



Welfare Conditionality

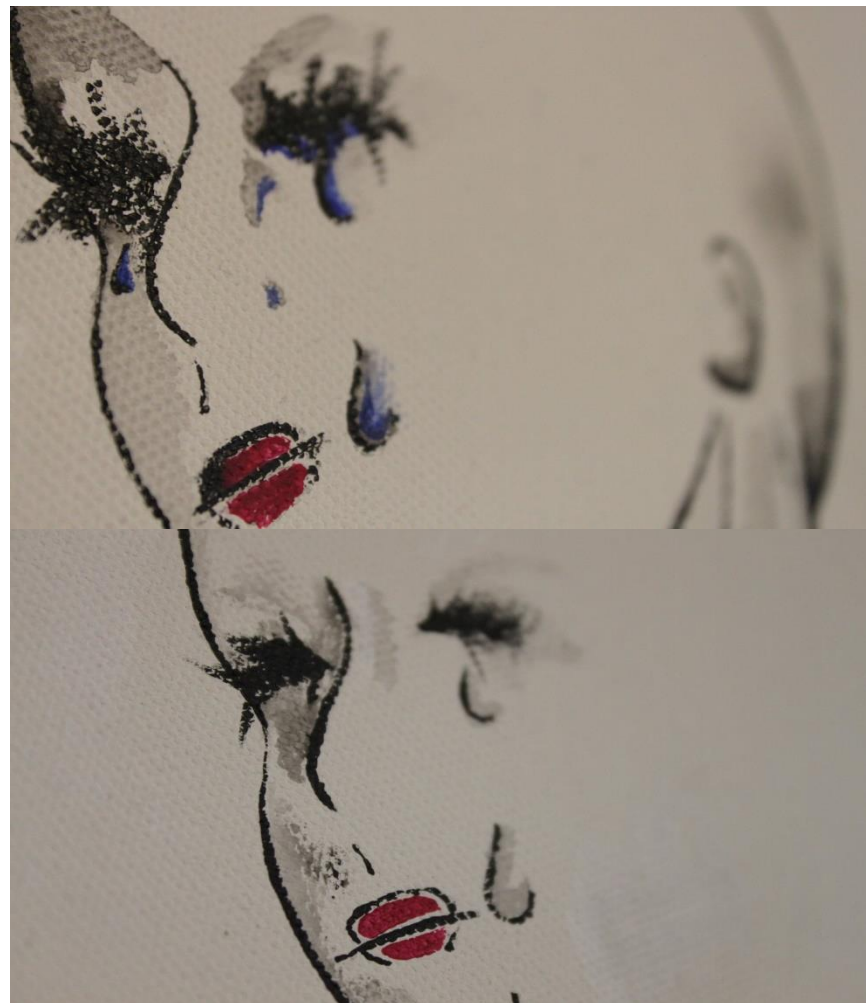
SANCTIONS, SUPPORT AND
BEHAVIOUR CHANGE

Disabled Person and Welfare Claimant: Mutual Identity or Dichotomy of Difference?

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Summary

- Overview of Study
- Recap on Progress to date
- Key Findings: On Identity



Overview of Study

- *'What are disabled peoples lived experiences of welfare conditionality?'*
- *36 semi-structured interviews with ESA 'claimants'*
- *5 interviews with key informants*

Key Findings

- *Work Capability Assessment (WCA) considered largely ‘dehumanizing’ and unfit for purpose.*
- *Back-to-work support available following the WCA highlighted as inappropriate to disabled peoples needs.*
- *ON IDENTITY – the impact of identifying as a disabled, ESA claimant.*

On Identity

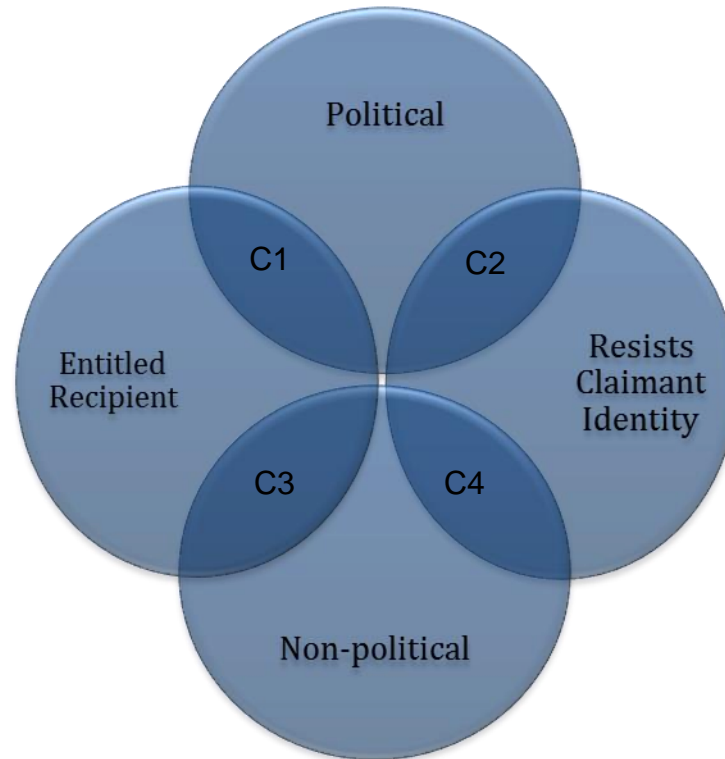
I: ...how did you feel about disclosing the fact you were on benefits?

P: I found that harder than telling people I had mental ill health

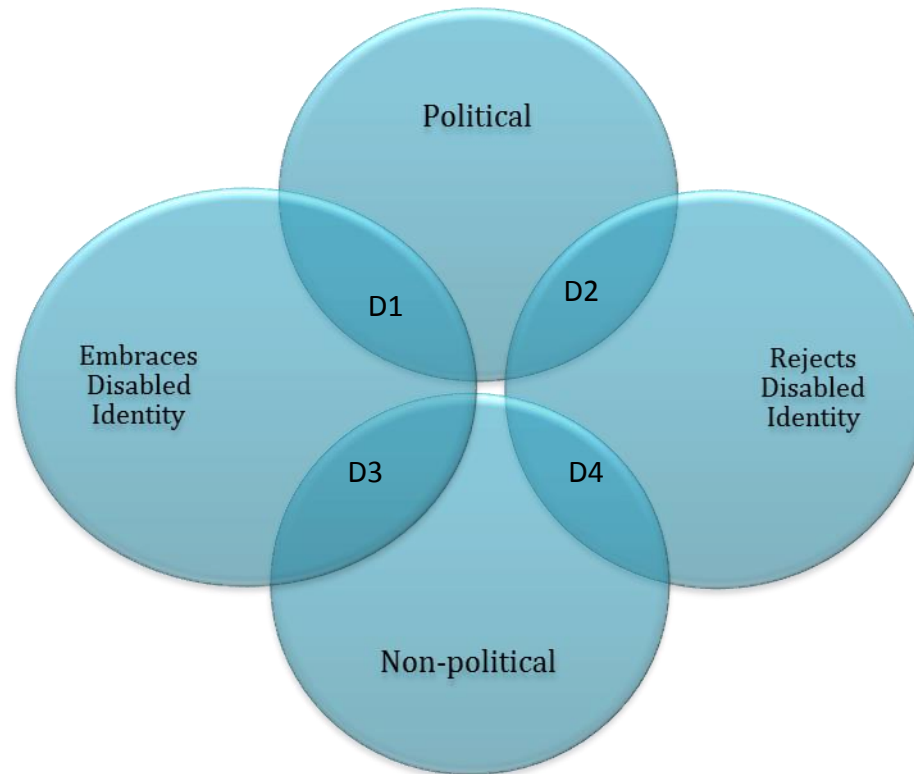
(Service User Involvement Officer discussing prior experience of claiming ESA).

When mapping out claimants levels of acceptance or resistance towards identifying as either disabled or an ESA claimant, a significant element for consideration was how politically engaged the interviewees were. This often played a key role in establishing identities. There was a general correlation between the most politically engaged interviewees being the most accepting of both their disability and claimant status. However, this was not always the case.

a) Political Engagement vs. Claimant Identity:



b) Political Engagement vs. Disabled Identity:



Case Study – Jack

Jack, who was currently in the ESA Support Group whilst working part-time at a local charity, was one of the most significantly politically engaged participants interviewed. He was educated to degree standard and often engaged in political activism.

Jack had experience of being on Jobseekers Allowance prior to his mental health diagnoses, before being moved onto Incapacity Benefit and finally transitioning onto ESA. When considering his identity as a claimant he stated ‘I don’t have a problem with it’ in reference to his personal feelings about claiming ESA and suggested that he was generally happy to disclose this. He acknowledged that there were negative connotations associated with claiming welfare support, although noted that this was largely due to the government scapegoating a group in a time of economic hardship.

He also considered himself as a disabled person and therefore embraced the ‘disabled identity’, however preferred the term of ‘people with mental health diagnoses’. He was happy to disclose his mental health diagnoses although did mention an occasion when applying for a job where he felt that the disclosure of this was of detriment to him getting the job.

Case Study – Richard

Richard, who was registered blind, also engaged in politics. He was involved in activism surrounding cuts to the public sector . Although Richard did not currently claim ESA, he had experienced receiving various other disability related benefits throughout his life. He discussed many years of work experience and his desire to enter full time paid employment but felt the support to do so was ‘not forthcoming’. He had experienced Welfare to Work Programme a number of years prior and stated that this was not a useful process for him and that nothing employment wise came from it. When considering the way in which Richard identified, he focused mainly on the stigma surrounding disability, making note of the negative connotations of claiming benefits but primarily in relation to fraudulently presenting as disabled. He also rejected his own disabled identity when stating that ‘Well I’m blind and registered disabled, but I wouldn’t like to be classed as disabled anyway, try and fit in with everybody else and I can’t’. He therefore challenged the use of his disabled identity, due to his desire to ‘fit in with everybody else’, which was problematic as he felt unable to do so.

Case Study – Luke

Luke was originally placed in the WRAG when being assessed for ESA. He was unable to meet the requirements placed upon him for a number of months before seeking help through a charity. He had assistance to appeal the decision and was successfully transitioned onto the Support Group. Disclosure of his claimant status was a significant issue for him, stating that: 'if I could live somewhere without having to claim any money which I cannot cos my sister cannot look after us, I wouldn't, I wouldn't claim at all. Nah, I wouldn't go through all the hassle that you gan through for the pittance that you get you know?'

Luke had a number of mental health conditions, however, when asked about whether or not he deemed himself as disabled, he did not. This was due to the difference in definition of what disability meant to him as evidenced when he stated: 'I would class disabled as like people with a wheelchair and that but that's the way I think disabled people are you know what I mean'.

‘So you try and hide it as much as possible and then when you actually need to talk about it, it’s like, oh no, everything’s fine’ (Beth, Support Group).

‘But I give the perception that I’m okay because I laugh and I joke and I’m fine and I won’t put people out. I don’t play the martyr card. I don’t play, I’ve got an illness card’ (Ruth, ESA SG/WRAG).

To Conclude

- Claimants went through a myriad of processes when constructing their own identity. This process was often negotiated in a way that aimed to reduce the perceived stigma and therefore challenge the 'spoiled identity'.
- Stigma was still significant issue in relation to both disability status and benefit status.
- Claimants challenged and resisted the perceived stigma, most notably through denial of disability status and normalisation of impairment effects.



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