SOCIOL 317: Sociology of Welfare State

Reading Response Worksheet #1

Student name: Joe Blogs

Student ID number: 000000

Week of semester this reading is from: Week 2

Name of reading: The Three Political Economies of the Welfare State

Word count: 337

1. **Summarise the author's key arguments/claims/conclusions? (compulsory – should take only two to four sentences)**

Esping-Andersen (1990) firstly reviews the existing literature on the development of welfare states in countries which are in the advanced stages of capitalism. The author contends that this body of literature is misdirected because it has detached itself from its theoretical foundations. Esping-Andersen then seeks to revise the concepts of political economy, in which he claims is necessary in order to us to effectively analyse the welfare state.

2. **What did you find most interesting about this particular reading? Why specifically?**

The way democracy has a role within the social democratic welfare state is a point in the article which resonated with me. My ardent Marxist biases have so far informed my thinking within this class. In my view, the long-term effectiveness of the social democratic state is questionable as it acts as a reactionary compromise, rather than a structural redress, to capitalism. However, Esping-Andersen makes a pertinent point through the fact that these states enable more workers to "participate effectively in a democratized economy" (p.126). This lays the foundations to give workers exploited in this system the ability to collectivise themselves. Without adequate, universal, and robust health, education, housing and social institutions, workers would otherwise lack the time, energy, capabilities, social support networks, and empowerment to organise themselves for collective action. Collective action can be potentially used to help solve a variety of objectives, from improving work conditions to advocating changes in public policy. Epsing-Andersen also highlights how the welfare state assists in the eradication of social divisions, whereby each person is able to have the same capacity to contribute to the existing political discussion. For this to be realised, we need to ensure true universal access, and remove any discrimination or stigma in its process. This may prove difficult if discrimination within bureaucratic structures is institutionalised, which may then impede the ability for those belonging to the discriminated group to make political claims, and hold similar influence to that of the majority who do meet the standard level of welfare. The political issues that are important in their struggle are thereby at the risk of being depoliticised.

Student Name: Joe Blogs

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Week of semester this reading is from: 8

Name of Reading: Policy, citizenship and governance: the case of disability and employment in Australia

Word count: 363

1. **Summarise the author's key arguments/claims/conclusions?   (compulsory – should take only two to four sentences)**

This article provides a qualitative study on how Australians with disabilities are problematized through activation policy. They are seen as worker-citizens whose value is measured through market participation. Drawing on other articles and responses from interviews with disabled Australians, the article mainly looks at the Job Capacity Assessment, the notion of the 'self-productive individual', and the motivation model behind social support, finding that these policies limited the recipients' access to autonomy and self-fulfilment.

2. **What did you find most interesting about this particular reading? Why specifically?**

It is interesting to look at the real impact of these policies with interview responses from the participants, who had a wide range of disabilities. Many noted that the new policy reforms for employment and disability made them feel as if the Government assumes the person receiving the pension isn't being truthful about their condition. One comparison was particularly striking in highlighting that the unemployed were at more risk than those that are employed: Australian farmers can still get drought assistance even if they maintain unsustainable farming practices, whereas those who are unemployed are constantly under scrutiny regarding their benefit. Further, they are made to feel as if their needs are being decided by others who are unqualified to make such a decision, and, as the 'motivation model' recognises, there is an assumption that the main barrier to people with disability finding work is their motivation which can be corrected by cutting benefits. I found this quite similar to the unemployment and sole parenthood benefits in New Zealand, which are predicated on inciting 'behavioural change' in beneficiaries through benefit penalties.

The point of the article, that those at a disadvantage are not being properly catered to with policy, reflects other points that have been made in readings and in class about neoliberal policies, marketization and consequent policies. Many policies that come out of a neoliberal government seem to be inadequate in providing safety nets for those who need it most, for

example, sole parents. The subsequent reading, 'Single moms and welfare woes: A higher education dilemma', exemplifies how hard it is for single parents to find their own way into employment, just as it is hard for those with disabilities to find their own way to self-fulfilment, employment and autonomy.

Reading Response 8

Student name: Joe Blogs

Student ID number: 000000

Week of semester this reading is from: Week 8

Name of reading: Single Moms and Welfare Woes: A Higher-Education Dilemma – Amanda Freeman

Word Count: 380

Key arguments/claims/conclusions:

Writing in the context of the United States, Amanda Freeman highlights the compounded difficulties single mothers (in particular) are facing when pursuing higher education.

Freeman argues that the current policy regime is ill equipped to cater to unique needs of single-parent students, such as childcare support services. Where programmes are in place, they receive limited funding and recourses – the Endicott and Jermiah Programmes are examples given in the reading (Freeman, 2015). Programmes also remain "invisible" in the college context (Freeman, 2015, n.p.). Additionally, Freeman shares and reflects on the stigma associated to being a single-parent student based from her own experiences and those of her respondents.

1. **Do the arguments/claims/conclusions surprise you? Why? Why not? 2. Are there any key concepts/ideas that the author uses that helped you better understand the study of the welfare state? Why and what are they?**

What I found surprising in Freeman's *Single Moms and Welfare Woes* was the sheer evidence of single-parent students. As per the Women's Policy Research, in the United States over a quarter of undergraduate students are single-parent students – this, to me, is a substantial proportion of the student population that should not be ignored (Freeman, 2015). Freeman causes me to wonder how many of my peers at the University of Auckland share the same single parent realities as the respondents in the article, but remain invisible.

On the second question, it isn't so much a concept or idea that Freeman articulates but the relationship between education and welfare as an interactive system that develops my understanding of the welfare state. Freeman engages the connections between policy and lived experiences through her evidence. Where there were once 649,000 student parents

receiving monetary assistance during full-time study, policy has contributed to the decline in numbers down to 35,000 on TANF aid (Freeman, 2015). However, it is not just her quantitative evidence that renders interest – the qualitative extracts depict difficulties. The simplest welfare administration proves difficult, if not impossible, for single-parent students and can form a barrier to education. Instead of welfare being beneficial to recipients, it is troublesome and hinders their social relationships and status. In New Zealand single parents face similar realities as Freeman describes in the United States. Since the removal of the Training Incentive Allowance, there is little support for single parents pursuing tertiary study and the emphasis is rather on short-term vocational work. Carey (2015) identifies sole-parent households as three times more likely to be in poverty than two-parent homes, yet policy falls short of alleviating this, particularly when education is in question.

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Reading Response Worksheet Template

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Student ID number: 00000000

Week of semester this reading is from:8

Name of reading: Lantz/Marston

Word count (aim for 200-400 words): 340

3. **Summarise the author's key arguments/claims/conclusions? (compulsory – should take only two to four sentences)** The article focuses on the labelling process of welfare governance on the disabled in relation to the type of welfare they received. This was the label of being worthy of welfare payments and meeting criteria and how the framework was becoming restricted making it more difficult for them to access income resources. This paper focused on 80 people who provided qualitative data on trying to enter the employment market out of welfare. Furthermore in this paper in continually highlights the labelling process of the active citizen and how in a neoliberal welfare state people are expected to contribute and receive only what is absolutely needed.

4. **Then respond to one or two of the following, answering in a way that demonstrates your learning and understanding:**

> **Do the arguments/claims/conclusions support, contradict or interact with what has been said in other readings or in lectures?** One of the major points which this article addresses that occurs quite often in readings we have already looked at in this course is the "self-productive individual". This is the

idea that the onus in on a person to seek paid employment in the workforce and not the governments regardless of the economic conditions. This promotes the ideal of the autonomous citizen who needs little to no help from the state to engage in the workforce.

Do the arguments/claims/conclusions support, contradict or interact with knowledge you have from elsewhere or your own personal experience? The point in this reading supplements my 305 Geog course as it talks about barriers of a physical nature stopping people engaging in society. This article highlights that before disabled people are going to be able to access employment more readily that structural barriers must be broken down. This can be from businesses being modified to allow disabled workers to be able to work or such forms as paid carers who can help these workers get to work or ready for work so that they can get/keep a job.

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Week of semester this reading is from: 9

Name of reading: Growing student debt is entrenching unfairness for a whole generation

Word count (aim for 200-400 words):

1. **Summarise the author's key arguments/claims/conclusions? (compulsory – should take only two to four sentences)**

Will Hutton, principal of Hertford College in Oxford argues that the tertiary education policy changes (new fee and loan regime) adopted in 2012 in the UK lead to a greater stratification in society. Firstly, part-time student numbers have dropped by 152,000 in the past five years, while the number of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds increased by only 12,000 over the same period. Secondly, UK universities are indexing fees to inflation, and it is expected that by 2020 the average student debt will amount up to £50,000, which is going to have a huge negative impact on graduates' lives. The statistics also show that the number of UK students graduating with debt is almost twice the US level. The Department of Business and Innovation predicts that 45 per cent of student debt will never be paid off.

2. What did you find most interesting about this particular reading? Why?

The comparison of the UK data on levels of student debt with that of the US was very interesting. Firstly, the author demonstrates that the levels of student debt in the US are on average twice as less than in the UK, which means that American graduates are generally better off financially due to a greater number of financial assistance and scholarships available. Secondly, although New Zealand tertiary sector differs in many aspects, it still resembles the approach to tertiary education utilised by Liberal-type-of-regime countries (Esping-Andersen's typology). New Zealand universities, similar to the UK, US, Australia, charge students for tertiary courses of all levels and provides fewer scholarship and bursary options when compared to its counterparts, which also contributes to the increasing stratification. The most surprising fact was that the proportion of US students in debt (including the levels of actual student debt) are much lower than in the UK.