when budget surpluses and low unemployment should mean government can afford to invest in the future of all New Zealand children, regardless of background. ("Report says Budget fails NZ's poorest children", 14 November 2004).

The press release continues by noting additional design flaws including the In Work Payment, reduction of core benefits and reduction of temporary hardship assistance. Perhaps the most pressing flaw was the shift in focus from specifically addressing the needs of children in poverty to rewarding parents in paid work. As the same press release states:

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[4] Since the beginning of this thesis, a new Minister of Social Development has been appointed. This thesis focuses on the comments of the Minister at the time of the *Cut Price Kids* publication.

The goal of eliminating child poverty, promised by the government, has been assumed into the narrower goal of rewarding work and independence from the benefit system. The emphasis has been on creating a gap between benefits and work without regard to the effect on the children in the families that cannot meet the work criteria. The gap has been created, but at the expense of the poorest children.

Although CPAG's press releases acknowledged and congratulated some commitment by Government to eliminate child poverty and provide work incentives, these were largely the only positive elements the group discussed. As the press release titled "Working for children?" (14 November 2004) highlights:

It is important to acknowledge the government's stated intention of reducing child poverty. That is an important development. For many years there has been either outright denial of the existence of child poverty in this country or simply a disregard for it. The government has acknowledged its existence and has taken an important step in attempting to reduce it. Regrettably its initiative has been subordinated to the attempt to shift adults back into the paid workforce. No one is disputing that paid work is the most effective means of getting out of poverty. Nor do we challenge the use of incentive to encourage people back into paid work. But the priorities are all wrong if that means leaving 150,000 dependent children to languish in the worst manifestations of poverty in contemporary New Zealand.

Essentially, CPAG press releases challenged the basic tenets of the *Working for Families* package for not delivering to those who need support the most and for entwining work incentives with child poverty reduction efforts. CPAG propose that the package simply assists those deserving poor who are working towards improving their situations, independent of state assistance. Government calls it "a responsible Budget that rewards work", which again, can invoke notions of the deserving and undeserving poor.

Briefly, aside from outlining flaws with the package, the press releases also detailed the *Cut Price Kids* report and the group's various recommendations for addressing the situation. One of their central recommendations is that rather than targeting assistance to families in paid employment, assistance should be universal, whereby all children are treated equal, regardless of their family circumstances. Emphasis throughout was on communal responsibility and structural explanations for child poverty, reflecting Keynesian ideas about the welfare state. The group proposed that child poverty reduction should be a policy that is separate and distinct

from those concerned with employment. This policy should also reduce the influence of other factors on child poverty such as poor housing and unmanageable debt.

*The Evolving Debate*

Following CPAG's press releases and then the publication of the *Cut Price Kids* report, came the response to the report's findings by Government. The response was given at a post Cabinet press conference, held on 15 November 2004 – one day after *Cut Price Kids* publication. Notes about the conference were later published on *Scoop Independent News* (www.scoop.co.nz)*.* The Government chose to discredit the integrity of CPAG's research. Specifically, the Prime Minister stated "…I just think it is pretty shoddy work that we saw from that particular group" ("Poverty and legislative process", 16 November 2004). She was also quoted as saying "I don't think that the material that came out from the Child Poverty Action Group was particularly well considered". Later that day, the Minister of Social Development described the report's findings as "out of context".  He also went on to say that the report authors were ignoring many of the positive initiatives the Government had introduced for children and families in the past – for example, the introduction of meningococcal vaccinations and income-related rents.

Naturally, CPAG responded by defending their findings and research credentials as leading economists and policy researchers. One of the report authors, David Craig, described the Prime Minister's comments as "ill considered" and as being "cheap political shots" ("CPAG author angrily responds to PM's criticism", 16 November 2004). In further responses CPAG stated that the report is far from "sloppy" and that it is in fact "an accurate, scientific, well-considered and the most comprehensive and thorough independent analysis of the *Working for Families* package undertaken, and by two people who could not be more qualified to do it" (15 November 2004). The spokesperson for the group stated that the only reason Maharey would find the report offensive is because it raises a number of valid points regarding serious design flaws of the *Working for Families* package. This exchange provides sensational material for the construction of the media controversy explored in the following chapter. Specifically, tensions evident in divergent positions adopted by Government and CPAG regarding targeted or universal assistance and associated notions of the deserving and undeserving poor will be traced through news coverage and then audience responses.

**CHAPTER FOUR: MEDIA REPRESENTATION**

As discussed in the introduction chapter, media coverage is central to the development and implementation of policy responses to child poverty. Policies are more likely to be developed and implemented if policy makers consider there to be sufficient public support expressed through media coverage (Davidson et al., 2003). As community psychologists interested in creating and maintaining healthy communities, we need to investigate and address the power of the media to identify and frame social issues such as child poverty (Loto, et al., 2005). This chapter focuses on the social negotiation of the reality of child poverty through the portrayal of relationships between key social actors who contribute to media deliberations and the claims that are made about poor people. The chapter sets the scene for the third analysis chapter which explores how lower SES parent groups come to understand and respond to media constructions within their own lives. Specifically, I present a plot synopsis of news coverage of child poverty and the story that evolved during the analysis period in order to contextualise themes to be analysed subsequently in relation to specific items. Section two explores the juxtaposing of sources and associated perspectives in this evolving story and issues around who is given the power to frame child poverty and "appropriate" responses. The third section considers the ways in which the framing of child poverty in the news relies on specific characterisations of deserving and undeserving parents and children as needy victims. The chapter concludes with a brief commentary on the ideological significance of news constructions of child poverty.

*Plot Synopsis*

Prior to the delivery of the Labour government's fifth Budget (27 May, 2004), news coverage comprised a series of items on the Government's support for struggling families. This focus was raised by the case of a particular family living in Waihi, where a mother had written to Prime Minister Helen Clark asking why her family was sinking increasingly into debt on a single annual income of $55,000. It was within the context of concerns regarding the plight of middle New Zealand that the *Working for Families* package emerged. Coverage around the package was initially positive and discussed the many benefits for working families. Coverage framed poverty as an enemy of the state to be eradicated by initiatives outlined in the package, which would address children's needs by giving more money to working

parents. Coverage relied on notions of God's deserving and the Devil's undeserving poor by emphasising the Government's distinction between the working poor and benefit families. The story progressed across items through the juxtaposition of various sources. For instance, Government representatives provided the most prominent and frequently used sources, which promoted a neo-liberal understanding of poverty and governmental support. The emphasis was on "a hand up" rather than "a hand out". However, as the story developed sources including Susan St John, one of the authors of *Cut Price Kids* and spokeswoman for CPAG began to be used. Sources such as St John were used to introduce critical perspectives on the Government's package and promote communitarian notions of collective responsibility.

The subsequent release of the *Cut Price Kids* report was covered across media outlets as the first systematic analysis of the Government's package. Coverage emphasised the group's view that 175,000 of the poorest children (benefit families) were being left behind. Coverage during the week of the 14th of November promoted the conflict between the Government and CPAG around who was deserving and how best to respond to child poverty. In response to this negative press, Government representatives were depicted questioning the integrity of the report's authors and the rigor of the research. News reports carried the accusation that the CPAG report neglected everything that the Government was already doing for beneficiary families. This response signalled a continued debate with CPAG that evolved into more general coverage of poverty in New Zealand.

*Key Characters in the Evolving News Drama*

Central to the construction of any social issue via news media are the characters in the evolving drama and the roles they play. News narratives often develop through the tensions created by positioning sources in adversarial relationships (Curran & Seaton, 2003). This section will trace tensions created through the depiction of the two primary characters that functioned as expert sources for the evolving story: Government and CPAG representatives.

The Government was very clear about how the *Working for Families* package would respond to many of the concerns of low to moderate income families such as the Waihi family. As the dominant source for journalists, media coverage

emphasised the point that Government was "standing by families", particularly through newspaper headlines which read "Families to receive a leg-up in Budget" (*The New Zealand Herald*, 25 May 2004) [5], and "$150 cash boost to help families" (*The New Zealand Herald*, 26 May 2004). Such articles focused on the many positive improvements this package was bringing families but also noted that the majority of financial assistance would go to families "where one or both partners are working" (*The New Zealand Herald*, 26 May 2004). Coverage also emphasised particular features of the package, which included the new In Work Payment that was discussed throughout all press releases. Discussion about the In Work payment led into discussion about the Government's plan to encourage those on benefits to move into employment. In one radio item titled "Government delivers Budget targeted at families" (*Radio New Zealand Newswire*, 27 May 2004), Finance Minister Michael Cullen states that the payment is an incentive to move from welfare to work, and that the package is designed to create a gap between work and welfare. Coverage also discussed other incentives including providing general assistance to working families through Childcare Assistance, Family Support, and an Accommodation Supplement. In one article titled "What its got for you" (*The Dominion Post,* 28 May 2004, A1), the journalist notes "almost half of the 300,000 families to get a hand-up from the *Working for Families* package will be beneficiaries, but Dr Cullen said they would get only a third of the benefits". In order to personalise the impact of *Working for Families* on working and beneficiary families, and the difference between the two, this article goes on to state:

> A domestic purposes beneficiary living in Christchurch with two children aged under 16 paying $200 a week rent would eventually get an extra $37 a week. But a working mother in the same circumstances would be $129 better off.

This highlighting of difference occurred in many items. In other words, at this point in the majority of coverage the Labour government's perspective that "you will be better off when you go to work", and that the package would "make work pay" was fostered ("Families to get $66 a week more", *The Dominion Post*, 28 May 2004).

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[5] Print coverage on the Budget was obtained from the University of Waikato online database *Newstext Plus* and not all articles included page numbers. Where page numbers were included for any print coverage, and where relevant, they are noted within the chapter.

Early coverage that discussed child poverty explicitly did so only briefly. Newspaper articles noted that the Government promises, or aims that *Working for Families* would reduce child poverty by either 30 or 70 per cent, depending on what poverty measure was used. For example, in one article titled "Families to get $66 a week more" (*The Dominion Post*, 28 May 2004), the journalist points out that the package promises it "will slash the number of children living in poverty by 30 per cent". As expressed in Government press releases, *Working for Families* is aimed to ensure people who work are better off as a result of their effort and ensure families have their incomes sufficient to provide their children with a decent standard of living (Ministry of Social Development & Inland Revenue, 2004). Coverage at this stage simply accepted and reproduced these two aims, which reflects the taken for granted status of neo-liberal notions of the deserving poor. It can be assumed that the second aim encompasses child poverty, and that by parents having more money to spend on their children (providing this is what all parents do), child poverty would be reduced. Child poverty was not discussed in depth throughout early items as an important point in and of itself, and children were not independent characters within this story.

Although Government representatives were the dominant source for journalists to construct news items throughout the analysis period (particularly around the Budget), CPAG were also a key part of the evolving narrative. The group provided the alternative view or challenge to *Working for Families*. Initially, Susan St John featured only sporadically throughout Budget coverage, occasionally having full length articles explaining the group's point of view. For example, an article titled "Susan St John – Welcome first steps for poor but much more to be done" (*The New Zealand Herald,* 28 May 2004) is one of the first to specify the group's concerns about the package. In this commentary, St John states:

> The Child Poverty Action Group has long argued for the assimilation of the Child Tax Credit into family support so that all children on the same income are treated the same. Unfortunately, its replacement, the 'In-Work Payment' again draws the line between those 'in work' and those 'not in work'.

Journalists also quoted St John in order to balance coverage, or include a specialist economist's view on the situation. St John's prominence in the media at this point put her in a more credible position to later publish *Cut Price Kids*. The debate between

CPAG and Government occurred primarily during the week of the report's release (14 November 2004). Coverage seemed most captured within print media and did generally follow the content of press releases. St John had established herself as a credible news source, based on her past suitability, authoritativeness, her ability to articulate ideas, and reliability. However, at this point CPAG was positioned as an alternative source introduced to respond to issues and agendas regarding *Working for Families* that were set by the Government's public relations activities.

It was the publication of the *Cut Price Kids* report that shifted the agenda and significantly widened the debate. The following *Radio Samoa* (14 November 2004) interview from the morning of the report's release demonstrates CPAG's view:

> Host: Child poverty is an after product though of adult poverty surely. It is the adults who manage the family budget and it is the adults that spend the family income at the casino, cigarettes or other things. Then no matter how much anyone can do the problem will still persist.
>
> David Craig: Yeah, and that is a difficulty and you know um, here is the bottom line I think. At the moment with this package you've got 2 kids standing in front of you and they are both from poor families right, and the government has got some money to give out to these kids because of the big Budget. They are saying to one kid oh, here is a whole, quite a lot of money for you, here is $150 a week for you and here is very little for you, here is $9.50 a week for you, and the only difference between those two kids is that one of those kids gets an income the, their parents gets one from the benefit and one gets it from the workplace. Now that is discriminatory we think and you know, kids can't make choices. Kids are not in control. If their parents are irresponsible you know someone's got to do something to protect them and how you protect them is you have got to get some money into their household so things aren't going too bad. Yeah some of it'll be wasted but those kids are too precious to leave behind.

In this extract, the host invokes the stereotypical notion that poor people often neglect their children and that the children are innocent victims of neglect – resulting in child poverty. David Craig does not question this stereotype and in fact reinforces it. However, he does move the conversation away from blaming victims to discrimination in support according to parents' source of income. He shifts the idea of neglectful parents to exceptions rather than the rule and proposes that the welfare of children means that we cannot simply withhold familial support because of these exceptions. For instance, this is accomplished by his quote – "some of it will be wasted but those kids are too precious to be left behind".

This item does raise some of the dilemmas faced by groups such as CPAG who attempt to engage in public deliberations and introduce constructions of "the poor", that are somewhat counter intuitive in a symbolic climate dominated by neo-liberal ideas and victim blaming rhetoric. On the one hand the host's introduction of notions of lazy and undeserving parents who are negligent and therefore responsible for their children's plight contradicts CPAG's perspective. However, if this perspective is directly challenged too early in the report release process then the agenda may be diverted or the group may be simply dismissed as out of touch academics. David Craig does not directly challenge the construction of the negligent parent, but rather focuses on widening the debate and emphasising the needs of all children. This is a safer rhetorical strategy in moving the story forward and it is later in the story's evolution that CPAG openly challenge such constructions of undeserving parents.

In order to illustrate the construction of this evolving debate between Government and CPAG and shifts in agenda setting for the controversy, I will present and then deconstruct a specific item published during the week of the CPAG report's publication:

"Govt 'fostering gap between rich and poor"

THE GOVERNMENT'S much-vaunted family assistance package leaves the most vulnerable behind and further entrenches an underclass in poverty, says a report on child poverty released today.

Design flaws in the government's Working for Families package leave around 175,000 of the poorest children with very little help - or worse off than before, says Cut Price Kids, a paper by Auckland University economist Susan St John and sociologist David Craig, for the Child Poverty Action Group.

But outraged Social Development Minister Steve Maharey says their claims are inaccurate and unscientific political opinion, ignoring a raft of policy initiatives that the government has introduced, other than Working for Families.

"They don't acknowledge things like income-related rents, state houses being built, primary health organisations lowering the cost of health care, $200 million in areas like meningococcal disease, minimum wages going up every year since we've been in, the domestic purposes benefit changes which allowed people to earn more income, and more money into childcare and early childhood education strategy.

"What is it about these people that they cannot acknowledge that this government inherited a massive social deficit and we have been busy doing things they've been asking for for the last four years?"

The Cut Price Kids paper recommends the elimination of child poverty should become a stand-alone government policy.

It says:

* 29% of dependent children - around 250,000 under 15 - are living in poverty, and 175,000 will remain so under the package.

* Deregulated gaming, loan sharks and booming credit-card debt have cut swathes into the budgets of many poorer families.

* Poverty is no longer a social problem of the elderly as it was in the 1960s and 1970s - the situation has reversed and now children are more likely than other groups to live in poverty.

St John and Craig said the Budget package discriminated against many of the poorest children on the basis of the source of their parents' income - they were disadvantaged if their parents were beneficiaries.

"The principle that all children should be treated the same must be reaffirmed.

"By narrowly targeting rewards to working families, and its heavy emphasis on creating a large gap between working families and families with benefit income, the policy neglects the poorest in favour of those already better off."

Their report said the package gave to many families with one hand by increasing family support, but took away by reducing core and special benefits.

"Many of the poorest families will receive income increases of less than $10 per child per week, or in some cases even nil net gains to income until 2007."

St John and Craig noted that in the past 10 years, the income of the top-earning New Zealand households improved by 35%, while those on the lowest incomes fell an average of 8%.

Poverty rates had increased dramatically for families on benefits since the 1991 benefit cuts and escalation in housing costs. Poor children were more likely to be malnourished, sick, changing schools frequently, and living in noisy, damp, cold and stressful conditions.

(*Sunday Star Times*, 14 November 2004, A9).

In this article both the Government and CPAG are quoted, and their contrasting perspectives about responding to child poverty are presented. The conflict between the two parties is given prominence with Steve Maharey's comments about "these people". The article focuses heavily on material from CPAG press releases and as a result is a crucial item in the broadening of the debate beyond the Government's

package to include socio-structural issues. Although this article is conservative to an extent, balancing the two groups' views and highlighting conflict, this journalist also takes an advocacy role by providing facts about child poverty. The positioning of source material is significant in that the Government's outrage is responded to by CPAG via what are presented as a reasoned set of "facts".

Although no direct press release quotes are used in this article, it is clear that many of the ideas came from press releases. For instance, the opening two paragraphs are likely to have been taken from the press releases mentioned in the production chapter. The information obtained from press releases would have then been followed up in interviews with the authors, as outlined in the production chapter by journalists and CPAG. Titled "Report says Budget fails NZ's poorest children" (14 November 2004), one press release specifically states "serious design flaws entrench an underclass even further by leaving the most vulnerable behind", a turn of phrase that is very close to what the article states. The author of this article is likely to have also taken the following point from press releases: "by narrowly targeting rewards to working families, and its heavy emphasis on creating a large gap between working families and families with benefit income, the policy neglects the poorest in favour of those already better off". This is clear when one looks at the afore mentioned press release, which also states: "…the emphasis has been on creating a gap between benefits and work without regard to the effect on the children in the families that cannot meet the work criteria. The gap has been created, but at the expense of the poorest children". In these respects, CPAG have been successful in eliciting a public response from Government. They have also been successful in having the group's press release material be relied upon by a journalist for constructing the story.

Once again, in order to balance coverage, Government's response to *Cut Price Kids* was also evident across coverage, which focused on the conflict occurring between these "former mates", and the "falling out among old comrades" ("In a land of plenty", *Sunday Star Times*, 5 December 2004, C1). Focusing on conflict also reflects wider media functions at play and demonstrates that various aspects go into "selling a story" to make it appealing to the audience (Lull & Hinerman, 1997; Curran & Seaton, 2003). Several items included Government's view of the group as "them", "they", and "these people". One journalist included the use of the label "these people"

in inverted commas perhaps to emphasise the Government's view of the group as different or "other", or to indicate that this was not how the newspaper or journalist refers to CPAG. The media's focus on conflict between the groups was certainly evident, with comments by Government being reiterated about the report's findings being inaccurate, sloppy, out of context, and unscientific. In one article titled "Hungry child had to walk 15km" (*Herald on Sunday,* 14 November 2004, p. 14), Social Development Minister Steve Maharey is quoted as stating that he found the report offensive and that:

> We are the only government to have done serious work into child poverty
> and discover what it costs for a family to survive. It beggars belief to say we
> should simply keep lifting the level of benefits. That is just not realistic….New
> Zealand has the second lowest unemployment rate in the world so there are
> opportunities for people to find work…. We don't run cut-price policies.

As the members of CPAG explained in our interview, emphasis on conflict has the potential to draw attention away from the report's findings, and thus can mean less media advocacy success for CPAG. This is because the need for structural solutions to poverty can be down-played with such a focus on conflict. The potential for civic journalism is also limited in such coverage because a journalism of conversation is not fully cultivated. Rather, short facts are presented about each group's views, instead of a more in-depth discussion about solutions to poverty, and how these solutions can be best met by the two stakeholders.

CPAG's response to the rejection of the report's findings by Government and via the media was to be somewhat expected. In a *Radio New Zealand Morning Report* bulletin (15 November 2004), another prominent member of CPAG noted that the report is far from sloppy, and is the most independent and thorough analysis of the package by two people who could not be more qualified. The member goes on to point out that "Mr Maharey obviously sees attacking the report's integrity as his only defence, as he has no answer to the points raised within Cut Price Kids".  Reflecting the follow-up strategy noted within CPAG's media advocacy work, David Craig was interviewed on *Newstalk ZB* (16 November 2004) so that he could elaborate on the findings of the report, and share his views about the Government's response. In the interview David Craig defends his research as being credible and scientific, and recommends that Maharey take the time to read past the first few summary pages of the report before making such unnecessary judgements and comments. He claims

that the poorest children of beneficiary parents should be at the front of the cue for financial assistance in this package. Instead, they are being forced to the back by people who should be doing the most for them.

At the heart of this conflict is the battle between these two groups over symbolic power and the right to name and define the issue of child poverty, and devise a solution (Couldry & Curran, 2002).  As discussed in the introduction chapter, symbolic power is important in the context of the media because news constitutes a shared forum for establishing why children are in poverty, where blame can be portioned, and for revealing the "experts" who should decide what "needs" should be met. Such deliberations tend to occur with limited or restrained input from poor people themselves. This is because poor people are generally denied media legitimacy to speak; they are denied symbolic power (Hodgetts, Cullen & Radley, 2005).  As I will show in the next section, this is something that CPAG set out to address.

*Framing Poverty and Characterising the Poor*

This section revisits the construction of distinctions between the deserving and undeserving poor in the context of child poverty framing and "appropriate" policy responses. I explore some of the contradictions surrounding the construction of children in poverty as needy victims, while their parents can be presented as undeserving. The focus is on the implications of symbolic power where Government and CPAG experts define problems, people and solutions. The potential for including members of lower SES communities directly in public deliberations via the media is also considered. This is in relation to CPAG's promotion of a South Auckland rap music video about child poverty which was broadcast on national television as a result of CPAG's advocacy efforts.

The Government proposition that working families are more deserving of assistance than beneficiary families was established as a dominant frame from which debate regarding issues of child poverty developed. For instance, the newspaper article titled "What its got for you" (*The Dominion Post,* 28 May 2004, A1), cites Dr. Michael Cullen as stating: "We're lifting all boats but lifting the working boats higher". Similarly, another article titled "Families to get $66 a week more" (*The Dominion Post,* 28 May 2004), published the same day states "[the package]…will

ensure families are always better off working than on welfare….beneficiary families will also gain from the package, but not as much as those working. As is evident in the *Radio Samoa* item explored in the previous section, coverage took for granted "common sense" ideas from within contemporary society (Fiske, 1993), including the notion that poor people purchase cigarettes or gamble instead of feeding their children. The characterisation of the poor into these two groups increases the potential for the undeserving to be blamed for their status and the suffering of their children unnecessarily.

Such distinctions went virtually unquestioned until the release of the CPAG report. In a commentary titled "Poorest still left on scrapheap" (*The Dominion Post,* 17 November 2004, B5), David Craig states: "by mixing up employment policy with the needs of our poorest children, it discriminates dangerously, and leaves many of the neediest very little better off….the package denies the poorest families benefits it is pleased to deliver to already better-off working families". However, even in light of direct challenges to such distinctions, reports still centralised the deserving poor as normative. Those who are working were presented as the "norm" by which other non-working parents are to be measured against (Bullock, Wyche & Williams, 2001).

CPAG presented the public with an alternative framing of the poor, which challenged the idea that working families alone were responsible and cared for their children and thus deserved assistance. By pointing out that children do not have the luxury of choosing their family circumstances and the source of their parents' income, CPAG proposed that all children are deserving of help to improve their lives. In the process they positioned the distinction between the deserving and undeserving poor as unnecessary and irrelevant. In other words, all poor children were characterised as needy victims who require care and protection. This effectively shifted the agenda from the Government's emphasis on the role of the parent to the needs of all children and the role of the community. Various articles specifically highlighted that some children were being "left in the cold" by the package. For instance, an article titled "Family benefit the best way to deal with child poverty" notes that *Cut Price Kids* argues:

> This Government, in its rush to prove what a fiscally responsible, welfare sensitive government it is, has forgotten our poorest and most vulnerable children. It has done this because, firstly, children don't make much noise and

secondly, because the Government is sold on the idea that getting people into work is more important than meeting children's needs…(Column, *The New Zealand Herald*, 17 November 2004, A17).

This journalist also states - "…or that the Government's new package announced in the Budget should reward families while leaving non-working families and their children out in the cold". The idea of leaving poor children in the cold encourages us to feel sympathetic for these children and invokes our desire to nurture and protect them. Framing the issue in this way encourages society to "step up" for children and provide them with a voice, particularly Government who possess the most power to make the quality of children's lives better, and their futures brighter. The words "leaving poor children out in the cold" also reflects an understanding about society bringing families into the warm from the cold, harsh environment that is poverty.

In items that framed poverty as an issue of structural circumstance, rather than personal choice, CPAG's view that the package discriminates against the poorest was clear. In the article titled "Govt fostering gap between rich and poor" (*Sunday Star Times,* 14 November 2004, A9), this understanding is reflected in the following quote by David Craig: "The principle that all children should be treated the same must be reaffirmed". CPAG's view about a universal family benefit being important for bringing all poor children out of poverty reflects Keynesian or communitarian ideologies of welfare assistance. As discussed in the introduction chapter, this ideology requires state intervention to regulate society and to assist those who are unable to look after themselves (Cullen & Hodgetts, 2001). There is an emphasis on collective responsibility and structural explanations for poverty. This ideological formation is in contrast to Government's somewhat liberal ideas about the market as a self-regulating realm requiring limited government intervention. According to the Government, the simplest way out of poverty is to get a job; any job. The media played on this tension between the libertarian and communitarian ideologies, but also suggested that the responsibility for lifting children out of poverty did in part, rest with Government. This suggestion was made through the emphasis on the In Work Payment as an incentive, or financial reward for parents who go to work. Once parents had done their part and entered the paid workforce, state assistance was warranted.

In many respects the framing of coverage supports van Dijk's (2000) observation that what is often important in news reports is not necessarily explicitly stated. For instance, references to the poor can centralise values, such as individual responsibility in understanding a wider socio-political phenomenon such as child poverty. Attending to such "unstated" features of items enables me to give coherence to the overall story being promoted through the media and how this relates to the specific characterisations of lower SES people. Beneficiaries are being marked as "those" deviant others who must be forced to comply with expected norms of self reliance. Thus poor people are characterised, talked about, and their lives are deliberated upon. Their lives are administered by experts whose perspectives are in play in coverage and result in the character tensions outlined above. The resulting deliberations reflect processes identified by Anderson (1991) as outlined in the production chapter by which the news media function to imagine a nation for dominant groups through the exclusion or "othering" of marginalised groups.

Distinctions between "us" the tax paying or middle New Zealand and "them" the beneficiaries, "abnormal" minority, are used to imply differences and boundaries between groups and their behaviour (Cottle, 2000). Coverage is constructed to appeal to the scroungerphobic fears of middle New Zealand. Unemployed parents are presented in an unsympathetic manner that defines the implied audience and their elected representatives as "benevolent custodians of social resources". This positions such custodians as working to address the failings of poor people by encouraging them to "get a job" (Baumann, 1999). Distinctions between deserving children as victims and irresponsible parents evident throughout coverage allow for the restriction of the rights of beneficiary adults to their child rearing roles but not their citizenship. Ironically, this neglects the multi-generational nature of child poverty, where these parents were once "deserving innocent victims" of the previous generation.

The persistence of such distinctions in coverage may reflect a limitation of CPAG's advocacy work. As stated in the production chapter, CPAG's primary goal is to advocate for children. They have succeeded in challenging the Government's discriminatory policies that restrict resources to the children of working parents. However, by focusing primarily on children's needs there may be a tendency to not

directly address the needs of parents, which are clearly a concern for CPAG members. These needs appear to be subordinated by the preoccupation with children. In all fairness, from my engagements with CPAG I know that this is a concern for the group.

Evidently, journalists' reliance on government and CPAG representatives both opens public debate and limits the scope of deliberations where the perspectives of those undeserving parents do not feature prominently. However, one action by CPAG did lead to the brief inclusion of the perspective of poor people into broadcast media. this was from the point of view of a young man who grew up in South Auckland surrounded by families in poverty. In packaging their story for the media, CPAG sent a music video called "Sweet Azz Bro" (2003) to support their story on television news. The group were aware that television news requires visuals to accompany stories in order to make them more newsworthy, and to add a personal element.

Part of the rap group *No Artificial Flavours*, a young Maori man sings the song and tells how the life of many families is anything but "sweet as" - in contrast to what average New Zealanders seem to believe. The following lyrics summarise the central message of the song:

> I represent for those who got food in their cupboards hardly.
> Seen it on the news but you didn't believe, failed to realise it's reality, heard it on the streets but you just don't see, it's just another day in my community. Is it cause of their skin or the clothes that they wear, that makes you decide if you really care?

The artist was interviewed by a journalist on *One News* and paints a vivid picture of life for some of his friends. When reporters interviewed the lead singer of the group for the story, they were engaging in the practice of civic journalism by widening the debate and attempting to understand the reality of poverty from the perspective of someone who had grown up around it (Wallack, 2003). The interests of the marginalised and lower socio-economic groups were being promoted, rather than solely the interests of the wealthy elite who usually talk about the poor.

The participation of poor people within media coverage is important because the resources communities have to respond to local issues are determined by policy processes often occurring through the media beyond the borders of our communities (Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004). "Sweet Azz Bro" was an example of an attempt by a group to inform the wider public about the reality of poverty. The song also challenges middle New Zealand's perception that there is no poverty in our country, and encourages people to actually care and do something about it. In our work as researchers, we can contribute to directly responding to the growing frustration of many who feel their voices have not been heard and their issues have not been fairly presented within news coverage. Through CPAG's effort to include this video in broadcast media, and by journalists talking directly with the lead singer, the rap artist was able to contribute to setting the agenda on behalf of the poverty stricken community he grew up in.

*Chapter Summary*

In the initial phase of the analysis period the Government was the primary source for journalists to construct stories on how their package responded to the issue of child poverty. This reflects the symbolic power of the Government to name and define child poverty and "appropriate" responses. They did this by distinguishing between God's working poor and the Devil's idol poor. In their view, the appropriate method of responding to child poverty was to create a larger gap between work and welfare. By inviting the media to report on *Cut Price Kids*, CPAG demonstrated their ability to challenge the Government's symbolic power and contribute an alternative frame for constructing child poverty as an issue for all children who are equally deserving.

Throughout the debate about who was deserving and who was not, and where children fit into the situation, the voices of poor people did not feature prominently. The voices of children were absent from coverage. As identified by television journalist B in the production chapter, humanising the issue can be difficult because of a victim identification issue with children. Much like the situation for their parents, it is usually experts that make important decisions regarding children's lives – whether and how their needs are responded to. The almost total absence of members from lower SES communities was in contrast to the voice of "the employed struggling middle classes", or middle New Zealand. Where journalists did include the voices of

people reliant on benefits, they were used to illustrate the issue of poverty, rather than to utilise in contribution to defining the issue (Hodgetts, Cullen & Radley, 2005). Generally, coverage reflected the tradition of experts talking about the poor, rather than to the poor. Therefore, the assumption is that we as a society, and in particular, our Government, should advocate for all children. News coverage also reflects the findings of research into images of poor and homeless people in the United Kingdom. Researchers found that the public is presented with coverage of poverty related ailments, but not why poverty exists, its relation to health, and what can be done about the issue (Hodgetts, Cullen & Radley, 2005). The next chapter investigates how these issues are understood by members of lower SES communities and also explores their self-representations to comprehend how and whether they differ from media portrayals of poverty.

# CHAPTER FIVE: CONSTRUCTIONS OF THOSE IN NEED

"Children in poverty"

Child poverty will end only when society acknowledges that procreation is not a right. Ideally, breeding would be forbidden to those who cannot afford to raise children in an acceptable environment. Those earning $35,000 to $45,000 should be allowed to have one child, with a maximum of one extra child for every $10,000 of additional income.

This would obviously not be acceptable to many sectors of our society, so an attempt needs to be made to show the population it is not acceptable to knowingly have children they cannot afford to care for. Welfare could then be used for its real purpose of helping single parents or families who have lost their income source.

Instead, it is being spent on those already on a benefit continuing to have children they cannot afford, while those who are responsible and want to have children have to wait longer because they are paying for other people's children. (Letter to the Editor, *The New Zealand Herald*, 18 November 2004, A18).

This letter presents a recurring characterisation of lower SES parents in some media reports as overly dependent and irresponsible scroungers. This is a "structure of feeling" (Fiske, 1999) or common sense view that retains some currency in contemporary deliberations regarding child poverty. The letter overtly invokes notions of us responsible tax-payers who wait to have children until "we" can afford to and those beneficiaries who choose to have children "they" cannot afford. The writer makes no specific claim to authority or legitimacy, and simply positions himself as a "concerned member of the tax-paying public", who is voicing common sense. The letter was published four days following the publication of *Cut Price Kids* and comprises a conservative response to the report. As discussed in the previous chapter, this re-invokes the agenda of focusing on parental behaviour rather than children's needs. In sum, the letter typifies accusations in media coverage towards the undeserving poor as audience members that must be responded to by parents whose children are living in poverty.

Research at the audience level of the circuit of mass communication is crucial for understanding the various ways in which media coverage of poverty and associated characterisations of the poor influence public and personal understandings (Miller et al., 1998). It is at this level that we can begin to understand the implications of policy deliberations occurring through the media for those living in poverty. Speaking

directly with media audiences works against traditional media and research practices of speaking about the poor rather than to the poor (Hodgetts, Hodgetts & Radley, 2006). This chapter discusses the findings from the four focus groups as well as the follow-up photo-based interviews with lower SES parent groups. Section one explores participants' general views about media framing of poverty and characterisations of the poor. Discussion about the *Cut Price Kids* report is subsumed into a general conversation around welfare and characterising beneficiary families because this was the general context for exploring issues developed by participants. Section two investigates how lower SES parents present themselves in contrast to traditional media depictions of the undeserving or neglectful parent. The chapter concludes with a summary of key points.

*Participants' Views on Poverty in the Media*

The main themes to emerge at this level of research were participants: (a) views about middle New Zealand's lack of understanding regarding the plight of poor families due to inadequate media reporting, (b) invoking and questioning stereotypes about beneficiaries as "bludgers" who were morally defective and lazy and, (c) questioning why the voices of poor people were absent from media coverage.  I will explore each of these interrelated issues in turn.

Participants identified middle New Zealand's limited knowledge of the reality of poverty for beneficiaries as an important concern. The term *middle New Zealand* was used in two ways. First, participants used the term to refer to the views of people in dissimilar situations to themselves. Second, it was used as a pseudonym for media coverage. As discussed in the production chapter, the media's role is to give the majority media consuming public what they want, which was reflected in the framing of poverty and characterisation of parents from lower SES groups in my media analysis chapter. Unfortunately, this often means that reporting on the complexity of issues important to marginalised groups is limited – for example, the direct health implications of poverty.

Some participants identified that middle New Zealand did not understand the reality of poverty for lower SES parents, particularly those who gain their main source of income from a benefit. The main reason for this was because the media did not explain the issue from their perspective. Others felt that the media could

sensationalise, or over-dramatise issues like poverty. As testament to this point, this participant from the non-Maori Women's Refuge group stated – "…and the media slants things you know, it's just, yeah, they put it to what they think will sell, and they sensationalise it…" (Sarah, 31). Participants also noted that middle New Zealand retains a large "bash-the-beneficiaries" brigade, but noted that this was unfair:

> I don't think middle NZ really realises there's poverty in NZ. I think they pay lip service to us and say oh yes, these people really are poor, but I don't think they really understand that when you say you've got no money, you mean you haven't even got enough for one loaf of bread at $1, they don't, they don't get that, they go oh, yeah you get plenty a money from work and income but they don't get it, that it's a choice you know[6].

This participant from one of the general community focus groups expressed her concern that middle New Zealand seem to think that the majority of beneficiaries stay on benefits because they choose too – as if it is a lifestyle choice, rather than a necessity they are sometimes forced into for survival. The reasons for applying for state assistance can be numerous, but for many of the participants (particularly the single mothers) it was due to the breakdown of a relationship. Therefore, there was a contradiction between their own life experiences and media characterisations that lead to resistive readings (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2003a) of coverage. Participants proposed that stereotypical ideas regarding the motivations of beneficiaries choosing to rely on benefits perpetuated the myth that "there is no poverty in New Zealand", which can be reinforced in media coverage.  The role of the media in perpetuating such a myth about child poverty was presented by participants as having serious practical or material implications leading to further hardship. Myths of parental irresponsibility and benefit bashing was said to support the setting of state benefits at levels that were barely enough to cover regular expenses such as electricity, food and rent. Here, participants invoked and then questioned media representations of beneficiaries as simply choosing to waste their money on cigarettes or alcohol, rather than caring for their children. As discussed in the representation chapter, these ideas form a common-sense backdrop within the media against which poverty debates occur (Fiske, 1993).  For example, participants spoke about having to take money from the food budget in order to pay for unexpected medical bills:

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[6] Some participants within the focus groups have not been identified and assigned pseudonyms due to the difficulty in differentiating between who stated what point. Where I have been able to identify participants, I have done so throughout the chapter.  All photo-based interview participants have been identified.

It's like the whole socio-economic factors, you know, like if you're in bad housing or high costing housing, you know, that's where, like for Island families, you know, all over-crowded and then you all share each others bugs, and then you gotta pay for the doctors for all the individuals and then, you know, of course food money's gonna go to that, you know, bills usually come first and then whatever's left over, and if we're gonna have poor food then I'm sure we're gonna have like, poor health.

In this quote the participant from the non-Maori Women's Refuge refers to what is known as a *cycle of poverty*, where due to hardships and stress people become ill which in turn adds further stress. Consequently, such stress impacts negatively on their health once again, and ability to respond to adversity. This trope was used to warrant an alternative perspective which places responsibility with contexts of poverty rather than the irresponsibility of parents. Poverty is something that impacts on, and restrains, the ability of families to be healthy through processes of stress and life pressure that were not fore-grounded in media deliberations regarding the *Working for Families* package. As a participant from Maori Women's Refuge noted: "…impact that it has on the families that can't afford it [the basics of life], the stress, the pressure…". Across focus groups, participants also discussed a lack of adequate media coverage regarding this cycle of poverty and the socio-economic factors impacting the ability of people to improve their situations. Participants saw the choices people have as being clearly dependent on, and in some cases restricted by, various structural factors such as whether they have enough money to purchase healthy food or live in a dry home. Participants then questioned why the media emphasised people's individual choices for their situations, while neglecting situational factors.

I cannot overemphasise how concerned participants were with how employed middle New Zealanders believe beneficiaries to be irresponsible parents, and lazy bludgers. They were at pains to point out the unfairness of such accusations and openly questioned the framing of beneficiaries as burdens on taxpaying citizens. They highlighted that this framing othered them as non citizens. Within the Maori Women's Refuge group, Terri (27) invoked such notions in the context of the social and special segregation of the poor from middle New Zealand: "Like some people, it's like oh we'll put them over there, out of sight, out of mind and that's why you've got housing areas and all that stuff and it's like oh well, everyone's got their own little groups, their own worries". Similarly, in the same focus group Martha (32) agreed

with such processes of exclusion and even used the self label "the others". Such processes of othering were not presented as end products in themselves but were seen as intensifying the negative impacts of poverty. Participants noted that this process of othering caused both material and psychological harm in a manner not reflected in the media framing of poverty or its impacts:

> …The benefit, it's possible to live off it and to be, you know reasonably healthy….but it's probably, more the psychological impact of the benefit and the lack of support and there's a widening gap as well between us [middle New Zealand and beneficiaries]. I notice now that my daughter's starting to go to friends places and stuff like that there's the, it's the insidiousness of being different really…. there's still that lack of acceptance into another person's world, you know, like I fit with this world better than I fit with their world.

Here, Miranda (43) discusses some psychological and relational consequences associated with being on a benefit for herself and for her daughter. The mundane nature of issues such as social isolation and restrained participation discussed in the introduction are presented with reference to fitting in. Miranda went on to talk about how the social marginalisation her family experiences is intensifying as her daughter gets older. In particular, she noted how her daughter does not have the same access to clothes and accessories as her peers, which invokes an almost taken for granted sense of difference. Other participants from the general communities groups spoke about their children knowing the economic situation of the family and asking questions about it: "but what I hate is that, is the fact that my children know there's a difference. Like my children go 'It's Tuesday mum have we got enough money? Can we afford?' 'Oh I'll have to check, see if we've got enough money'…". Like Miranda, this participant spoke about her concern as a parent about her ability to shelter her children from the stress associated with an awareness of difference.

The media construction of poor people as other, or as being different to middle New Zealand was presented as being perpetuated in relation to the arena of welfare coverage. As is evident in a brief exchange from one of the general community focus groups, such processes of othering sometimes made it difficult to ask for help when they genuinely needed it:

> …And what's, as a single mum, single parent, what's really really hard is actually asking for help [being on a benefit]. (Rachel, 34).

> Yeah because everybody says we're bludgers. (Miranda).

It is important to note that for many of my participants, racism was an additional barrier to help seeking and a sense of entitlement. This barrier also relates to the perceptions of more socially dominant groups. Racism was invoked in relation to the intersection of personal experience and media images. A participant in the Maori Women's Refuge group spoke about the attitudes that she grew up with about Maori being inferior to non-Maori, and how she still recognised that attitude today, though perhaps in more subtle forms:

> I think it's also about you know, there are attitudes and beliefs that are values to us being able to participate anyway…. I would never front up to go for a flat or a house because I was really aware of the colour of my skin, you know, I would send a Pakeha mate to go, you get it, you go, to, you know, me being able to participate at that level and basically that's it [racism]….That's a huge barrier in my life and in, I'm still impacted by that… I believe that's from the impact of growing up in a place where lots of messages were basically said you get at the back of the cue, you know…. I don't know many people that haven't been brought up with that.... The constant messages that I think are an everyday reality so how can people who have no idea of that everyday reality know what it's like to walk in our shoes let alone make decisions about how we might succeed with something or change something? How can they make those decisions taking into account that this is the kind of environment we live in and this is reality.

In this quote Alexis (49) recounts instances in her past where she felt othered, not only as someone who was of a lower socio-economic position, but also as someone who is Maori. For my Maori participants, feelings of being othered, or different from Middle New Zealand is two-fold; difference includes dimensions of class and ethnicity. The Maori community group also raised these issues and its effects on their sense of identity and belonging. They noted that in pandering to the views of Middle New Zealand, media often misrepresent Maori people by attributing issues like obesity to the personal irresponsibility of Maori. It was suggested that the media do this by emphasising their supposed lack of restraint from purchasing unhealthy, fast food and so forth. It was also proposed that media coverage did not include information about factors restricting their ability to be healthy, such as the high expense of healthy food. Members noted that sometimes it is much more affordable to feed a family by purchasing a "$5 fish and chip meal". Again, emphasis is placed on structural rather than individual explanations in order to question victim blaming tendencies in coverage of poverty and associated characterisations of the poor.

Participants were able to speak at length on their views about middle New Zealand's partial and often incorrect understanding regarding people who rely on a benefit as their main source of income. Several proposed that this lack of understanding was due in part, to Government representatives speaking to journalists about the poor, rather than journalists taking the time to engage with them directly. For example, as Alexis highlights:

> The issue for me is about people [primarily Government Ministers] making decisions about the economic situation of our country without talking to the people who it's mostly impacted on and that we have the answers, that if we're talked to as a group of people, you know, I'm sure that we can all come up with some really good ideas and attitudes around you know, access to health, access to different opportunities in our own lives, in our own little community…. When do we get to participate in those discussions, in those decision making, you know, assumption is 'The Mother of all Budgets' blah, blah, and so far that's what's happened, they've assumed because they don't walk in our shoes.

Alexis' account supports the proposition that without an adequate understanding of the complexities and situational nature of poverty, governments often propose punitive solutions that contribute to hardship. The result is a package such as *Working for Families*. The reference in this extract to the "Mother of all Budgets" is significant in the context of the discussion because it can sustain two interpretations. The first is a reference to the accusation of the supposed incompetence of beneficiary mothers. It also provides evidence for links between current debates regarding child poverty and the framing of the previous National government's efforts to promote a "get hard on beneficiaries" economic package in the early 1990s where benefit levels were reduced. This instance may reflect how aspects of previous coverage can live on in the public memory of the audience, providing part of the context for the interpretation of subsequent news items (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2003a).

Briefly, references to middle New Zealand throughout these extracts reflect current discussions in media coverage and how concepts or terms can be appropriated by audience groups and re-used rhetorically. Participants appropriate fragments from media items in order to make sense of, and articulate, aspects of their own lives. They worked to contextualise common patterns across media coverage in a manner that qualifies any relevance to their experiences. The concept of *appropriation* or *discursive elaboration* can be used to explain how aspects of

media portrayals are adapted to people's life-worlds, refined, criticised and extended (Thompson, 1995). To appropriate is "to make one's own" something new or strange. The appropriation of media images of poor people and the discursive elaboration of these is an ongoing and socially negotiated process. Participants engaged reflexively with media portrayals and used many of these to question negative assumptions regarding beneficiary parents and to articulate positive caring and responsibility as aspects of their lives.

### *Self-Representation as the "Deserving Poor"*

In light of the critical orientation of participants' views about media characterisations of the poor, it is appropriate to also document their self-representations, as a partial response to media constructions (Hodgetts, Hodgetts & Radley, 2006). This section considers how participants respond to negative media depictions of the undeserving poor by presenting themselves as concerned and caring parents worried about their families' health and welfare. In particular, I will document the ways in which direct personal experience of hardship was invoked to challenge media accusations towards the undeserving poor. I will also document how such experience was used to warrant situational orientated explanations for the impact of life chances on health. As previous research with lower SES groups in Aotearoa has shown, recourse to structural explanations can be used to transfer moral blame for poverty and illness from the individual to the system. This serves to protect the individual's social identity as a moral person (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2000). Specific themes to arise in regard to the way participants presented themselves as respectable members of society are (a) participants' rights as members of society, (b) health as a product of one's environment and, (c) being on a benefit as a survival strategy rather than a lifestyle choice.

Throughout our discussions participants spoke about, and illustrated, how they were responsible members of the public and good parents who cared deeply about their children's needs. They were aware of negative media accusations and were not prepared to accept associated criticisms. As noted above they dismissed media accounts of child poverty and parental neglect as simply reflecting the opinions of ill-informed commentators who have not experienced the realities of life on a state benefit. For instance, one general community group participant discussed the

controversial issue of meningococcal vaccinations to demonstrate the threats to beneficiary families' rights as members of society:

> …And that's what my friend said to me, well because I pay your benefit, ie. Taxpayer. I'm the surrogate parent and therefore I have the right as a taxpayer to tell you 'you have to immunise your child!' (Stacey, 45).

> Yeah and I would say go to hell. (Sam, 44).

> Yeah and I tried to explain the difference between informed consent and non, and she didn't get it, it's not that we don't, we're just lazy thick beneficiaries who don't wanna get our children jabbed. (Stacey).

In this extract Stacey and Sam invoke their right as citizens to choose whether or not to immunise their children. Stacey discussed the fact that some tax-paying citizens do believe that they pay the income of those on benefits and therefore have the right to control such aspects of poor people's lives. However, the participants positioned themselves as informed and intelligent people who made responsible choices regarding what they believed were in the best interests of their children. This contradicts the view they are "thick, lazy beneficiaries". As others in some of the focus groups had done, Stacey researched extensively the benefits and costs of immunisation, and thus was informed enough to decide not to immunise. In her photo-based interview, Tania (35) also spoke about how she had made the decision not to vaccinate her child following extensive research:

> Well it's just, I guess the part that annoys me is that it's just so matter of fact I mean good parents vaccinate their children it's the vibe isn't it [media coverage/campaigns], if you don't vaccinate your children you're just a slacker well… We're the ones that have researched it to death, we're the ones that keep going online and checking out the sites and coming up with new information, other people they, well of course you're gonna vaccinate your child so they vaccinate their child and they haven't given it any thought at all you know and then they turn around and…. We live in a country where we're entitled to make our own decisions based on as much information that we wanna get, problem is there's a lot of people out there that aren't getting any information they're just believing you know this is what you should do.

Tania referred to her research into the meningococcal vaccination in order to position herself as a responsible citizen and parent, who has rights. She positions herself as an active citizen in a democracy by invoking her rights in reference to our "free country" in which "everyone is entitled to make their own [informed] decisions". Finally, several participants commented that they felt as if they were on trial and their

competency as adult members of society was questioned due to their status as beneficiaries. In many respects, Tania's decision not to vaccinate her child should be seen in the context of a response to such accusations that asserts competency to research an issue and think independently of media campaigns promoting immunisation. This decision is an expression of agency from an individual whose life choices are restrained by circumstance.

Throughout the photo-based interviews concerns regarding the health of one's family, self and children, and the ways in which material and psychological hardship undermined familial wellbeing emerged. For instance, many participants commented directly on their health as being dependent on the condition of the housing in which they live. These participants took photographs of, and reflected on, damp areas in their homes to show how their lack of financial resources meant a lack of alternatives. In the process they worked to re-characterise themselves as needy victims of circumstance. This was done in part, through recourse to situational restraints that impacted their health and ability to work and lift themselves out of poverty. Participants also re-characterised themselves via stated concerns regarding the impact of their situations on their children's health. For example, Sam, a 44 year old man, lived on a health and sickness benefit with his son. As a result of an accident, he had debilitating arthritis and bone pain which meant he was unable to work and had to resort to renting a substandard small flat. The dampness of his home contributed to the worsening of his condition. Sam photographed elements of his physical environment that impacted his health and the health of his son. Figure 1 depicts a bed that is very low to the ground and the block brick wall which runs the entire length of his small rented flat. This photograph depicts more than dampness and the hassles of life with a chronic condition. It also depicts pain and the concerns a father has with the physical environment he and his son are forced to live in. Specifically, Sam stated:

> That's just to indicate, yeah as you can see that's a very low bed. Now most people wouldn't give that a second thought but to me, getting up and down from that bed is a painful thing to do and one thing that, that photo doesn't illustrate is that, that bed's away from the wall as well and that is because of the condensation that outside wall just, water streams down there.

*Figure 1.* Photograph of Sam's bedroom.

When one first looks at this image, the meaning that the participant associates with it may not be obvious. However, when Sam explains the photograph the theme of unsuitable, cold and damp conditions impacting health emerges. Therefore, when Sam discusses the impacts that the dampness has on his family's health, he links poverty directly to health.  In the media coverage that I analysed, there was a distinct lack of coverage about the direct health implications of poverty. When one asks those who are most affected by poverty, an impoverished environment plays a key role in the onset and severity of illness. Again, as Sam notes:

> Initially the first thing that come to mind was my house, and the health issues within the house and you'll see within those photos there's a few inside the house, you know, where it's just damp and wet, and to me that just screams pain.  Because I don't work I don't have a dehumidifier to improve the conditions inside my house and even if I did the amount of time that I could run it each day is limited because of my financial situation so a lot of those photos relate to that.

Rachel, a 34 year old mother of two also used some of her photographs to illustrate the impact the damp and mouldy conditions had on her family's lives. In particular, she used Figure 2 to discuss how the dampness impacts their health:

*Figure 2.* Rachel's bathroom ceiling.

Of this photograph Rachel stated:

> These two were of the bathroom ceiling um, health-wise a big thing is humidity and… condensation, especially this time of year. The bathroom ceiling in particular I deliberately left it, I was going to clean it but, with my daughter being pregnant as well and she's asthmatic, I've gotta be careful with sprays and because most things used to kill mould are a bleach base, I sort of been a bit iffy about using it because I don't want to upset her with bubby and everything which I sort of thought was, that's why I took those one's cos bathrooms are always damp… health-wise that's not a good thing...

Rachel's main concern was for her 14 year old daughter, who was due to give birth at the time of the interview. However, as with Sam, Rachel also discussed the dampness as irritating her family's health, in this case her arthritis and psoriasis. Rachel went further to refer to the psychological stress that was part of her daily life. Her stress had multiple causes, three of which included her teenage daughter being pregnant, her ailments, and her lack of funds for bills. Rachel again notes the role stress plays in her life – "…if my stress levels are up then my psoriasis plays up so then the arthritis seems to niggle more and everything's sort of, inter-related of, all comes back to stress". Rachel voices what Radley (1994) refers to as the *societal perspective* on stress, associating stress with social inequality and the negative features of contemporary life, particularly for people are lower SES. Stress is conceptualised as the product of adverse material circumstances, which are not

faced to the same degree by those of more affluent standing. The stress of trying to "get by on a benefit" is presented as "…depleting one's 'health reserves' and rendering oneself susceptible to illness. Emphasis is placed on one's efforts to 'do what one can' within conditions 'not of their own making" (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2000, p. 331).

As discussed, stress is something that is a routine part of poor people's lives and one that is central to a poverty cycle. As Alexis indicates, this sort of poverty is entrenched among generations and often stems from opportunities lacking as children:

> It's everything I think that impacts on a child's life so that would include access to health care that type of thing as well as education….There's all different options not necessarily available however….Who are they there for? Generally child poverty is about anything and everything that impacts on a child's life as per the options, the opportunities that a child has in order to grow healthy into the future.

This poverty cycle explanation was also acknowledged by Rachel who noted the level of difficulty with moving one's family out of this poverty trap. She presents herself as someone who faces structural adversity on a daily basis. However, she also noted her personal agency for her situation, in this case, her health:

> …But then it might be that over a period of a month we could be there [medical centre] three or four times with myself or the kids and of course the money has gotta come from somewhere and then you don't eat as well and then you don't get healthy it's yeah, the cycle of, basically the poverty cycle though I know there are a lot of people that are a lot worse off than what we are it's, yeah, it's a hard place to be and more than that it's hard to get out of the cycle, it's really really hard to break out of it…. And also because food wise, healthier eating options are more expensive um, the whole vegetables and things. I mean your cheap food is potatoes, bread, you know all your really nice heavy starchy things that fill you up but they're not really all that healthy and especially if you're not doing the exercise that you should be….I think it's a bit of a cycle is the health because you're not healthy and, and the financial side of things, each, each one seems to aggravate the other.

In this extract, Rachel is able to discuss the importance of eating healthy food and doing regular exercise to keep herself healthy and thus is well versed in mediated messages about the importance of such activities. In contrast to the characterisation of lower SES groups as lazy people who do not care much about their health, Rachel was concerned about her health, while noting that her healthy options were limited

because of her budget. In other words, her budget prevented her from being "as healthy as she could be". Thus, here we have Rachel shifting between personal agency for her situation and structural circumstances.

Continuing the theme of situational restraint, many of the participants spoke about state benefits providing barely enough income to exist on. As noted in the introduction chapter, benefits usually only meet 75-85 per cent of a standard budget (Joint Methodist-Presbyterian Public Questions Committee & New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services 1998). In addition to being forced to "make their money stretch" to pay for basic expenses, the participants limited funds also meant they lacked access to services. For example, Sarah (31) from the non-Maori Women's Refuge focus group stated:

> Even child-care, access to child-care, money, access to food, access to health, education, I mean that's a big thing at the moment where they're charging fees and they're suing them [parents who do not pay fees]. I mean education, health and police, protection for us, those three things should be totally free, accessible, no questions asked, but you pay, you know.

Participants were acutely aware of the things they could not always access for their families, and that not being able to access fundamental services such as healthcare was by no means a choice or example of parental neglect. From such accounts one could logically conclude that these people would not choose to rely on a benefit as their main source of income. These people did not choose to deny their children of healthcare because they were lazy or because they had no desire to. Accessing care or purchasing healthy food to prevent becoming ill in the first place were simply options not guaranteed to them as they are wealthier sectors of society. Many participants in the focus groups and interviews made significant sacrifices to ensure their children had what they needed. Again, Rachel discussed putting herself at the bottom of the list in terms of what her family required:

> …If your child needs something then you tend to give it to them and so you're the one missing out, which of course means you being the one getting sick… like my daughter's asthmatic. She got sick so the asthma flares up…but it's all this extra money spent on her with doctors and chemists and all the rest of it well it meant like, just little things that can make all the difference…

This extract exemplifies the way in which many people who are dependent on benefits challenge stereotypes by presenting themselves as responsible, concerned, and caring parents who do their best for their children with the resources they have. These parents presented themselves as people doing their utmost to ensure that their children's basic health needs were met. Their self-representations challenge media depictions of the undeserving poor as people who waste money on cigarettes or alcohol instead of caring for their children. Miranda noted how she had actually given up smoking to retain more money for her family - "yeah well I've just given up smoking so I've got an extra $30 bucks a month and I'm really, really good with my money". This quote demonstrates how Miranda felt it necessary to state that she had good budgeting skills, to again, contradict the idea that she wastes money. In order to further present themselves as responsible people, some participants' accounts involved direct differentiation from media images of beneficiaries as wasteful with their money. This meant that participants reproduced media stereotypes of beneficiaries as being irresponsible with their money, and then challenged them by acting as a witness to such wasteful spending habits (Hodgetts, Hodgetts & Radley, 2006). In the process they attempt to cross what Sibley (1995) refers to as *bounded categorisations* between irresponsible, bludging beneficiary parents and members of the taxpaying public who "look after their own".

*Chapter Summary*

This chapter documented participants' views about how media coverage portrayed them as the undeserving poor and their alternative self-representations as the deserving poor. In the first section, participants identified that the media promotes a limited understanding of poverty for beneficiary families, leading to negative stereotypes about poor people. Participants proposed that the media reinforced stereotypes about beneficiaries as bludgers, or irresponsible parents who have wasteful spending habits, particularly in welfare related coverage. This finding reinforces what Leitch (1990) proposed regarding one prominent frame for poverty in New Zealand media. As noted in the introduction chapter, Leitch found that the media contained victim blaming images of unemployed people in which individuals were accused of not wanting to work and being too dependent on the taxpayer. Such images create and maintain distinctions between deserving taxpayers and undeserving bludgers, which serve as a backdrop for poor people to be deliberated upon, and constructed. Poor people are judged in accord with middle New Zealand's

scroungerphobic concerns about "those unproductive people" who we waste our tax dollars on.

Participants contested such othering, partially because it contributed to their children growing up feeling different to their peers, inferior, and excluded. These parents presented their children as victims of oppression and prejudice, who are not responsible for the economic situation of their family. For Maori participants, this difference from middle New Zealand was two-fold in that they were perceived as being different because they were lower SES, and because they were Maori. This consequently proved to be a barrier throughout their lives. Finally, participants also discussed their lack of adequate representation or voice within media coverage. They proposed that the absence of lived experience in news reports and associated policy deliberations meant that the issue of poverty was constructed in a superficial and partial manner which promoted punitive "solutions" to poverty.

The second section explored some of the participants' rhetorical strategies for challenging negative or ill-informed media depictions. This challenge was achieved through recourse to the cycle of poverty.  They discussed their rights as members of society who are able to make informed and responsible decisions for their children. They differentiated themselves from felt public and media accusations regarding bludgers who lack a desire to work, waste taxpayer dollars and neglect their children. In my analysis of media coverage I found there was a lack of acknowledgement of the caring nature of these parents and their efforts to provide their children with the best start in life with the limited resources they possessed. The participants' acknowledge public concerns regarding the needs of children and then show how they are doing their best but are hampered due to circumstances, thus shifting the blame from them as victims back to the system. In other words, participants rework stigmatising media characterisations according to their photographs in ways that allow them to present themselves as worthy members of society, who are hampered by social inequality. Participants invoke both material and psychosocial determinants of health to explain the impact of poverty on themselves and their families. However, although the participants faced daily adversity, they did not present themselves exclusively as passive victims of circumstance. They reinforced their commitments to family, community, and a sense of legitimacy as community members who sought to shield their children from hardship.

# CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSIONS

Aotearoa is awash with media commentaries on social concerns, including child poverty, diagnoses of inter-group relationships, characterisations of the poor, and prescriptions for addressing poverty. If community psychologists are serious about fostering social justice then we need to do more work that enables us to explore why media coverage appears to advantage some groups over others (Loto et al., 2005). We also need to consider what impacts media representational politics have for those who are marginalised from participation in media deliberations. This research illuminates the implications of the social negotiation of child poverty through the circuit of mass communication for the setting and revision of policy agendas and for resolving child poverty. It links media production processes, publicly disseminated constructions of child poverty, and lower SES parent groups' understandings of such representations. The promotion of the Government's *Working for Families* package and the corresponding release of CPAG's *Cut Price Kids* report provides a focus for investigating the role of mass media in framing and promoting specific solutions for New Zealand's disturbing levels of child poverty. This chapter presents my reflections on the wider significance of combined findings from across production, representation and audience analyses. I consider the implications of this research for community psychology and the development of advocacy work aimed at ensuring civic participation by lower SES groups regarding concerns impacting directly on their lives.

*Bringing it all Together: Production, Representation and Reception*

Previous research has provided valuable insights into media representations and the stigmatising of lower SES groups as unmotivated and fundamentally the source of their own problems (Golding & Middleton, 1992; Leitch, 1990; Hodgetts, Hodgetts & Radley, 2006). For some time researchers have documented efforts to work with the media to promote alternative perspectives and the lived experiences of marginalised groups (Wallack, 1994, 2003). In a complimentary manner civic journalists have attempted to "get involved" and to work with communities to set news agendas, rather than relying on government institutions for accounts of what is important and what needs to be done (Wallack, 2003). Researchers have also started to explore the ways in which audience members from lower SES backgrounds can appropriate (Thompson, 1995) and work with media

representations to produce counter narratives expressing their citizenship. Such counter narratives can also explain structural restraints on their life changes, and the importance of human public responses that do not rely on victim blaming (Hodgetts, Hodgetts & Radley, 2006). The key contribution of this thesis is the exploration of all these levels of the circuit of mass communication (Miller et al., 1998) in relation to the public construction of child poverty and policy responses (Davidson et al., 2003).

Discussions with journalists reveal the extent to which they strive for balance and objectivity to legitimate their reports (Lealand, 2004). Presenting opposing sides of a story is accomplished through the juxtaposing of adversarial stakeholders views about the issue – in the present case, those of the Government and CPAG and each groups supporters. Findings support Husband's (2005) proposition that production staff engage in professional practices that influence which issues are selected, the angle taken in covering such issues, the sources drawn upon or interviewed, and the composition of an exposition. Both Government and CPAG representatives were able to promote their respective views. What was particularly worrying about the ensuing debate was the historical links of this framing in medieval notions of God's poor and the Devil's poor (Golding & Middleton, 1982). Initially, coverage emphasised Government's conservative views between the deserving and undeserving poor and focused on the personal responsibility of parents to bring themselves out of poverty by finding employment. Such a frame served to individualise poor people as the cause of their own situations, fuelling the potential for poor people to be blamed (Leitch, 1990). At this point, the Government's symbolic power meant that they could name and define poor people into two separate groups (deserving and undeserving) (Couldry & Curran, 2002). Poor people who did not work were characterised in some items as other, or being a burden on taxpayers (Hodgetts, Cullen & Radley, 2005). These common-sense ideas served as a backdrop against which the poverty debate played out. CPAG presented the alternative frame for poverty, presenting the children of beneficiaries as victims of social inequality, rather than simply irresponsible parenting. Success in broadening coverage of child poverty and options for public response indicates the level of success that the group had in influencing the production process and working within institutional parameters. However, not all of CPAG's criticisms of the Government's understanding of poverty, emphasis on individual responsibility and prescriptions for legitimate public responses were promoted in news reports. Although coverage

incorporated CPAG's communitarian or Keynesian concerns for beneficiary children, sympathy in coverage tended not to extend to the parents. This was due to the prominence of the Government's emphasis on the responsibility of families to bring themselves out of poverty through finding employment (Cockett, 1994).

News media constituted a sphere in which controversy surrounding the *Working for Families* package played out. In highlighting the differing perspectives of the two primary sources, coverage focused heavily on the conflict, which demonstrates the newsworthy value of conflict/controversy in the media (Chapman & Lupton, 1994). Civic journalistic practices were restrained due to a reliance on reporting "short facts" from each group's press releases and public statements, rather than more in-depth reporting. The public sphere (Thompson, 1995) constructed through the media was restrained by the reliance on two opposing sources and limited to an engagement for and from middle New Zealand. Media framing is important because coverage is taken by policy makers to reflect public opinion regarding issues (Davidson et al., 2003). However, potential for change in journalistic practices did emerge from several journalists questioning notions of balance and objectivity. These journalists proposed that the resulting juxtaposition of two extreme views leads to the promotion of controversy over understanding or in depth investigations of the topic and promotion of a resolution (Rupar, 2006; Singer, 2006). A barrier to the realisation of a shift from a journalism based on notions of balance and objectivity to one based on civic journalism was the emphasis placed on commercial imperatives. This meant journalists targeting middle New Zealand and in the process pandering to scroungerphobic views (Golding and Middleton, 1982).

The voices of poor people were not a prominent feature in media coverage, which reflects the common media practice of talking about the poor rather than to the poor. This is similar to what Loto et al. (2006) found in that the focus of contemporary news consists primarily of communicating with and between so called "legitimate sources". These sources have cultivated links with journalists and assist in the identification of issues of the day and the needs of marginalised groups. Symbolic power (Couldry & Curran, 2002) is an important consideration here because news is supposed to constitute a shared forum in society (Curran & Seaton, 2003) for establishing why children are in poverty, where blame can be portioned, and for revealing the experts who should decide what needs should be met (Wallack, 2003).

The issue of framing or shaping the debate is important because the way in which a society views a problem, determines how and what solutions are found (Davidson et al., 2003).

Lower SES parents identified a distinct absence of people like themselves in coverage or attention to the actual hardships they face on a daily basis. These people pointed to how they were being spoken "about", rather than to, in public deliberations. They proposed that the media characterised beneficiaries as bludgers and promoted the assertion that they were undeserving and a waste of taxpayers' money. For Maori participants, this othering and difference was two-fold in that they were perceived as being different because they were lower SES, and because they were Maori. Racism proved to be a barrier throughout their lives in seeking help or moving beyond such discrimination. Because the media did not explain poverty from the perspective of those affected by the issue, participants felt that middle New Zealand lacked a true awareness of the complex reality of poverty. They felt that this led to inadequate policy responses such as *Working for Families* and contributed to further marginalisation. Participants used their photographs to challenge media depictions and present themselves as deserving, morally worthy citizens with rights (Hodgetts, Hodgetts & Radley, 2006). In doing so, they invoked the importance that structural factors played in their lives noting that they do their best to care for their children and ensure their needs are met with the limited resources they have. Thus, they shifted blame for their circumstances from them back to the system and to the policies that allow poverty and inequality to continue. The caring nature of these parents and their ability to cope with such adversity was not evident in coverage. Although participants faced daily material adversity and psychological stress, they did not present themselves exclusively as passive victims of circumstance, but reinforced commitments to family, community and a sense of legitimacy as community members facing adversity. This supports previous research showing how people do not just reproduce socially or mediated explanations or personal stories (Hodgetts, Hodgetts & Radley, 2006). Rather, they appropriate (Thompson, 1995) and rework these explanations according to their photographs in ways that allow them to present themselves as worthy members of society, who are hampered by social inequality.

In sum, analysing the three levels of the mass communication circuit has allowed me to identify who possesses symbolic power regarding the construction of child poverty, how this power is accessed and negotiated in media framing, and the potential for challenge and change. It enables me to understand implications of media framing in terms of policy formation and implementations, and the consequences for the lives of lower SES families. These are issues of direct concern for community psychology.

*Implications for Community Psychology*

Community psychology professes to be a context sensitive sub-discipline that attempts to engage with people's life circumstances (Foster-Fishman et al., 2005). The focus is on the context rather than the individual yet we continue to work as if the media do not matter as a fundamental basis for community life (Wallack, 2003). It is difficult to understand the lack of engagement with wider media processes in community life when one considers the potential such a focus on media offers for extending the scope of our efforts for social justice and change. If we are interested in what stories get told and which are suppressed, and how this influences the framing of social problems and our efforts at resolving these issues, then we must engage with the media and processes of symbolic power (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2006). As an emerging community psychologist I have attempted to inform my work with insights from media and communications, media advocacy and civic journalism. Across these disciplines, researchers also promote the interests of marginalised groups to various degrees in the desire to address social inequalities. This has enabled me to make sense of the processes that result in lower SES families' lack of symbolic power to voice their concerns about public constructions of child poverty. It has informed an interpretation of how child poverty and associated policies are rendered conservative due to the media and Government pandering to the scroungerphobic tendencies of middle New Zealand.

My findings lend further support to the proposition that media othering of lower SES parents in particular can undermine the social capital of those in need (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2003; Wallack, 2003). Social capital refers to connections – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Putnam, 2000). Underpinning this concept is the notion that interaction enables people to build communities and resolve collective problems, to commit

themselves to each other, and to knit the social fabric (Smith, 2001). In order for the media to promote or encourage citizens to participate in public life and re-connect with the community(s), the media must first enhance the connections between members of the communities themselves because it is in these social networks that social deliberation and engagement in civic life occur. In other words, in engaging the public, the media are challenged to map their communities' social problem-solving capacities in the first instance (Friedland, Sotirovic & Daily, 1998). Thus the general orientation for social capital development can be about deliberation and community problem solving, where citizens are involved in developing their own solutions to community problems contributing to their overall empowerment (Wallack, 2003). According to Friedland et al. (1998) the media do not in and of themselves stimulate deliberation or create social capital, however by setting a communitywide media agenda on a particular issue, the media can create an environment in which deliberation can be focused on and intensified.

This thesis presents insights into how community might work with journalists towards enhancing social capital in society so that marginalised groups are included in public deliberations. We can learn a lot from groups such as CPAG who attempt to broaden the representational scope of news coverage. After all, without adequate representation of their lives, the potential for beneficiary parents to be further marginalised as irresponsible parents who bludge off taxpayers is increased. Community psychologists can work with groups such as CPAG and journalists to forge direct links between journalists and lower SES groups that reflect the efforts of civic journalists in community mobilisation (Wallack, 2003). The goal is to foster a "media space" where deliberations and community developments can be played out. The strategies of CPAG and other media advocates provide insights into how this can be achieved. Public support for polices can be placed back into the media through letters to the editor or talkback radio, where the views of the public serve to inform media agendas contributing to the idea of a mass communication circuit.

Such work requires the recognition that the roles of community psychologists (Prilleltensky & Prilleltensky, 2003) civic journalists (Hodges, 1997) and media advocates (Wallack, 1994) overlap because we all attempt to foster community development in defining issues of relevance and solutions. As researchers we can work with journalists to support them in covering stories from a social justice angle

and to ensure a wider range of sources are present in deliberations, especially those of the marginalised. This is because as researchers we have the ability to work with lower SES groups and help them at least contextualise and potentially challenge symbolic power by representing themselves (Hodgetts, Cullen & Radley, 2005). This thesis has facilitated the participation of marginalised groups in the identification and framing of local issues and wider decision-making processes. Information is provided about the wider impacts of poverty and alternative policy solutions which are more communal in nature. This challenges the tendency to blame families experiencing poverty.

We can also work with journalists to change professional norms maintaining distance between journalists and the communities they serve by serving as a bridge between the two. Tester (2001) proposes that if issues such as child poverty are to be addressed then the norms must be changed. Media are better at exploring consequences than intentions, which is reflected in the tendency for news to not compare child poverty in different locales or create a dialogue across issues of social marginalisation (Tester, 2001). The audience is confronted with a series of distinct stories. Tester (2001) speculates that reports that raise issues of justice, injustice and fairness, and which explore systemic causes are more likely to invoke public response because they can elicit feelings of shame and guilt. This would re-politicise poverty. It might involve a comparison of children in need and their life changes with children who are more affluent.  As community psychologists working to foster communal life and context orientated policies for addressing issues such as child poverty, we need to document and then challenge processes of media distancing. This thesis has contributed to this agenda.

This thesis is necessary because we can highlight the links and complexities of production, representation and reception processes, and because it provides information and tools to other groups doing important work. We can also understand public action and inaction on issues. As researchers, we can explore media processes and understandings in order to address questions like why we can know about issues like child poverty but leave it for others to deal with. We can also assist advocates by promoting messages that move beyond individual blame and onto emphasising structural causes of poverty and its implications for families.  Finally, we can also help by evaluating advocates efforts, and suggesting areas for improvement

to their media advocacy strategies as based on what we know about advocacy work. For example, CPAG tap into the public's sympathy and emotion for the welfare of children. It is important that such efforts go further than simply invoking sympathy for children – action needs to occur on the part of journalists, our Government, researchers, and the wider community (Tester, 2001).

In approaching my research, I adopted various elements from other researchers' methodologies. Following Hodgetts, Bolam and Stephens (2005), I adopted an approach where mass communication is conceptualised as an ongoing dialogical process through which society communes and common vocabularies for understanding child poverty are negotiated. The media provide more than the transmission of specific information or messages. They can also provide focal points for citizens to access shared vocabularies for understanding child poverty. In centralising media in public and community life, this approach supports a focus on media production, actual media representations, and the processes through which such representations enter life-worlds.

This research contributes to an existing set of community focused literatures that explore the role of the media in society (Curran & Seaton, 2003) to promote a media orientated community psychology (Loto et al., 2006). A particular strength was the focus on all three levels of mass communication. This strength also created considerable difficulties in the form of the resulting project size for a masters thesis. Because I explored all three levels together and at each level had large data sets, the depth of analysis of themes emerging at each level was restricted.  In particular, one area I would have liked to explore and discuss more was the double disadvantage of poverty and racism for Maori, who are over-represented within lower SES sectors of society. This leads to a general recommendation that future research should explore similarities and differences in and across minority groups and the potential for varying opportunities for civic participation through the media. Such a focus would contribute further insights into the implications of public constructions of child poverty and those struggling to care for their families.

By way of final comment, this research has only scraped the surface of CPAG's media advocacy efforts and capabilities. It has focused on one of their reports as an example of media advocacy. CPAG had already published two reports prior to this,

as well as one during the writing of this thesis. The first publication is titled *Our children: The priority for policy* and was published in two editions, the first edition (2001) detailing the issue of child poverty and why it needs to be a priority for policy in its own right. The second edition (2003) updates the initial report and reflects on the events and progress made since 2001, making recommendations for future improvement to policies. The second report is titled *Room for improvement: Current New Zealand housing policies and their implications for our children* (Johnson, 2003)*,* the contents of the report exactly reflecting the report's title. During the writing of this thesis, CPAG published their fourth report titled *Hard to swallow: Foodbank use in New Zealand* (Wynd, 2005)*.* Also, in 2005 CPAG won confirmation of their right to bring legal action against Government for its discriminatory policies – the Child Tax Credit and In Work Payment. According to one of their press releases titled ""Landmark win in human rights case" (28 November 2005) the Human Rights Review Tribunal decision to grant access to the group sets a new standard for non-government organisations. It also shows how successful CPAG have been with their work. The decision is a crucial achievement for CPAG in a lengthy battle to engage with Government about discrimination against New Zealand's poorest children. The group first complained to the Human Rights Commission in 2002. Mediation failed and the group pursued the cause with the Human Rights Review Tribunal. Evidently, the work of CPAG is ongoing, and occurs within a larger dialogue regarding child poverty that is occurring between this child advocacy group and the Government, often via the media.

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**APPENDIX A**

*Proposal of Research to CPAG*

The case study investigating media coverage of child poverty that we are asking members of Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG) to participate in is part of a larger Maori and Psychology Research Unit project funded by the Health Research Council of New Zealand (HRC REF: /04/274): *Mediation & the public negotiation of health inequalities: Comparing Maori & Mainstream Media*. Below we provide the general orientation for the larger HRC project in order to set the context for what we propose to explore with your group in relation to the issue of child poverty.

### *Background to the larger project*

There is more to health than the adoption of a healthy lifestyle or prompt access to medical treatment. Although these practices are clearly important, economic prosperity, housing, work, equality, community cohesion, and social capital also bear on health. These societal influences have been found to be particularly pertinent to the health of Maori, Pacific Island, and Pakeha lower socioeconomic groups (*cf.*, Hodgetts, Masters & Robertson, 2004). This study explores processes by which members of the public form understandings of links between social inequalities and health by undertaking analyses of media representations and public uses of different representations. Given the importance of media messages as a frame for information today, and the engagement of media in everyday life, the focus on the media is a vital, but largely neglected, component of research into health inequalities (Hodgetts & Chamberlain, 2003).

Until recently, health inequalities and social determinants of health have been studied independently of the media (Seale, 2004). A discussion of the role of media is crucial because media are primary sources of taken-for-granted frameworks for understanding social concerns, and are central to the definition of social issues and the legitimation of specific approaches to addressing these issues (Hodgetts, Cullen & Radley, 2005). Media coverage is often taken to reflect public opinion regarding policy issues, and as a result policies are more likely to be developed and implemented if policy makers consider there to be sufficient public support "expressed through" media coverage (Davidson, Hunt & Kitzinger, 2003). As Tompsett et al. (2003) write:

The effects of the media on public opinion may be most significant in how it affects how powerful policy-makers perceive public opinion. A false perception of collective opinion derived from biased media coverage could prove particularly detrimental when it is held by those with the power to shape social policy (p. 242).

How media frame social issues is an important consideration for those trying to promote the importance of social inequalities and policies aimed at alleviating the impact of social injustices.

The larger project explores these processes across Maori and Mainstream media outlets for a range of topics from housing and transport, to civic participation and inclusion. The findings will be used to widen media agendas.

### *The case of child poverty*

This thesis case study aims to document links between media framing, public understandings and policy agendas surrounding child poverty. We plan to examine your group's promotion of the *Cut Price Kids* report as an instance of media advocacy (Wallack, 2003). Specifically, we are interested in exploring strategies for placing child poverty on the media agenda, how these strategies relate to international case studies and the perceptions of journalists and media professionals regarding the involvement of groups such as yours in news production. We are also interested in resulting coverage by the media, political reactions, and audience responses to specific news items (*cf*., Miller et al., 1998). This research aims to:

- Analyse the role of the mass media in framing child poverty as a public issue
- Evaluate a specific attempt at media advocacy
- Discuss the relevance of media advocacy and civic journalism for the ways in which society responds to child poverty
- Contribute to a growing body of research into links between the media, the perpetuation of social inequalities, and health

### *What would participation by CPAG involve?*

We would like to interview two members of your group who were involved in the promotion of the *Cut Price Kids* report. The interviews would be approximately 60 minutes in duration. Specifically, these participants would be asked to discuss the following issues:

- Their efforts to encourage media outlets to cover child poverty
- How they got involved in working with the media

- What they are trying to achieve
- Why they think the media are important
- How the media react to their efforts
- The nature of media coverage of the report
- Examples of what has worked
- Examples of what has not worked
- Any lessons they have gained from working with the media

We are also going to talk to journalists who generated coverage of the *Cut Price Kids* report in order to gain further understandings of how public and health issues get included in coverage, how journalists perceive groups such as yourselves, and what journalists are trying to achieve when reporting on social and health issues. The notion of "civic journalism" will guide these interviews:

> …civic journalism projects seek to engage the community in the process of civic life by providing information and other forms of support to increase community debate and public participation in problem solving (Wallack, 2003, p. 606).

Your participation will aid us in developing a better understanding of how social advocacy and community groups can influence media processes and become involved in setting agendas for public deliberation (Wallack, 2003). We are happy to share our findings with your group.

### How will you benefit from participating in this phase of the research?

We see this project as enabling us to open a dialogue with your group through which we can share ideas and interests. We will provide you with feedback regarding our findings, including journalist and community members' perceptions of coverage of child poverty, relevant literature regarding media advocacy strategies, and insights from other groups engaged in similar work. Once our analysis is complete we would like to present our findings to your group and answer any further questions that you may have. This research may also bring further attention to CPAG and the issue of child poverty.

This research will also be integrated into the research literature on links between health inequalities and the media and our work with community groups currently attempting to get their concerns onto the media agenda. Any publications including material provided by CPAG will be sent to you for feedback prior to submission.

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**APPENDIX  B**

*CPAG Consent Form*

The
University
of Waikato
*Te Whare Wānanga*
*o Waikato*

# Health in the News

## *Child Poverty and Media Advocacy*

### Consent Form

I have read the proposal of research and have had the details of the study explained to me.  My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I understand that I have the right to decline to discuss any particular issues during the interview and to withdraw from the project up to the end of the interview. Further, I understand that anonymity of individual names will be guaranteed.

I wish to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the proposal.

Signed:        _____

Name:         _____

Date:          _____

Researcher(s):  _____

**APPENDIX  C**

*Focus Group Information Sheet*

THE UNIVERSITY OF
**WAIKATO**
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

# Health in the News

## Information Sheet (Focus Groups)

### What is this study about?
This research explores processes by which members of the public engage with and understand the reporting of health, and poverty, in the news media. In today's world, many of the explanations used to make sense of health related issues are drawn from the media. Our project examines how health and poverty are reported in the news, media, and how these reports are understood by people like you.

### What am I being asked to do?
We invite you to take part in a focus group discussion about media health reporting. This will cover the type of health concerns considered in the news media, factors influencing health (including poverty), and how these relate to your life and your children's lives.  We are interested to know what you think of news media reporting of health – what you make of it, what's missing from it, and the role of the media in public understandings of health and poverty related issues. The focus group meeting will involve up to four other people, and will take about two hours of your time.  It will be organised at a time and place that is suitable for everyone in the group.  We will provide some refreshments at the interview and also give you a $20 petrol voucher to compensate you for your travel costs.  We will audio-tape the interview, although you are free to ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time.  The group will also decide on two people to take part in a further part of the project.  This will involve them taking some photographs, keeping media diaries for a week, and discussing these in an interview. About one month after the interview we will ask you to come to another meeting where we will talk about our initial results from this part of the study, and give you a chance to comment on what we are finding. We will give you another $20 petrol voucher to compensate for your travel costs to this meeting.

### What will happen to my information?
We will use the information you give us to analyse what people think about the news media reporting of health and poverty, and to present this to other researchers and inform them about these issues. As well, we will use the information to help us write

storylines that can be used by the media to develop better ways of reporting on health. Be assured that no-one will be able to identify you in any of this material, although we may use some brief quotations from the interview and photographs to illustrate common concerns that people have. At the end of the study, the tape-recordings and photographs will be destroyed. We will send you a summary of our findings at the end of the study.

### *What can I expect from the researchers?*

If you decide (or have decided) to participate in this project, the researchers will respect your right to:

- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- Decline to discuss any particular issue in the focus group;
- Withdraw from the study up to one week after the interview;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- Ask for the audio-tape to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- Have a copy of your photographs

### *Who can I speak with about my participation in this project?*

If you have further questions or concerns, please contact Darrin (research supervisor), Rolinda or Alison. Their contact details are below:

Darrin Hodgetts, Department of Psychology, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. Phone: (07) 838 4466 ext 6456 Email: dhdgetts@waikato.ac.nz

Rolinda Karapu, Maori & Psychology Research Unit, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. Phone (07) 838 4466 ext 8025 Email: rc3@waikato.ac.nz

Alison Barnett, Maori & Psychology Research Unit, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. Phone (07) 838 4466 ext. 8025. Email: arb9@waikato.ac.nz

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Brian Murphy, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Albany, telephone (09) 414 0800 email humanethicsalb@massey.ac.nz.

**THE UNIVERSITY OF**
**WAIKATO**
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

## Health in the News

### Information Sheet for Photo-Based Interviews

#### *What is this study about?*

This research explores processes by which members of the public engage with and understand the reporting of health and poverty in the news media. In today's world, many of the explanations used to make sense of health-related issues are drawn from the media. Our project examines how health is reported in the news, media, and how these reports are understood by people like you.

#### *What am I being asked to do?*

We invite you to take part in the second part of this study, which involves you in taking photographs of places and events that you consider to be important for health, keeping a diary of health related reports that you come across during the week, and discussing these in an interview. If you agree to take part in this part of the study, you will be given two disposable cameras and asked to take photographs of health related activities, events and objects that you encounter over the course of the next week. You will also be asked to keep a diary of health reports in the media that you come into contact with over the next week. You will be asked to return the cameras and media diary to the researcher at the end of the week. The researcher will then have the cameras developed and organise a time within the following week to conduct the interview. During the interview, you will be asked to talk about the photographs you have taken and the media reports that you have selected. This interview will cover the type of media reports and issues that you think are important and factors influencing your health (including poverty). We are interested in how the media fit into your life and how you engage with media reports when developing your own understandings of health and factors affecting your family's health such as poverty. The interview will take about 2 hours to complete and will be organised at a time and place that is suitable for you. We will provide some refreshments at the interview and also give you a $20 petrol voucher to compensate you for your travel costs. We will audio-tape the interview, although you are free to ask for the recorder to be turned off at any time. About one month after the interview we will ask you to come to another meeting where we will talk about our initial results from this part of

the study, and give you a chance to comment on what we are finding. We will give you another $20 petrol voucher to compensate for your travel costs to this meeting.

### *What will happen to my information?*
We will use the information you give us to analyse what people think about the news media reporting of health and poverty, and to present this to other researchers and inform them about these issues. As we will use the information to help us write storylines that can be used by the media to develop better ways of reporting on health. Be assured that no-one will be able to identity you in any of this material, although we may use some brief quotations from the interview and photographs to illustrate common concerns that people have. At the end of the study, the tape-recordings and photographs will be destroyed. We will send you a summary of our findings at the end of the study.

### *What can I expect from the researchers?*
If you decide to participate in this project, the researchers will respect your right to:

- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- Declined to discuss any particular issue in the focus group;
- Withdraw from the study up to one week after the interview;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used;
- Ask for the audio-tape to be turned off at any time during the interview;
- Have a copy of your photographs

### *Who can I speak with about my participation in this project?*
If you have further questions or concerns, please contact Darrin (research supervisor), Rolinda or Alison. Their contact details are below:

Darrin Hodgetts, Department of Psychology, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. Phone: (07) 838 4466 ext 6456 Email: dhdgetts@waikato.ac.nz

Rolinda Karapu, Maori & Psychology Research Unit, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. Phone (07) 838 4466 ext 8025 Email: rc3@waikato.ac.nz

Alison Barnett, Maori & Psychology Research Unit, University of Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton. Phone (07) 838 4466 ext 8025. Email: arb9@waikato.ac.nz

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Professor Brian Murphy, Chair, Massey University Campus Human Ethics Committee: Albany, telephone (09) 414 0800 email humanethicsalb@massey.ac.nz.

**APPENDIX  D**

*Focus Group Consent Form*

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## Health in the News

### Consent Form (Focus Groups)

I have read the Information Sheet and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I understand that I have the right to decline to discuss any particular issues during the focus group discussion and to withdraw from the project up to the end of the focus group.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Signed:                _____

Name:                 _____

Date:                  _____

Researcher(s): _____

**APPENDIX  E**

*Summary of Media Coverage*

| Date | Media Outlet | Title | Sources |
|------|-------------|-------|---------|
| | | Budget 2004 | |
| 2 May | Sunday Star Times (SST) | Staying at home for the kids | Waihi family - St John quoted |
| | SST | Death of the single-income family | Government (Govt.) – St John quoted |
| 9 May | SST | Tight, Mean and Nasty regime | Researcher and Professor from Victoria University, St John, Steve Maharey |
| 19 May | New Zealand (NZ) Herald | Budget to benefit '60 per cent of families with young children' | Govt. |
| 25 May | NZ Herald | Families to receive a leg-up in Budget | Govt. & St John |
| 26 May | NZ  Herald | UK shows the way on child poverty (comment) | Professor Emeritus of Social Policy at Edinburgh University. Targeted at Govt. |
| | NZ Herald | $150 cash boost to help families | Govt. |
| 27 May | Radio New Zealand (NZ) Newswire | Government delivers budget targeted at families | Cullen |

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| 28 May | NZ Herald | Susan St John – Welcome first steps for poor but much more to be done (comment) | St John |
| | NZ Herald | Families to get $66 a week more | Govt. |
| | The Dominion Post (TDP) | What its got for you | Govt. |
| | NZ Herald | Families on benefit in for short rations | Govt. |
| 29 May | NZ Herald | Those in poverty need money now (editorial) | NZ Herald |
| | TV One Agenda | Interview with Steve Maharey and others about Budget | Steve Maharey & others |
| 2 June | NZ Herald (comment) | Bruce Logan: Budget handouts eventually do more harm than good | Director of Maxim Institute |
| 4 June | NZ Herald | Cullen has done well in evening things up (comment) | St John |
| 10 June | TDP | Poorest lose out, say debaters | ACT, Greens, Labour, social researcher |
| 28 October | Breakfast | OECD - DPB should be cut to encourage solo parents into work. Budget discussed | Steve Maharey, United Future Leader |

Cut Price Kids & Poverty

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|---|---|---|---|
| 7 Nov | SST | Middle-class strugglers are winning | Waihi family |
| 14 November | Herald on Sunday | Hungry child had to walk 15km | CPAG. – Maharey quoted |
| | SST | Govt 'fostering gap between rich and poor' | CPAG. – Maharey quoted |
| | One News | | CPAG, Paediatrician, lead singer of "Sweet Azz Bro", Maharey |
| | 3 News | Claims that 175,000 Are suffering in the Poverty trap | Lower SES members, CPAG, Maharey |
| | TDP | Child poverty report given thumbs down | Govt. & CPAG |
| | Radio Pacific News 9am (9-12) | Report says kids left out In the cold | CPAG |
| | Newstalk ZB | Govt hits back at critics | Govt. Cut Price Kids discussed & Public Health Association |
| | Radio NZ Newswire 14.06 | Health groups back Child Poverty Action Group report | Public Health Assoc. |

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| | Radio NZ Newswire 04.13 | Maharey says child poverty report is offensive | Maharey. Cut Price Kids discussed |
| | Radio Samoa | | David Craig |
| | Radio NZ | | Maharey |
| | Radio NZ National Radio | | Supporters of CPAG Paediatrics Society, Public Health Association |
| 15 Nov | TVNZ News | Maharey unhappy with Poverty group | Govt & CPAG. - Paediatric Society quoted |
| | Read on Morning Report (radio) 8.33 am | Response to criticism of Cut Price Kids | CPAG |
| 16 Nov | 1080 Newstalk ZB | Interview with David Craig | David Craig |
| | Scoop feedback article 4.40 pm | CPAG author angrily responds to PM's criticism | David Craig |
| 17 Nov | NZ Herald | Family benefit the best way to deal with child poverty (perspectives) | CPAG |
| | TDP | Poorest families still left on scrapheap | CPAG |
| 18 Nov | Scoop feedback opinion 12.51 pm | CPAG responds to PM's comments on Working for Families report - | CPAG |

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| | | PM's 'pocket calculator' increases don't look so large against long term erosion | |
| | Radio NZ | Welfare and child poverty | Social Scientist, Maharey |
| 5 Dec | SST | In a land of plenty | Govt. – St John quoted, Waldegrave, Act MP |
| | SST | Poverty in New Zealand: On the frontline - We are the last resort | Salvation Army, poverty researchers |
| | SST | Poverty in New Zealand: The new homeless – Fringe dwellers | Lower SES members, (community constable), Salvation Army |
| | SST | Banishing poverty benefits us all | Govt, St John quoted |
| 15 Dec | Radio NZ Newswire 03.18 | Child Poverty Action Group seeks immediate family support | St John |
| 17 Dec | Radio NZ Newswire 07.32 | Surprises in Govt. social strategy | Salvation Army & CPAG |
| 22 Dec | NZ Herald | Diane Robertson:…and the greatest of these is charity | Auckland City Mission |