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Coping with Welfare Shame: Responses of Urban Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Peoples to "Mutual Obligation" Requirements in Australia

This article examines how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in cities navigate welfare and the mutual obligation regime in Australia. Since the introduction of the mutual obligation requirements (MORs) and the accompanying "Work for the Dole" program, initially for Indigenous and later for non-Indigenous welfare beneficiaries, welfare recipients from both groups are perceived as morally deficient people and are stigmatized by paternalistic state surveillance. Drawing on the idea of shame as a cultural boundary-making process, this article shows that although welfare recipients from both groups have reinterpreted the concept of "mutual obligation" based on their cultural values and practices, contesting interpretations of the concept within each group have hindered them from fully deflecting shame by disrupting and replacing normative scripts of conduct. This article argues that such variations occurred first because the interpretations that both groups adopted to cope with government surveillance are already mobilized by the state to justify intervening in citizens' lives, and second because the sociospatiality of a city such as Adelaide, where a broad range of neoliberal policy experiments have been implemented, facilitates the internalization of neoliberal values among citizens, regardless of whether they are Indigenous or not. *[mutual obligation, "work for the dole" program, Indigenous, welfare recipients, shame]*

The impact of punitive neoliberal welfare policy in Western societies on welfare recipients' lives has received increasing attention in academia. In Australia, welfare reform in the 1980s caused a shift in the welfare state, whereby it stopped taking responsibility for meeting citizens' needs and engaged in welfare conditionality, where the state intervenes and directly changes the behavior of citizens on welfare (Parsell et al. 2020). Although Indigenous people were subject to welfare conditionality until 1966 according to their ancestry, culture, and living conditions (Murphy 2013), Anglo-Australians—whose welfare entitlements were somewhat ensured as social civil rights compared to other racial groups—also became targets for welfare conditionality. Since the notion of mutual obligation requirements (MORs) was introduced in 1996, welfare recipients have been required to engage in "active job-seeking behavior" to be eligible for income support. MORs are rooted in the principle that welfare recipients should do their best to find work and engage in activities that will increase their employability and contribute to their community in return for welfare payments (Australian Government 2020). This study contributes to the scholarship on welfare by teasing out the somewhat culturally essentialized concept of welfare shame and, thereby, elucidating the mechanism by which welfare stigma is created and perpetuated among cross-cultural groups through a case study in Australia.

One of the most prominent examples of welfare conditionality is income management (IM), introduced in 2007. IM, which involves "quarantining" at least half of individuals'

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social security income, initially targeted residents of prescribed remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. The practice eventually became normalized as part of Australia's social policy and was extended to non-Indigenous people in the Northern Territory, and then to members of other disadvantaged communities. According to some studies on welfare conditionality's impact on Indigenous people, individualization of the structural problem through neoliberal welfare policy has deprived marginalized people of the agency to shape their own lives (Bielefeld 2014; Dee 2013; Lovell 2016). Other studies indicate that Indigenous people are not passive recipients of the policy, but rather have responded to government surveillance by developing their own strategies to redistribute food and goods among kinship members to endure the effects of government surveillance on their daily lives (Dalley 2020; Vincent 2021).

Studies examining everyday experiences of vulnerability among long-term welfare recipients highlight the emotional dimensions of acceptance of, or resistance to, the existing welfare system, especially shame (Mitchell 2020; Peterie et al. 2019). For example, Peterie et al. (2019), who interviewed eighty unemployed welfare recipients in Australia, found that most had internalized the public discourse on welfare recipients due to their perceived personal and moral shortcomings, which caused them to suppress their anger and develop feelings of shame and worthlessness.

While shame is a feeling that accompanies transgressions of social norms (Mitchell and Vincent 2021; Peterie et al. 2019), it is not necessarily experienced homogenously. For instance, through an ethnography, Watt (2020) scrutinized differing responses to IM among Aboriginal people in Cape York. She revealed that social groups actively engaged with settler-colonial society expressed feelings of shame around having their income quarantined, whereas other social groups who adhered to "localism"—which focuses on close-knit kin and harbors an egalitarian "ideology of relatedness"—demonstrated little embarrassment about the matter since welfare quarantining is normalized within their kinship domain (Watt 2020).

Similarly, Mitchell and Vincent (2021), who investigated cultural differences of shame in the lived experiences of welfare recipients in cross-cultural groups, showed that shame is culturally inflected, historically conditioned, and spatially situated; while the experiences of shame of an asylum seeker and an Anglo woman seeking basic income involved a mix of acceptance and refusal, shame was absent among many Aboriginal people in a specific area, which was subject to IM. Drawing on Strong (2021), who examined the spatiality of shame, Mitchell and Vincent (2021) viewed shame not as limited to a personal setting, but rather as inhabiting the boundary between the private and public spheres, and between the personal and collective domains; they argued that shame involved giving meaning to one's culture. Accordingly, the experience of shame is a process of cultural boundary making, entailing both a self-definition and collective identity (Mitchell and Vincent 2021). Mitchell and Vincent's (2021) work is important because it offers more nuanced interpretations of welfare-related shame by focusing on cultural specificity in one's experience of it. However, as welfare measures initially intended for Indigenous people have been extended to non-Indigenous people, it is equally significant to explore how the experiences of welfare recipients from both groups intersect regarding poverty, unfair treatment from the welfare office, prejudice, and discrimination from mainstream society, despite their different historical and cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, because shame is framed and produced through particular spaces intertwined with the broader politics of inequality (Strong 2021), it is necessary to consider the sociospatiality that causes the experiences of these groups—residing in the same geographic location—to intersect. Thus, I investigated how Indigenous and non-Indigenous

people in cities navigate welfare and the mutual obligation regime based on their cultural practices and values. Simultaneously, I explored heterogenous views of "culture" within each group, and scrutinized the mechanism linking the experiences of these groups by considering the spatiality of a Western city where norms are created and imposed on citizens.

This study is grounded in intermittent fieldwork conducted in the northern and northwestern suburbs of Adelaide, Australia, for a total of six months between 2017 and 2019. People with low socioeconomic status are relatively concentrated in these suburbs, although a portion of the suburbs has become gentrified due to redevelopment projects promoted by the state government since the 1990s. I interviewed five Indigenous and six non-Indigenous welfare recipients, as well as an advisory group for the impoverished. I lived with an Indigenous family I had come to know through personal networks, and took advantage of the relationships and rapport I had built during my doctoral research on the identity negotiation of urban Aboriginal people in everyday practice, which I conducted for a total of twenty months from 2008 to 2010 in the same location. During my fieldwork, I interviewed service providers and beneficiaries, attended regular meetings held by the advisory group at a local public library, and carried out participant observation at a service site. The ethnography was supplemented by information from the group's newsletters and social networking sites. I performed the field study in full compliance with the "Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies" created by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research. I used pseudonyms for all participants and groups. It is important to note that I completed the fieldwork pre-COVID-19. As such, the post-pandemic socioeconomic situation of welfare recipients may change.

The Background of Welfare Policy in Australia under Neoliberalism

Welfare policies, laws, and welfare beneficiaries' responses to them have been examined separately for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia since the government adopted a separate welfare policy for Indigenous people. Indigenous people have been subject to a paternalistic style of governance and "structural violence" (Bielefeld 2014) accompanying welfare laws since colonization. Premised on negative stereotypes of Indigenous people as primitive, childlike, and thus incapable of managing their own finances, Indigenous people were denied, or had limited access to, financial resources. For instance, under "protection legislation," wages earned by Indigenous people were held in trust accounts by the state, which frequently confiscated the money to finance the reserve and mission system; this was justified as being for the "benefit" of Indigenous people (102–03).

Along with constraints placed on their freedom to handle their own financial resources, Indigenous people were denied citizenship, including voting rights and social rights, and subject to surveillance until they were granted social benefits as citizens along with Anglo-Australians in the 1960s. While Indigenous people in remote communities retained a certain degree of economic autonomy and maintained their cultural practices until the 1960s (Peterson 1998), the introduction of unemployment benefits and the cash economy, as well as displacement by the church, the state, and private enterprises through liberal democratic policies since the 1970s, led to the transformation of their social systems and high unemployment rates (Pearson 2003; Sutton 2001). Consequently, Aboriginal welfare recipients have been portrayed as "dysfunctional" for receiving "passive welfare" (Pearson 2003).

The national media's allegations of child sexual abuse in the Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory in 2007 generated an inquiry into the protection of Aboriginal children. In response to the submission of the "Little Children are Sacred" report—which

included recommendations on alcohol restrictions, the provision of healthcare, and many other issues related to child abuse and neglect in remote Aboriginal communities—the government implemented the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER), also known as the Intervention, that same year. While the targeting of Indigenous Australians conflicted with the Racial Discrimination Act (1975), the federal government suspended it in this case to enable the abovementioned measures.

One important measure implemented under the NTER was the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment (Welfare Payments Reform) Act of 2007 Schedule 2 (Income Management Regime), which mandated that 50–70 percent of welfare payments be managed by the government through the BasicsCard, which can only be used to buy essential items. The program was forcibly applied to all welfare recipients from the seventy-three Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory, allegedly for their benefit and "protection" (Altman 2010). This law maintains a certain degree of continuity with colonial era laws and policies regarding Indigenous people in the sense that it deprives them of trust, dignity, and individual autonomy, and inculcates a sense of stigma from having their incomes managed against their will; this significantly curtails their citizenship (Bielefeld 2014; Dee 2013; Lovell 2016).

IM was later expanded to non-Indigenous welfare recipients in the Northern Territory and then throughout the nation with the enactment of the Social Security and Other Legislation Amendment Act in 2010. Lovell (2016) asserted that although poverty and welfare dependency were initially considered issues unique to Indigenous communities, the similarities of these problems between low socioeconomic Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities began to be emphasized in parliamentary debates to justify the program's expansion. However, this law remains discriminatory since Aboriginal welfare recipients can still be subject to the same negative stereotypes under the biopolitics of race and structural violence, and Indigenous people are overrepresented in the IM categories (Bielefeld 2014, 107; Lovell 2016).

Another measure exemplifying welfare conditionality is Australia's version of workfare, known as the "Work for the Dole" (WFD) program, which started in 1997. The program's goal is to assist the long-term unemployed in contributing to the local community and gaining skills useful for employment through quasi-work experience (Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 1997, 5). WFD participants are required to engage in work-like activities at nonprofit organizations and government agencies, undertake volunteer work, or study to develop skills and experience for work (McDonald and Chenoweth 2006, 113–14).

Indigenous people in remote communities are more severely impacted than non-Indigenous people by the WFD program, which is called the Community Development Program (CDP) in remote communities. Stringent requirements are applied that impose financial penalties on CDP participants owing to "persistent noncompliance," which is substantially higher than in the overall group of jobseekers (Fowkes 2016).

The WFD program is operationalized through two categories of providers: Centrelink and the Job Network. Centrelink is the primary government income support agency overseeing the WFD and is the chief gateway to the Job Network. The Job Network is a quasi-market network comprising contracted organizations that provide WFD placement services to the unemployed. The Job Network offers different services depending on clients' degree of risk and employability (McDonald, Marston, and Buckley 2003). The long-term unemployed and those with significant difficulties in gaining employment are placed under surveillance by case managers, who assist them with finding employment by providing intensive, customized guidance. Clients who fail to participate in designated activities face

financial penalties such as benefits suspension, reduction, or cancellation (Marston and McDonald 2008; McDonald and Chenoweth 2006). The Job Network was replaced by JobActive, which ran from July 2015 to June 2022, and was then replaced by Workforce Australia in July 2022 (Australian Government 2022).

Indigenous People's Response to WFD

Mutual obligation is a key instrument for the administration of Indigenous affairs under welfare reform. Although the idea of mutual obligation derives from the concept of the social contract, which originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and binds citizens to states, it has been mobilized to address the problem of welfare dependency (Anderson 2006). When the government introduced MORs for Indigenous citizens, social and economic critics, as well as some Aboriginal leaders, viewed them as resonating with Aboriginal notions of reciprocity. Under the mutual obligation regime, Indigenous individuals and communities must commit to making behavioral changes in return for government funding for infrastructure or services (McCausland and Levy 2006).

However, an important difference exists between the notions of mutual obligation and reciprocity. Mutual obligation, as envisioned by the government, is premised on individuals as autonomous actors who fulfill their obligation to the state—which represents an undifferentiated, taxpaying Australian community—through participation in the market economy. Conversely, reciprocity as articulated by Noel Pearson, an Indigenous leader who advocated for MORs, assumes that such obligations should be implemented between individuals and their community, family, and local group as the state is too remote from Indigenous citizens to have the moral authority to undertake this role (Martin 2001, 11–13). Additionally, compared with "reciprocity," there is a substantive power imbalance between the government and Indigenous communities, and structural biases favor the former over the latter (McCausland and Levy 2006).

The practice of reciprocity in remote Indigenous communities has been conceptualized as demand sharing. Peterson (1993) argued that the practice serves to reconfirm and preserve social bonds in small-scale societies, as well as ensure equitable resource distribution in situations of scarcity. Demand sharing is practiced among some Aboriginal people in urban settings as well, and is perceived as a core element of Aboriginal identity or the "Blackfella Way." Nonetheless, Aboriginal people in metropolitan centers, such as Adelaide, practiced it with limitations and reservations such that demand sharing was adapted to Western values. Furthermore, as Aboriginal people have been exposed to enormous pressure to assimilate, perspectives of demand sharing vary within the Aboriginal community and even within families, with some members seeing it as a practice that prevents upward social mobility (Schwab 1988).

Although the concept of demand sharing was originally adopted by anthropologists in Australia, the term is increasingly used in broader academic, popular, and public discourse to highlight incommensurability between kin-based Aboriginal societies and market-based Western ones, thereby justifying the state's IM of Indigenous people. Although demand sharing exists in diverse forms (and the most recognizable kind that occurs among close kin is one of many forms for distribution), as the term is used beyond academia, it has only been perceived in moralistic, negative terms, and at times taken to represent the whole of Indigenous Australian sharing behavior (Altman 2011).

Demand sharing has also been linked to the rhetoric of failure in Indigenous affairs by anthropologists such as Sutton (2001). Based on his perspective that Indigenous child socialization reproduces maladaptive behaviors, Sutton attributed Indigenous disadvantages to cultural factors including demand sharing, and claimed that children who learn these

cultural patterns cannot adapt to wider Australian society or sometimes even to their own (Sutton 2001).

The ideas of mutual obligation and demand sharing have become detached from their original context; policymakers and the mainstream media have adopted these notions to explain the reasons for dysfunction in Indigenous society. We therefore need to consider how such a biased view that is pervasive in popular discourse may have impacted public perceptions of these cultural practices of urban Indigenous citizens.

Coping with "Mutual Obligation" in Cultural Practices

Demand sharing has been practiced at times by some Indigenous individuals placed under the supervision of welfare offices through the WFD program. For instance, Mary (who was in her fifties when this article was written) grew up in an Aboriginal community in a northwestern suburb of Adelaide and worked for an Aboriginal organization that provides services to Aboriginal prison offenders. She has also been involved in diverse cultural activities as a local Aboriginal elder, such as by giving speeches at events related to Aboriginal culture and guiding visitors to the park established in commemoration of her mother, who was a renowned Aboriginal activist. However, after leaving the organization due to personal issues with its manager, she and her partner were unable to pay the rent for their public housing and were evicted. Although she began seeking employment, she explained she was too old to find work suitable for her interests and skills, and was required to participate in the WFD program in 2016.

After losing her home, Mary made a living by engaging in demand sharing with her relatives, as she had done since childhood; her relatives provided her with shelter and food and she babysat their young children in exchange. Although her niece, Tanya, with whom Mary spent most of her time, was not very pleased with Mary staying at her place long-term, she could not ask Mary to leave because Mary had looked after her as a child.

After having been placed in the WFD program, Mary lamented the deterioration of welfare officers' attitudes: "Social workers are not passionate about their work anymore. They are doing their job for their own benefit" (interview, September 3, 2019). At the welfare office she was constantly humiliated by her Anglo-Australian service provider, who lectured her and other welfare recipients from a non-English speaking background about the stigma of being on welfare. However, she pointed out the illegitimacy of his remark from the perspective of "cultural appropriateness" as follows:

I said what you called welfare stigma is what I came from as a kid. This is welfare stigma. You know nothing about this. So what would I want to be told of it, talked about it? Troy [the service provider] says, "Well, when I married my wife, me and my wife went on holidays. We had to borrow money to go on holidays. We borrowed it from her parents. As soon as I got back here, I had to find jobs to pay [it] back." Troy, how stupid do you think we are? I do not think you are culturally appropriate to speak to anybody that is cultural in this group. You need awareness. We know what is going on in the world. We do not need you to stand up there and tell us about your holiday. We know all about that. Do you see us putting out our hands for holidays we cannot afford? (interview, March 15, 2017)

Mary indicated that it was culturally inappropriate for the service provider—who had never been on welfare—to bring up the example of his holidays to explain the importance of repaying "debts" to those who cannot even afford to go on vacation. She was familiar with the idea of "cultural appropriateness" from her work at the Aboriginal organization (which was funded by the state government), where employees had to serve clients in a "culturally appropriate" way. By associating being Aboriginal, that is, being "cultural,"

with being poor, she appropriated this concept promoted by the government to challenge the ways in which she and others who were categorized as "cultural" were treated in the welfare office.

Nevertheless, it was not only the welfare officer that humiliated her; even some of Mary's family members saw her being on welfare as shameful. Although she had pride and strength in surviving poverty and racism through demand sharing with other Aboriginal people in the community—which enabled her to challenge her case manager in regard to "cultural appropriateness"—Lucy, one of her sisters, who was married to an Anglo-Australian man, viewed demand sharing (including lending and borrowing money among Aboriginal family members) as begging. Lucy told Tanya privately not to give Mary any money if she asked since she believed Mary should work if she needed money. Conversely, Mary criticized Lucy for distancing herself from the practice of demand sharing among family members and perceived her attitude as embarrassing. Unfortunately, Mary was also aware that Tanya—who been raised by Lucy and her family in a country town where the Anglo-Australian population is dominant—criticized her for always blaming others for her situation and not having excelled at anything in her life. Daily experiences of these criticisms at times caused Mary to doubt her belief in demand sharing as an Aboriginal custom, and eventually led her to participate in volunteer work at the Salvation Army as part of the WFD program, as requested by the service provider. Finally, she decided to take an online course on running a small business, with the aim of starting an Aboriginal tourism business at the park founded to commemorate her mother. The online course was also meant to help her achieve something, as expected by Tanya.

The Significance of Social Connections

While the WFD program aims to incorporate all welfare recipients into the mainstream labor market as individual workers, it is challenging for some Aboriginal people who grew up in Aboriginal communities to leave and work in predominantly white environments. For instance, Abbie, who was in her twenties at the time this study was conducted, grew up with Aboriginal parents in the Aboriginal community. After she left school in Year 8, she entered a local Aboriginal community college where she enrolled in a community service course using a scholarship for Aboriginal students. However, due to her absenteeism, she was expelled and her scholarship terminated. Subsequently, she occasionally held part-time jobs, including providing childcare at local Aboriginal organizations and public schools. However, since she never worked full-time, she was forced to participate in the WFD program and engage in jobs such as weeding, planting, packing at a factory, and welding in a suburb far from her community. She explained how she reacted to welfare officers when they introduced these job opportunities to her:

I told them I'm a community-based person. I need to be in the community. Even if I am not working with my own people, I want to help the community. They just wanted to put me into stuff like retail. They had a council that came and saw me, and I said to them, "I need to be in a community." This is how I was brought up and who… . I am. They said, "But you do not get to choose." And I said, "If you want me to do something, and want me to come back, it's got to be something I enjoy." They said, "You do not get a choice, you know, if you wanna get paid, you have to do whatever you are told to do." (Interview, March 13, 2017)

Since her identity was reduced to "an unemployed person" by the case manager, her identity as Aboriginal and her sense of belonging to the Aboriginal community was disarticulated in the mandatory job search. However, while claiming an Aboriginal identity

to refuse the requests from the welfare office, she was also struggling to find a way to make ends meet. She borrowed money for living expenses, primarily from her mother, Kate, who also used to live on welfare but then secured a full-time job at an Aboriginal organization after earning a certificate. However, Kate often blamed her for being "too lazy" and "taking everything too lightly." For example, she mentioned that Abbie did not show up for her part-time job arranged by the college. After discovering that welfare recipients could engage in part-time study or training to meet their mutual obligations, instead of continuing at a "meaningless" job through the WFD program, Abbie decided to reenter the Aboriginal community college and reenroll in the community service course with a scholarship for Indigenous people. Returning to college not only distanced her from the welfare office but also provided more opportunities to interact with the Aboriginal community and, thereby, increase her motivation to work for the community.

These cases indicate that even if Indigenous people utilize their cultural practice of demand sharing to cope with the welfare system, this practice will likely receive criticism, not only from Anglo-Australians (including the government) but also Indigenous relatives. Such contestations over interpretation of the practice emerged among urban Indigenous people due to having been instilled with the stigma of being unemployed and on welfare by mainstream society since their migration to the city, and more recently having been subject to popular discourse, which attributes dysfunctionality in Indigenous society to cultural practices like demand sharing. Furthermore, urban Indigenous people are well aware of the consequences of noncompliance with Western society norms, which stress the importance of self-reliance and self-responsibility; they were thus pressured to avoid behavior that produces adverse effects. As such, differing attitudes toward their own cultural practices from within the Indigenous community have undermined the validity of such cultural norms of the group, and by extension, their self and collective identity. Thus, urban Aboriginal people have been hindered from regarding welfare as a norm within their cultural realm and deflecting welfare stigma. The experience of having a cultural practice devalued by their own cultural group is likely to cause some Indigenous welfare recipients to feel they deviate from social norms compared to non-Indigenous people.

Non-Indigenous People's Response to WFD

Anglo-Australian welfare recipients targeted by the WFD program are also frequently subject to harassment from employment service providers. Peel, who examined the life experiences of impoverished Anglo-Australians residing in disadvantaged suburbs of major cities, observed that Anglo-Australian residents receiving welfare payments were viewed by the welfare office as incapable and as frauds; they were consequently treated with disrespect, like their Indigenous counterparts (Peel 2003).

Consequently, there are cases in which non-Indigenous beneficiaries seek advice and support from an advisory group to cope with the problems they face with the WFD program. An advisory group for the impoverished in Adelaide was founded in 2013 by citizens affected by poverty with the aim of advocating for the dignity, rights, and well-being of low-income people and creating community networks that provide emotional and practical support to those impacted by poverty. The group offers mutual support and advice to those placed on IM or in the WFD program in dealing with duties from job agencies and welfare offices; group members also accompany people to job agencies as necessary to ensure their rights are recognized.

Reclaiming Rights as Citizens in Accordance with Mutual Obligation Requirements

Non-Indigenous welfare recipients respond to unfair treatment by their case manager in different ways. For instance, Lily, in her fifties, is an Anglo-Australian member of the advisory group; she had lost her job and house five years previously due to closure of the company she worked for. She had experienced constant harassment from her case manager, such as being yelled at and forced to attend appointments, and was often threatened with postponement of her payments upon failure to comply with these orders, even when she had valid reasons. She reflected on her experiences as follows:

Being yelled at like that would upset me terribly; well it still does, but now I know the rules and I know my rights. I feel more able to stand up for my rights because that's the thing: If you do not know your rights, you cannot stand up for yourself. This is a major problem for many people. Many people do not know about their rights. The Job Network agency will not tell you. (Interview, September 22, 2018)

She also attempted to explain to her case manager that it was not her personal flaws that made her fall into poverty, but she was not listened to. In following advice from the group, she once challenged her service provider's instructions in the following manner:

One time, I had a meeting at an appointed time. I had to be there at a certain time, but I had a job interview at the same time. I said to her [the case manager] straight away, even before she first gave me the appointment, "I've got a job interview at that time." She said, "It doesn't matter; you have to come to this," and I said, "But the whole thing with the Job Network is that they are supposed to help you find work." She said "No, you cannot go to a job interview. You have to come to this meeting." (Interview, September 22, 2018)

By reminding her case manager of the illegitimacy of denying clients their right to "reasonable notice" or a "reasonable excuse," which allows them to reschedule their appointments according to MORs, and the original purpose of the welfare office, she implicitly claimed the case manager's instruction contradicted the expected role as an employment service provider. She eventually went to the job interview.

Advisory group members have coped with harassment in subtle ways to protect their own rights. Byron, for instance, "politely" challenged his case manager when she was about to increase his unemployment obligations. He requested she provide him a written statement of the new activities so he could send a private letter of complaint to the Department of Employment. The advocacy group advised him that writing letters or emails would be the best way to communicate with job agencies, as this would prevent them from using "bullying tactics to derail the issue" and would ensure the presence of a written record for later use. Furthermore, in response to the case manager's remark that "welfare is not just free money anymore," he made it clear the comment was inappropriate. He said, "Organizations like yours cannot just milk job seekers for all they are worth either. We both have rules we have to follow."[1] Although such action required courage, he employed the strategy of being politely "uncooperative" to protect his rights as a job seeker while maintaining his dignity as a citizen.

This shows that subtle resistance in compliance with mutual obligation guidelines not only helps protect welfare recipients' rights but also questions the legitimacy of service providers' attitudes toward welfare recipients. Service providers view their clients as negligent based on the assumption that each client should be a self-contained, autonomous contractor under mutual obligation. The advisory group members reminded service providers that individuals with various backgrounds and situations cannot always be self-reliant due to external factors beyond their control, and that the main role of welfare workers is to

provide assistance and care to the vulnerable and to reconnect them with society, not to humiliate and stigmatize them.

Forming a Community of Empathy and Resilience among Welfare Recipients

While welfare beneficiaries in the advisory group have asserted their rights based on MORs or by questioning the legitimacy of the requirements, some do not feel completely released from the stigma of being on welfare and the fear of welfare payment suspension. For instance, Byron feared the consequences of his behavior:

Even as I spoke, and as bold as I like to think I am, I was still afraid. The power balance between job seeker and provider is very much tilted in the latter's favor, and yet I have taken [to] challenging this as my job. She simply said, "No, the point is to find you a job." "That's right," I said. She didn't pursue the matter any further and the appointment was ended immediately after that exchange. I will be surprised if she flatters herself with my company any more than she has to, and yet I will find myself checking my Centrelink account regularly for the next few days hoping my provider hasn't sanctioned my payment for being "uncooperative."[2]

Lily could also not tell her own daughter that she was living in her car when her welfare payments were postponed, due to the fear of stigma and humiliation as well as to avoid inconveniencing her daughter. Such stigma and fear among the unemployed are derived from their internalization of stereotypes and prejudice imposed by the public, which attributes poverty to laziness or lack of competence in managing one's income, thus blaming welfare recipients for misspending their welfare payments. Even when their rights as citizens are recognized by service providers in a legal sense, they continue to feel that they cannot fulfill their obligations as expected by the public.

Since welfare recipients are placed under the case managers' surveillance, they have few opportunities to interact with one another. These situations force them to deal with poverty in solitude.

Participating in the advisory group's activities enabled some members to share their experiences and be more attentive to others in similar situations. For instance, Keith shared his experience of encountering other unemployed individuals at the welfare office:

I overhear the conversation in the booth next door. As my unemployed comrade gets quieter, his case manager becomes louder: "Surely I have a say in it. I really do not like the way you are talking to me," says the unfortunate interviewee. "You're unemployed. I have told you before, you have to do what we say … and I do not believe for a second you are looking for work." It goes on like this for some time until the manager goes away to get the interminable job plan. I poke my head around and say, "You're a 'client.' That is the cover they use for ritual humiliation. Tell him you are a client and you want him to do his job."

"Are you a client?"

"Apparently."

"Did you hear the way he talked to me?"

"I did, brother. I heard every word."[3]

Although he did not intervene in the conversation between the unemployed individual and the service provider, to change the latter's attitude, he showed that he cared about the interviewee and reminded him that he was a "client" and had the rights of a "client." Furthermore, he extended his empathy toward the man by declaring that he too was a client, referring to him as "brother" and admitting he had heard inappropriate comments from the service provider. Sharing the experience of being ritually humiliated by welfare

officers created a provisional sense of commonality between them, which reminded them they were not suffering alone and reconfirmed the illegitimacy inherent in the treatment received from welfare officers.

Empathy and care toward other welfare recipients were expressed on the group's Facebook page. For instance, the group shared the story of Jane, a longtime member in her fifties when this study was conducted. Jane had multiple chronic health conditions and, several months prior, had been evicted from her private rental housing, as her contract was not renewed after the landlord raised the rent. Whenever her current situation was updated on Facebook, several messages were posted by the group members as they had had similar experiences. They encouraged her to continue to claim her right to stay by saying, for instance, "SHAME. A disgrace. I hope you are getting through the struggle. You are brilliant and strong." A network of supporters eventually formed offline and lobbied for her placement in public housing. Finally, Jane was offered a place the day before her private lease was due to end. Once she was settled into her new house and had recovered from a stroke, she expressed concern for other poverty-stricken individuals by speaking on a group video. She said, "I will fight for everybody. So that they can get social housing. They can get affordable permanent housing. And that we can get eighty dollars a day. So that we can eat. And we can survive." She also made a comment aimed at the state premier regarding the 2021–22 budget: "I tell you, I don't give a fuck about the fucking sports arena that you are building. You have to get social housing for everybody," to which one of the members responded appreciatively: "Thank you for your passion and caring and speaking out for others like myself."[4]

Such messages enabled them to feel that they cared and were cared for by others within an informal network of social relations. Paul believes this shared sense of vulnerability makes citizens realize that every person is relational and interdependent morally. Although each member had to cope with difficulties on their own, Paul said that a loose sense emerged of "being part of a supportive, nonjudgmental community of low-income people" (interview, February 17, 2017).

However, although a network of empathy and care had provisionally formed, Jane was also subject to some negative comments on the Facebook page from the public, who criticized her for not making enough effort to find a job or had problems with her lifestyle. Comments included, "There is plenty of work out there if you are willing to work"; "Find a job. Fruit picking or something. Stop relying on taxpayers to give you a free ride"; and "Give up drugs, smoking, and beer or spirits; then you'll have money for food." In addition, regarding a photo of her with a two-week supply of food she had received, a viewer stated, "If that's all that is left for food, I would be taking another look at all other expenses, particularly rent. You can save a bundle by living further out from city centres in shared accommodation." The viewer was blaming her for not being able to find a house suitable for her income. By being judged based on the neoliberal values of self-responsibility and individual lifestyle choices, Jane was constantly reminded that she deviated from the norms of mainstream society, where citizens are expected to work and learn how to spend their money wisely.

Both service providers and the public perceive non-Indigenous welfare beneficiaries as people with moral deficiencies and a lack of self-management ability, thereby justifying their disciplinary role in altering welfare recipients' behavior. Although the advisory group members attempted to deflect personal blame by insisting on the unfairness of society and claiming their rights as citizens based on MORs—also premised on Western liberal values—their claim was denounced by those supposedly from the same "cultural" group. In the same way as Indigenous people, norms of the impoverished Anglo-Australian people

did not serve as a form of cultural boundary due to the pervasiveness of neoliberal values inherent in cities' social systems, and to which individuals are subject in everyday practice. It is also significant to note that by mobilizing the discourse of the rights and rules set by MORs, they were trapped in the relationships of rights and obligations between the state and citizens, thereby reinforcing the government's proposed concept of mutual obligation.

Conclusion

Under the neoliberal welfare regime, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous welfare recipients have experienced a similar stigma, despite their different historical and sociocultural backgrounds. Their experiential commonalities can be attributed to the nature of what Vincent considered the neopaternalistic welfare state's care. Vincent placed complex everyday caregiving (primarily undertaken by Indigenous women) within the larger landscape of the neopaternalistic welfare state's care. Under the disciplinarian neopaternalistic state, the condition of dependency is pathologized and the welfare recipient is cast out as a child, whereas the welfare state is perceived as an overly indulgent mother (Vincent 2021). While Aboriginal people have been subject to such patriarchal welfare care due to policies of so-called protection and assimilation in the twentieth century—which have contributed to today's extreme poverty among Aboriginal people—non-Indigenous welfare recipients became incorporated into this type of welfare state care for the first time under neoliberal welfare governance. Consequently, their experiences of surveillance by the disciplinarian state merged with those of Aboriginal people.

As Aboriginal people in remote Australian communities have participated in distributed caregiving among kin because of elimination of welfare provisions, Indigenous people in Adelaide have also coped with paternalistic state surveillance by engaging in their own cultural practices of demand sharing, thereby appropriating the government-promoted idea of "cultural appropriateness." For them, their practice of caring and sharing among family members embodies pride and strength. Indigenous people have redirected the hierarchical care of the paternalistic welfare regime, in which the government imposes obligations on its citizens, compelling them to engage in caregiving on their own terms; the place where one's carer and those receiving care intersect is horizontal. Likewise, this type of caregiving—based on equal relations, though not involving kinship obligations—was also observed among non-Indigenous welfare recipients in the advisory group, where those in a similar situation of impoverishment cared for one another and extended empathy to others.

By reinterpreting the concept of care, which from the government's perspective is characterized by paternalistic surveillance of citizens, both groups practice an alternative form of "mutual obligation" by building a network of empathy; each member is considered an individual with a unique social and cultural background who helps others facing similar problems. In this sense, shame offers a way to disrupt and replace normative scripts of conduct (Strong 2021).

However, although both Indigenous and non-Indigenous welfare recipients have attempted to deflect stigma using culturally-based tactics—such as by Indigenous people utilizing demand sharing and asserting their rights rooted in mutual obligation—they are not completely free from shame due to constant exposure to each group's opposing views on the cultural practices, values, and thoughts emphasized in the neoliberal welfare regime. Although it is argued that experiencing shame serves as a form of cultural boundary making, varied interpretations of the values and practices within each cultural group in urban settings causes ambiguity in self-definition and collective identification, thus inhibiting the group members from adopting their cultural norm to deflect welfare stigma.

The contestations of views over culture and shame emerged first because the notions of mutual obligation and demand sharing, adopted by both groups to cope with government surveillance, are already mobilized by the state to justify interventions into welfare recipients' lives and social and economic behaviors. Thus, the claims grounded in these concepts are easily drawn into the logic of the state and citizens who have internalized such logic. Second, as cities have become strategically important geographic arenas in which a broad range of neoliberal policy experiments have been articulated in Western countries (Brenner and Theodore 2002), the spatiality of cities contributes to varied interpretations of cultural concepts. Since neoliberal urban policy experiments aim to mobilize city space for market-oriented economic growth (368), urban residents become inculcated with normative scripts of conduct and comply with the neoliberal values inherent in these goals to varying degrees, regardless of their racial or ethnic background. Through what Strong (2021) referred to as "affective governmentality" in which all citizens are encouraged—and expected—to alter their conduct to avoid adverse effects in the neoliberal welfare state, any microcultural tactics adopted by both groups of welfare recipients might not be resilient enough to justify their claims for fair treatment, even if those claims are legitimate in their own right.

Notes

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i. Group's quarterly newsletter, 2016 (author, personal file).
ii. Group's quarterly newsletter, 2016 (author, personal file).
iii. Group's quarterly newsletter, 2017 (author, personal file).
iv. Anti-Poverty Network SA, June 25, 2021, https://www.facebook.com/antipovertynetworksa

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Author's Contribution
Ritsuko Kurita conducted the fieldwork and wrote the manuscript.

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