

Perpetuating Poverty Transcript:

Source: Mumsnet

Methods: Analysed 2 conversation threads taken from a popular forum for mothers and carers. The conversation threads were searched for on the basis of topics that are related to poverty in my experience of campaigning and activism: free school meals, benefits and pupil premium.

From the threads, I found 4 main themes of discourse:

Culture of justification:

Ellie: "DH [darling husband] was a **nursery nurse** and I am a SAHM [stay at home mum] with a **nursery nurse qualification**. Despite the low income we were/are perfectly capable of parenting our children/listening to them read/supervising homework and all the other things that low income parents supposedly don't know how to do."

Helen: "my dh has become disabled and unable to work."

Robyn: "I have an **Oxbridge degree, an MSc and am resolutely middle class**. I am, though, a lone parent... So, children of 'stable', 'middle-class', '**aspirational**' families who have a temporary blip will be in the same lot of data as those whose **parents have never worked, have chaotic family lives and significant problems at home.**"

Instances of Stigma:

Anne: "Dd [darling daughter] is entitled to free meals but takes a packed lunch. She is not a problem child!

Yes, i am a single parent etc. But that is it. Although she was classed as "underprivileged" when she started high school and **was offered a trip away for a week at an outdoor adventure place free of charge "as she was on free meals etc"**. **We declined the offer** as we only went to Ibiza a couple of months ago!! ... People assume because the child is on free meals that they are **thick or dirty or whatever...**"

Dawn: "Anne - you can afford a holiday in Ibiza and yet receive free school meals? **And who says benefits aren't cushy?**"

Personal Poverty Shame:

Shelly: "...We've been entitled to them since DH [darling husband] was made redundant 6 months ago. I **never claimed them until 3 weeks ago!**"

Rebecca: "**My last holiday was three years ago and in-laws paid for it as a treat to us.**"

Claire: "I have recently split up with my DP. We have 3 DC's 2 of which are at school. As I have been a SAHM since having children I **have had to** claim benefits until I can get sorted..."

Deborah: “**Ashamed/nervous/worried** I don't know what it is. 2 weeks ago I applied on the council website for youngest child still at primary to have free school meals, there was an online checker & we are eligible. I haven't heard from the school yet & im worried it's because they think **we shouldn't be eligible**. I feel uneasy about that and free meals - because of our decision to split I am now claiming benefits. **Should I be - morally?**”

Elsie: “Sch [school] secretary lives 4 doors down ridiculously I'm worried in case she sees me with a sainsburys bag and thinks I should be **shopping g somewhere cheaper** ... I have an early morning cleaning job now though which means much less time in the mornings for making them up (arrrrgh **sounds so lazy**) I am struggling with my morals on this...”

Christine [a teacher]: “I work in a school and a dad with two kids didn't claim **because of pride** - he couldn't pay and the bill was over £200 each child - that's a lot when help is there. (Yes I judged him for being proud!!) Anyone else - not my business!!”

Reinforcing the Dominant Discourse:

Trisha: “The pupil premium is there to address inequalities between those on FSM and those who aren't... **Incidentally the brightest child I ever taught was on FSM.**”

Sandra: “YABU [you are being unreasonable]. Why struggle when there are services out there that can help you? **No one needs to know** your child will get FSM, the school certainly won't be judging and you won't be the only one getting FSM either.”

Lauren: “This is what benefits are for - you split with your husband. **Sitting on your arse all day** because you can and claiming would be taking advantage which you're not doing so have nothing to worry about.”

Lilian: [discussing an instance of a school teacher's comments] “She might have simply thought that **your family is sorted, seeing as you have been enjoying the luxury of not working and staying home with three children**. I guess she just assume this did not apply to you at all.”

Conclusion: it is clear that the way we talk about poverty impacts lived experiences of poverty. The analysis of these conversations included discourse between each other and third parties such as teachers. The findings are that stigma, shame and justification all play a role in how we discuss and experience poverty. The most interesting finding for me is the act of reinforcing the dominant discourse and how these online communities play a role in continuing stereotypes and negative discourse around people in poverty.