Persistent poverty in the Netherlands
Noordhoff, F.J.

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The second half of the 20th century has seen a gradual conflicting debate between those who ascribe to the causes of poverty due to economic and social structures and those who draw attention to individual behaviour or culture. The theoretical balance has changed from an emphasis on agency and structure to one which concerns itself with the relationship between the two.

Noordhoff has used a relational level to look for additional explanatory evidence. In his dissertation, based on qualitative research, he shows how low income earners in The Netherlands are entrenched in various fields (State bureaucracy, the labor market, the neighborhood and the informal economy), how people affiliate with one another and how these various fields interrelate. In doing this, his study intends to surpass the dichotomy between structuralist / individualist explanations of poverty and how poverty perpetuates itself over time.

Amsterdam School for Social science Research (ASSR)
Persistent Poverty
in the Netherlands
PERSISTENT POVERTY IN THE NETHERLANDS

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aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus
prof. dr. D.C. van den Boom
ten overstaan van een door college voor promoties ingestelde
commissie, in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel der Universiteit
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Floris Jan Noordhoff

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Preface

This manuscript is about poverty in the Netherlands during the late 1990s. I made use of the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project database (1997-1999). This project was funded by The Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW) and was conducted by Godfried Engbersen, Erik Snel, Richard Staring, Annelou Ypeij, additional interviewers and research assistants. I would like to express my gratitude to them for allowing me to use the database. For financial assistance, I am most grateful to the Amsterdam School for Social science Research, University of Amsterdam. Furthermore, I am particularly indebted to those who commented on earlier drafts of these pages and made many helpful suggestions. Richard Law Bijster, Susan Stocker and Jacqueline Spruijt did a fantastic job editing my dissertation in a professional and efficient manner. Naturally, all remaining deficiencies are mine. At last, I really appreciate the support of my two excellent supervisors Godfried Engbersen and Talja Blokland.
1. Poverty and social exclusion in the Netherlands

1.1. The 1990s: rising economy, steady poverty rates

After studying “modern poverty” at the end of the 1980s, Engbersen (1990; p. 230) predicted that a substantial number of Dutch citizens permanently have to live in poverty. He defined poverty as the structural exclusion of citizens from political, economic and cultural participation. This exclusion is accompanied with permanent state dependency (cf. Engbersen 1991). To ensure whether this prediction is accurate, statistics must provide insight into the persistence of poverty. In 1998, the Netherlands counted 917000 low-income households (Engbersen et al., 2000; p. 8). Approximately 40% was persistently poor – which means more than four years. This corresponds to roughly 6% of all citizens and 7% of all households (SCP, 2001; p. 40). Despite the fact that the economy increased most significantly during the second half of the 1990s, (when the information and communication technology boosted industrial sectors, the state introduced new labor market policies, so that more jobs became available) the number of the long-term poor did not change (SCP, 2001; p. 40). In spite of this, these conditions did not result in fewer people in poverty (SCP, 2001; p. 46): in 1990 14.8% and in 1998 14.3% of the households were considered poor (De Beer, 2000; p. 210-2). These numbers confirm the impression that there is a stable population of socially and economically excluded people.

Dutch social scientists – interested in persistent poverty – asked how this could happen while the economy was growing (cf. Engbersen, 1997). This led to a large-scale research project on poverty. This undertaking, the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project (1997-1999) was funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment (SZW), and aimed at describing and explaining the situation of people in poverty – those who did not (start to) profit from the boosting economy (the long-term unemployed, single parents, the elderly, and migrants). This project explored the life-world of people in poverty, demonstrating and describing the daily struggles of people in poverty. The incidence of poverty was already described in other reports; for example, the Annual Poverty Monitors contain

This research proceeds from poverty definitions used by the SCP and the CBS (Dutch Central Bureau for Statistics). Commonly, two income definitions are used in the Netherlands. The first definition is the social policy minimum, which is based on the statutory minimum income as adopted by the government in its social legislation (SCP, 2004; 9-10). Because the social policy minimum is 5% more than the statutory minimum income, households with little supplementary income from employment or with limited assets are also included. Since the norms applied for social security benefit and the state pension do not always precisely follow the trend in prices, the social policy minimum is less suitable for comparisons over time. Nonetheless it is important, because it determines the number of households with an income around or below the politically recognized poverty line (ibid.). The second definition is the low-income threshold, which stands for the same purchasing power for all households. It is based on the social assistance benefit for a single person in 1979, at the time the purchasing power of social security benefit was relatively high (ibid.). As the low-income threshold for the years after 1979 is adjusted for price inflation, it is appropriate for comparisons over time. The “Landscapes of Poverty”-interviewers searched for households having an income not exceeding 105-110% of the social policy minimum. These households are subject of study. They paid special attention to the long term poor. Among the long term poor, characteristics of “modern poverty” are observable, such as counterproductive life-strategies (informal work), social isolation, state dependency, internal group divisions, spatial concentration and cultural adaptations (cf. Engbersen & Van der Veen, 1987; Engbersen, 1990, 1991; Engbersen et al., 1993).

This dissertation is one of the products of “The Landscapes of Poverty”-project, and is based on secondary data analysis – the data from the aforementioned project. I provide insight into the poverty phenomenon by showing how people in poverty in deprived areas in the Netherlands become socially excluded from the primary public spheres of life (such as the labor market). Showing this, I will try
to answer the question why poverty is perpetuated, and why so many people endur-ingly live in poverty. This first chapter addresses the concept of social exclusion; that is how people become socially excluded from spheres and why this is relevant for understanding poverty perpetuation. This chapter also outlines the content of the remaining chapters and the central research questions for each.

1.2. Poverty as social exclusion

In contemporary western societies, poverty is a versatile social problem. People in poverty suffer not only from financial hardship, but also from social isolation; they depend on state benefits, experience relative deprivation, live in one of the poor neighborhoods, and are durably excluded from the labor market. Because contemporary poverty is complicated, scholars started to use the concept of social exclusion\(^2\), which refers to a process by which individuals or households experience deprivation, either of resources (such as income), or of social links to the wider society\(^3\) (cf. Berghman, 1995; Levitas, 1996; Paugam, 1996; Lee & Murie 1999; Room, 1999; Kronauer et al., 2001; Murie & Musterd, 2004). Traditional poverty studies have concentrated on a lack of access to material resources. However, the concept of social exclusion provides a framework to look at the social relations of power and control, the processes of marginalization and exclusion, and the complex and multi-faceted ways in which these operate (Williams et al., 1996; p. 9). However, by arguing that social exclusion is complicated, it does not automatically guide us to thought-through investigations. Emphasizing that a social problem is incomprehensible and many-sided might result in obscure, chaotic, and difficult analysis of the problem. To cope with this, I can focus at various dimensions of social exclusion. Since scholars on social exclusion refer to multiple dimensions of poverty\(^4\) (cf. Kangas & Ritakallio, 1998; Brady, 2003; Dekkers, 2003), I can choose a number of these dimensions, analyze them separately and soon after simultaneously. Elaborating on the work of Kronauer (1997), he analytically distinguishes between several of these dimensions, for example the labor market, the state, the neighborhood, and social networks.

According to Kronauer (1997, in Littlewood & Herkommer, 1999; p. 15), first and most commonly, there is exclusion from the labor market, which results in long-term unemployment without any expectation of finding new work (cf. De Beer, 1996b; Wilson, 1996). People who can rely on stable high-paid work, unquestionably have few chances of becoming poor. Numbers (SCP, 2001) indicate
that unemployed people – resulting from labor market exclusion – have the highest risk of living in poverty. Moreover, if people in poverty are durably excluded from the labor market, the chance that they will ever be employed in the labor market becomes less (cf. De Beer, 1996a). Because their income is insufficient, they often have difficulties maintaining social contacts (cf. Vranken, 2002; p. 46). They also have to move to a cheaper house in one of the “backward” neighborhoods. It seems that labor market exclusion has severe consequences for other dimensions of social life.

Secondly, according to Kronauer, there is the economic exclusion in a more general sense of poverty – considered in relation to social and cultural values about standards of living. Research on impoverished people shows that the lack of money forms the bedrock of their daily struggles (Snel et al., 2000; p. 47). We cannot understand contemporary poverty by looking at all the other aspects and leave out the analysis of the lack of financial resources. Third, according to Kronauer, exclusion results in social isolation, which is manifested in the restriction of social contacts and social relationships. People in poverty cannot – often because of the lack of money – fully participate in society. They cannot invite friends over for dinner, go shopping, or join a sports club. People in poverty cannot live up to reciprocity expectations, and do not want to be reminded of their precarious position during exchanges. Consequentially, they avoid social interactions with friends, family, and neighbors. In the end they experience a reduction of their social network (cf. Engbersen & Van der Veen, 1987), and become disintegrated from social networks and detached from society overall (cf. Jehoel-Gijsbers, 2004).

The fourth dimension is close to the third, and is called spatial exclusion. People in poverty often live in urban areas in which poverty is concentrated (cf. Engbersen & Snel, 1996). Within these neighborhoods, people in poverty might develop a culture of poverty – a culture of fatalistic attitudes, counterproductive life strategies, and downward leveling norms. These cultures of poverty are thought to perpetuating poverty (cf. Blokland, 2003; p. 2-3). According to Kronauer, the fifth dimension is institutional exclusion, that is visible in, and consequent on, the retreat of public institutions from welfare programs, the inclusionary conditions of access to welfare institutions, and the direct exclusion from access to such public services as schooling. Although people in poverty often depend on welfare benefits, they are often not fully informed on the available arrangements (cf.}
Vrooman, 1996), like job training (SCP, 1997; p. 147), additional income support, and aid to end debts (SCP, 1999; p. 161). Therefore, they are partially excluded from welfare state arrangements.

Another dimension is the inclusion in the informal labor market that may promote an alternative life-style among people in poverty (cf. Wacquant, 1999a). People in poverty – who are included in the informal labor market – have fewer chances to become integrated in the formal labor market, and are often penalized by the state. Along these lines, social exclusion refers to various dimensions, each and every one of which sheds light on the societal integration of people in particular, and the perpetuation of poverty in general.

In the same way, Dutch scholars gave emphasis to the process of social exclusion (cf. Schuyt, 1997; Gowricharn, 2001; Blokland, 2006; p. 8). For example in line with Mingione (1996) and Walzer (1983), Van der Veen and Engbersen (1997; p. 307, see also Engbersen & Gabriëls, 1995) argue that people in poverty are often excluded from elementary spheres of social life (labor, education, housing, state). People in poverty cannot obtain financial resources from the labor market, cultural resources from the educational system and fail to make use of state support. Studying poverty and social exclusion in this manner (using various social spheres and dimensions) has methodological and theoretical consequences. First, I need to analyze multiple spheres. Since poverty is a diverse problem, it cannot be reduced to the analysis of one sphere. For example, although labor market exclusion, Van der Veen and Engbersen argue, has severe consequences for other spheres, it is not the only element to understand poverty. Other spheres need to be analyzed as well (ibid.; p. 308). Second, I need to analyze what is going on within these various spheres, and especially how people cooperate with each other in these spheres. What do people in poverty do in a particular sphere? Third, I need to analyze the interrelations (and its effect) between the spheres – under the condition that the exclusion from one sphere indeed has consequences for the exclusion from other spheres. To understand poverty perpetuation, I must examine multiple spheres, their interrelations, and the process that leads to social exclusion. To continue this research paradigm, I strategically select a number of relevant spheres, where we can observe the processes towards social exclusion. These spheres are: a) the regular labor market, b) the state, c) the neighborhood, d) social networks, and finally e) the informal labor market. On page 24, I will elaborate on these spheres.
Pertaining to the concept of social exclusion, some remarks can be made. In the first place, it seems that people are either included or excluded from a particular sphere. People in poverty are not particular dichotomously included or excluded from a sphere. However, inclusion or exclusion stands for whether they are able to benefit from the relevant sphere. For example, scholars give emphasis to a growing population of working people living in poverty, both in the US (cf. Newman, 1999) and in the Netherlands (Becker, 2000; p. 236; Gowricharn, 2002; Snell et al., 2007). Although people work, they cannot earn sufficiently to stay out of poverty. They are called the working poor. For instance, 15% of all the working ethnic minorities in the Netherlands earn no more than a wage below the low income threshold (cf. Vrooman & Hoff, 2004; p. 83). The working poor are included in the labor market, but hardly benefit from this inclusion. Another example, people in poverty might have numerous social bonds – friends, family, and colleagues. But these bonds offer few opportunities for exchange, or people in poverty do not make use of these bonds. They seem to have a social network, are not isolated, but for reasons to uncover cannot benefit from these resources to get and to stay out of poverty. The second remark I make is that people in poverty are not included in a particular sphere on Monday, and then excluded overnight. According to Littlewood and Herkommer (1999, p. 14) social exclusion has not merely been treated as a result of a consequence of societal changes, but importantly has also been widely treated as a process. Seen from the individual point of view, this involves: a) the experience of losing one’s job, and not finding another one, b) the absence of subsidizing, supportive institutions, such as the family and the neighborhood, and c) the humiliation involved in the control procedures related to public welfare. Social exclusion refers to various developments within a variety of life-spheres: the neighborhood, the state, the labor market. Vranken (2004) merges the aforementioned in a poverty definition, including the notions of process and sphere. He defines (2004; p. 99) poverty “as web of various processes of social exclusion. To those it concerns, it expands over the various societal and personal spheres” (my translation). Furthermore, the poor are separated from the generally accepted living patterns in society and are unable to bridge this gap on their own (Vranken, 2001; p. 75). Consequentially, social exclusion needs to be approached as a process, in which the interchange between spheres needs attention.
What remains unclear is just how people in poverty become excluded from these various spheres of social life. Conceivably, enduring social exclusion leads to the perpetuation of poverty. Consistent with the recognition that contemporary poverty is not an “either/or” but rather an “and/and” situation, I will attempt to examine the relationships between the various exclusion processes. Moreover, since exclusion is not about graduations of inequality (Giddens, 1998; p. 104), I am interested in the mechanisms that act to detach groups of people from the social mainstream (ibid.).

1.3. The process towards social exclusion

If we want to grasp how people in poverty become excluded from the relevant spheres of social life, the primary step is to define such spheres. Understanding processes of social exclusion, I make use of the concept of field. In the words of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu a field is a social space in which people maneuver and struggle in pursuit of relevant resources. This definition indicates that a field has two relevant characteristics, first; that people constitute and set up the boundaries of a field. After all, people maneuver and struggle in the field. Second, within each field some kind of capital is at stake. People do not merely only set up the boundaries of a field, they also struggle in pursuit of relevant resources. The question remains who are the others, and what are the relevant resources.

Elaborating on the first characteristic of fields (people constitute the boundaries of a field), the question remains who are the others in the first place. In the labor market, people in poverty have to compete with others for jobs, to persuade employers that they are good employees, and finally to exchange their effort into financial capital. The significant others in the labor market are often the employers and people who desire the same job. People in poverty also have to deal with employment institutions – the welfare office and employment agency. Those who rely on state benefits have to deal with welfare officials, negotiating with these officials in pursuit for their benefits, and even discussing whether they deserve social assistance. In the neighborhood, people in poverty have to deal with other urban dwellers – their neighbors, people who also make use of the neighborhood, drug dealers and users, social workers, and other professionals. In social networks, family, friends, and acquaintances are highly relevant. These social ties offer resources for daily getting by or for the necessary bridges to get ahead. People in poverty can make use of these social ties to get a job. Accordingly, people
in poverty are embedded in various fields, and within each field, they deal with a mixture of different people.

However, social interactions between people go wrong; for example, if people in poverty are rejected for a job by an employer, they face difficulties in entering the labor market. If they have difficulties negotiating with the welfare officials, they have less chance that they will take up additional welfare, income support or help with ending their debts. If they cannot cooperate with other urban dwellers, they will probably not obtain information on available jobs from them. These tensions between and among people might instigate social exclusion from a particular field.

The second characteristic of a field is the struggle in pursuit of relevant resources (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; p. 102). These resources are oftentimes financial capital: money. People can obtain financial capital from various markets: the labor market, the state, the neighborhood, their family. People in poverty might also pursue cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications, thereby increasing their chances in the labor market. People also might want to acquire more social capital (social connections). These can be used to access critical networks, which in return give admission to the labor market. In these ways, people increase and / or maintain their assets. Hence, the chance of ending their poverty depends on their daily interactions with these significant others. However, at the moment the relationships and interactions for poor people are unsatisfactory, they have a harder time securing resources from any particular field.

In the next subsection, I will elaborate on the interactions and struggles between the people in the field, and how they might contribute to poverty perpetuation. I will argue that, first, there is a struggle over resources, and this struggle is material and symbolic. Second, as a consequences of these struggles, the actions of the field members have unintended consequences. Third, these fields are interrelated, and the interrelations between fields have consequences for people in poverty. So, poverty might be perpetuated via these three processes: the material and economic struggle; the unintended consequences of social action; and the interrelation of fields. I will describe these elements.
1.3.1. The material and symbolic struggle

In general, social exchange establishes the fundamental relationship between people. People exchange goods, commodities, items, gifts, images in daily interactions. A distinction can be made between symbolic and material exchanges. On the one hand, people exchange and deploy the resources needed for action, such as money, labor, and information. On the other hand, people attempt to establish and maintain the system of meaning: an exchange of symbolic tokens, for example, status, identity, or a characteristic like poverty or wealth (cf. Medvetz, 2006). Sure enough, the material and the symbolic exchange are hardly distinguishable. For example, in a sparkling article, Herrmann (1996) shows how this comes about. She studied women’s exchange in the US garage sales, and found that women solidified personal relationships through exchange. She observed that people transmit something of themselves with their possessions, transform their lives in the process, contribute to a broader spirit of community, and that there is an important link between the symbolic and the material. Women did not solely start up garage sales to make money, but to build up lasting social relationships in the neighborhood, and to have a story about the items they sold. Although these two levels are methodically distinguishable, I argue that analyzing their relation can facilitate a greater understanding of poverty.

People are embedded in various fields, and in each field they can acquire and secure economic resources. In the labor market, people obtain a regular income in exchange for their effort. If people are in need, they can get a benefit from the state bureaucracy. They have to show that they deserve assistance, and finally they receive a benefit. People can make use of their neighborhood relations. For example, a neighbor helps a person in poverty to look for a job. Within the informal labor market, people in poverty can get an irregular income if they do odd jobs. Fields are systems of exchange and probably there are conflicts between people over resources. For example, employers might reject people in poverty from the labor market; people in poverty have to compete with others over jobs; welfare officials might reject people’s requests for welfare; and friends reciprocate gifts of a lesser value. Sometimes, people in poverty cannot economically profit – for reasons to uncover – from a particular field. There is a constant struggle over resources and therefore a material struggle in which commodities are central.
However, different systems of exchange can be economic, but are also symbolic (Skeggs, 2004; p. 7). For example, people exchange images and meanings through interaction, what we see and hear daily. To illustrate, people in poverty are discriminated against, often approached as undeserving for social assistance, reminded of their deviant status, and overall stigmatized (stigmatization, defined by their relationship to mainstream society, is the process whereby an individual or group comes to be viewed as having “an attribute that is deeply discrediting” (Goffman, 1963, p. 3)). During the interactions in the various fields, they meet head on with these practices. In the bureaucratic field, people in poverty might interact with welfare officials who are condescending towards them. In the neighborhood, they might be discriminated against, or might discriminate against other urban dwellers. What is exchanged between people is not commodities, but symbols. If people in poverty are often discriminated against – for their ethnic background or their poverty status – it has consequences for relationships between people. As a result, people in poverty are actively excluded or they exclude themselves from a particular field of interaction.

Thus, people in poverty have to deal with both the material struggle and the symbolic struggle. However, the symbolic struggle can have severe economic consequences. If people in poverty are often discriminated against, they might opt to exclude themselves from the relevant market, to respond with similar hostile practices, or to accept their negative label. For example, if during the bureaucratic encounters, welfare officials persistently stigmatize people in poverty, the latter might dodge the welfare office. Consequently, people in poverty reduce their chances for additional welfare benefits, such as job training. Furthermore, they lower the chance to become reintegrated in the labor market, obtaining more economic resources. In the end, their poverty spell is prolonged. It becomes clear that the symbolic struggle is part and parcel of the material struggle. These ostensibly minor symbolic struggles may have major economic consequences. By showing how these interactions and struggles happen in the various fields, I will show how social exclusion occurs.

1.3.2. The unintended consequences of social action

One of the objectives of sociology is to study the unintended consequences of social action (Engbersen, 2002; p. 9, my emphasis). The classic sociological example of unintended consequences of social action is found in Max Weber’s argument (1991) about the relationship between the protestant ethic and the spirit of
capitalism. The Calvinist doctrines of predestination and this sophisticated asceticism had the unintended consequence of creating conditions appropriate for progression of capitalism by supporting the accumulation of capital as an obligation or end in itself. The rise of capitalism was never planned, but arose from an elective affinity between the religious and the economic sphere. Unintended consequences are also of great consequence at the micro-level as individuals are regularly flawed in their interpretation of the situation and can, by their social action, bring unexpected effects. In all probability, the same is applicable for social actions of people in poverty. In each field people in poverty interact with significant others – which is quite common\(^\text{11}\). Certainly, a wide variety of actions and interactions between various people are possible, and in each field people’s actions and interactions depend on the social context. People in poverty might be harsh towards welfare officials, and friendly towards their neighbor; they might be accepted by their friends, and rejected by employers. There is a constant interference between people. They do not live and act in a vacuum, and choices and actions almost always depend on others. Although they try to make choices that benefit themselves, on the aggregate level, it might have negative consequences for all partakers (cf. Engbersen & Van der Veen, 1992; p. 218). Again, there is the idea of individual actions interfering with each other to produce an unintended outcome (cf. Elias, 1982; p. 160; Elster, 1989; p. 91\(^\text{2}\)). For example, if urban dwellers hold others responsible for the neighborhood deterioration, they unintentionally reaffirm the image of a hostile environment. Blaming others for their “bad” neighborhood will further weaken their neighborhood’s reputation and internal solidarity (cf. Wacquant, 1993). They chose what is thought best for themselves in the short term (blaming others), but it might have unintended consequences in the long run (reaffirming negative neighborhood reputation). Doing this, they exclude themselves from that particular field, and probably even from other fields. Their choices – although these choices come about relationally – have consequences on an aggregate level\(^\text{13}\). These unintended consequences of their actions might result in social exclusion, and precisely these outcomes might contribute to poverty perpetuation.

1.3.3. The interrelation of fields

That various fields are interrelated\(^\text{14}\) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; p. 109), can be traced back to the work of Max Weber. According to Weber, there exist organic links between the economic and the political spheres\(^\text{15}\) in modern societies (Swedberg, 1998; p. 209). Although each field has its own internal dynamic as
well as autonomy, fields interact with the other fields of society\textsuperscript{16} (ibid. p. 6). Max Weber (1991) studied the relationship between the economic and the religious sphere, noting that a certain tension is typical for the relationship of the economic sphere to all other spheres of society. In fact, the economic sphere\textit{clashes} with the religious sphere in capitalist society because it is very difficult to regulate rational economic actions through religious rules (Swedberg, 1998; p. 133). As a consequence, Weber’s view was that politics and the economy are closely interconnected and must often be analyzed together (Swedberg, 1998; p. 55). Swedberg (1998; p. 209) furthermore refers to the work of Merton (1970, p. ix-x). According to Merton, there exists “various kinds of … interdependence” between these “seemingly autonomous departments of life.” Merton also argues that these are “only partially autonomous” and are linked because an individual has “multiple statuses and roles” so that there exist “social, intellectual, and value consequences” for what is done in one sphere for the other spheres\textsuperscript{17}.

Descending from the theoretical heights, how can we apply this perspective to this study? If people in poverty are excluded from one field, this might have consequences for the inclusion or exclusion from other fields. For example, exclusion from the labor market has severe consequences for people’s social networks. After losing their job, people in poverty have few economic resources and face difficulties in maintaining reciprocal social relations – for example inviting people over for dinner. In the end, their social network reduces in size. In addition, if people in poverty have hardly any social ties, they lack the necessary bridges to the labor market, and consequentially have few opportunities to change their impoverished position. Hence, the labor market is in many ways connected with other fields. Employers might oppose hiring people from backward neighborhoods, which suffer from a bad reputation. Employers might think that all people from such neighborhoods seem to have the same bad characteristics of the neighborhood itself (cf. Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004). If people in poverty live in such a neighborhood (a field), this might become an impediment entering the labor market. Therefore, the labor market might be related to the neighborhood. In this manner, there are not only relations between individuals in various fields; there are also relations between fields. These relationships must be understood as elective affinities. Without knowing the exact causal mechanism, an elective affinity refers to the resonance or coherence, the reciprocal attraction and mutual reinforcement of fields. Accordingly, although I\textit{analytically} distinguish between several fields, these fields intersect. In other words, although they have well-
defined borders and specific codes, fields are constantly interacting. It is precisely this interaction that shapes the actors’ structure of meanings\(^{18}\) (Passy & Giugni, 2000; p. 122). People may face the consequences of the deficient interrelation of fields (cf. Wrong, 1994; p. 232)\(^{19}\). They sometimes need one field (education, or welfare institutions) to enter another field (formal labor market). Because they have troubles – for reasons to be uncovered – in the first field, it becomes even harder to enter the second and the same. Otherwise, if the welfare bureaucracy is poorly connected to the labor market, this may have consequences for getting a job. Alternatively, if people are excluded from one field (the labor market), it oftentimes results in exclusion from other fields (social networks). They become caught in a difficult situation. One effect of the poor relationship between fields could be that people in poverty might withdraw from future attempts to improve their position (cf. Silver, 1994)\(^{20}\). The ultimate outcome is that their position is perpetuated. It is therefore my concern to disentangle the consequences of the interrelation of these fields\(^{21}\).

By looking at these three elements (the internal struggles, the unintended consequences of social action, and the interrelation between the fields), these seem to constrain people in poverty from changing their impoverished position. For example, hypothetically, people in poverty might face moody welfare officials who do not want to help them out. Alternatively, people in poverty might have few friends, and these friends do not have any jobs either, and therefore cannot provide them with job information. Then again, the neighborhood might be a hostile environment in which people hardly know each other and only blame each other for their misery. However, it can also be the other way around. These fields might enable people in poverty to change their position. For example, if people in poverty have many friends in their neighborhood, these friends can help them to get a job. If welfare officials support people in poverty with job training, the latter might get a job. Consequentially, whether a field is constraining or enabling needs empirical investigation. It is my task to uncover whether these fields are constraining or enabling people in poverty to pursue their ambitions.

Looking at the various fields in which people are embedded, I contend that we are able to understand the multifaceted problem of poverty and social exclusion. Within each of these five fields, it is necessary to study the internal struggles of the people in poverty – both the material and symbolic struggle – and the unintended consequences of their actions. It is also worthy to explore the interrelation
of the various fields. All this together helps us to understand the perpetuation of poverty.

1.4. The analyzed fields

Now I will provide a brief description what may happen in the studied fields; who are the significant “others”, and what kind of struggle happens in the field. However, not in every field does a material and symbolic struggle occur; and not in every field are there unintended consequences of social action; and not every field is equally important in the understanding of poverty perpetuation. I will start with the labor market, because this is the most important field. Paid work (and labor market integration) will be indispensable: labor market integration offers people economic independency, self-worth, social standing, financial capital and chances to get ahead in society. It furthermore lessens state dependency and reduces the financial burden on the welfare state. As Visser and Hemerijck (1997; p. 181) argue, paid work “will remain the main engine of social integration and economic independence and is likely to remain so for decades to come.”

1.4.1. The formal labor market

One often-studied field is the formal labor market, where human effort is made into a commodity, bought and sold under terms, which, in law, are considered to constitute a contract (Marshall, 1994; p. 348-9). This market – field – plays a vital role in social integration. One solution to solve poverty is to make the labor market more accessible. But people in poverty are durably excluded from the labor market and face many difficulties going from welfare to work. Central to this chapter is what people in poverty do to increase their chances in the labor market, and why they often cannot access the labor market. This chapter develops the concept of the forms of capital as the basis of a model of labor market incorporation. The model sets out the manner in which the social, financial, and cultural capital of the respondents are used to gain entry to the labor market. Each and every one of these forms of capital can be employed to access the labor market. If people lack one of these resources, they can use other resources to strength the missing form of capital. For example, people in poverty can use their economic resources (money) to invest in cultural resources (education). With these cultural resources, they increase their chances in the labor market: they converted one form of capital into another. Knowing that people in poverty possess several forms of capital (social, financial, and cultural capital), what are their strategies to convert one form of capital into another? Furthermore, what kinds of difficulties
do they have in converting one form into another? The question is: What obstacles do the respondents face with getting into the formal labor market? If they face many difficulties entering the labor market, it will prolong their poverty spell.

1.4.2. The bureaucracy

Another relevant field is the welfare bureaucracy that organizes welfare distribution. The problem is that “passive” welfare regimes are accused of perpetuating poverty, eroding the work ethic and disrupting flexible work patterns (cf. Theodore & Peck, 1999). People in poverty often depend on social security benefits; they receive a benefit, and this benefit is distributed via the welfare office, which is oftentimes responsible for labor market reintegration. However, sometimes, these bureaucracies might become an obstacle going back to work. The question remains, what happens at the bureaucracy that might barrier people in poverty from going back to work? This chapter describes the interactions between the welfare officials and people in poverty, makes the internal logic of this field visible, and shows how these interactions might negatively affect the chances for labor market integration. By showing how people in poverty perceive the relationship with the welfare officials, insight will be given in the functioning of the welfare office.

1.4.3. The neighborhood

Another studied field is the neighborhood. A neighborhood is the bundle of spatially-based attributes associated with clusters of residences, sometimes in conjunction with other land uses (Galster, 2001; p. 2112). In this application, the spatially-based attributes comprising the complex commodity called ‘neighborhood’ consist firstly of, the social interactive characteristics: local friends and kin networks, degree of interhousehold familiarity, type and quality of interpersonal associations, residents’ perceived commonality, and participation in locally based voluntary associations. Secondly, the neighbourhood consists of sentimental characteristics: residents’ sense of identification with place, historical significance of building or district (ibid.). Galster (ibid.) also refers to various spatial dimensions, such as structural characteristics of the residential and non-residential buildings: type, scale, materials, design, state of repair, density, landscaping; infrastructural characteristics: roads, sidewalks, streetscaping, utility services; and environmental characteristics: degree of land, air, water and noise pollution, topographical features, views.
I elaborate on two of these dimensions, the social ties and the sentiments. The conceptualisation of the neighbourhood is not a matter of interest. I am particularly interested in the impact of the neighborhood on the life-chances of individuals, an ongoing dispute among social scientists (cf. Buck, 2001). Perhaps no single question in urban inequality has produced more research than whether neighborhood poverty affects the life-chances of the poor (Small & Newman, 2001; p. 29). Authors address questions such as; why does the neighborhood matter, for what, and to what degree? (Sampson et al., 2002; p. 447); how does neighborhood poverty produce negative effects? (Small & Newman, 2001; p. 32); does living in a deprived area constitute the disadvantage experienced by its residents, and do the area effects contribute to a lack of social mobility (cf. Atkinson & Kintrea, 2001)?

All these questions are part and parcel of the neighborhood-effect research program. In this program, the central concern is that segregation acts as a motor that drives social inequality (cf. Hanhörrster, 2001, p. 329). This study tries to contribute to this debate. I attempt to understand how place (the neighborhood) shapes ones’ life chances. If social space negatively acts upon the respondents’ lives, it can have an effect on poverty perpetuation. I am particularly interested in how people in poverty cooperate with others in the neighborhood. Do they have any fruitful social ties in the neighborhood? Or do they distance themselves from other urban dwellers? If they have sufficient fruitful ties, people in poverty can receive, for example, information on job opportunities from their neighbors. The neighborhood – via this kind of reasoning – becomes a springboard to other social fields. To understand what their position is vis-à-vis others in the neighborhood, I analyze how they classify other urban dwellers in the neighborhood. Analyzing how the respondents classify others enables us to understand their own (perceived) position in the neighborhood with reference to others. One way to understand how this works is to illuminate who (in the neighborhood) people define as morally worthy and morally unworthy. This way, the internal differentiation of the neighborhood becomes visible. Do they actually have any potential social ties in the neighborhood that offer resources? What can be said about the differences between the neighborhoods? What can we say about the relevance of the neighborhood and how the neighborhood shapes individuals’ life-chances?
1.4.4. The social networks

Another often studied field are social networks, which involve people who are linked together by one or more social relationships. In these networks people interact, exchange, and share “certain” things. In general, social networks can be approached negatively and/or positively. On the one hand, it might create cultures of poverty: a culture in which people are trapped, which a number of people share, and which is perpetuated over generations. On the other hand, social networks can be seen as a resource. People can support each other and their social networks can offer an escape out of poverty. I look at the latter, and concentrate on the positive aspects of social networks and focus on “social capital” – which is generally conceptualized as a resource that is realized through social relationships (Coleman, 1988; Leventhal & Brooks-Gunn, 2000, cited in Sampson et al., 2002; p. 457). Therefore, this chapter addresses how social capital functions and how people in poverty deal with their social relationships. This study concentrates on the “weak ties”, because these ties can act as bridges to other resources and fields. Weak ties are relationships characterized by infrequent interaction or low intimacy. They are wide ranging and are likely to serve as bridges across social boundaries (cf. Bian, 1997; p. 366). People in poverty can use these ties to find a job, information for job opportunities and job training. With a job, they can change their opportunity structure in the long run. Therefore, first I try to answer the question whether the respondents did have weak ties. If they possess such ties, why do these weak ties seem unproductive? If they cannot make use of their weak ties – for reasons to be uncovered – they, consequentially, cannot escape their position.

1.4.5. The informal labor market

Because welfare dependency (long-term receipt of welfare) is often associated with illicit work (Lister, 2004; p. 111), the last field studied is the informal labor market. The informal labor market differs from the formal labor market: human effort is made into a commodity, which is bought and sold under terms without any official contract. Working in the informal economy can perpetuate one’s position, since it reduces the chance to work in the formal economy. For that reason I address the question whether the respondents work informally and if so, what and for what reasons are they doing it. What is the role of their social connections, their relationship with welfare institutions, and severe labor market exclusion? This chapter aims to consider the reasons why they work informally, and
the transcriptions were analyzed for their informal work activities. The structure and logic of the informal labor market is described, and I want to uncover the reasons why they work off the books.

Within each and every one of the aforementioned fields, a struggle over resources takes place. Because of these struggles, people in poverty are excluded or exclude themselves from that particular field. In addition, people in poverty have to deal with the various people in each field. The relationships between them and the others determine whether the actual field is a fruitful ground. However, not only is the social figuration central. The relationship between fields is of importance, since a poor connection between them may have consequences for people in poverty. In each chapter, I provide more theoretical insight in the processes of social exclusion.

1.5. Research questions

The central question of this study: How can the perpetuation of poverty be explained? I am especially interested in the long-term poor: why these people cannot escape their financial poverty and why they have difficulties in accessing the labor market. Furthermore, because I do not have data from several generations, I draw attention to intergenerational poverty (poverty within one generation), and not the perpetuation of poverty over generations (intrigenerational poverty). To understand the phenomenon of poverty better, society is divided into several fields. The structure of each field provides information on poverty perpetuation.

Each chapter discusses one relevant field, and addresses a particular question. In the third chapter, using the three forms of capital model, I try to answer the question: what are the barriers to work? In the fourth chapter, I try to answer the question: How does the relationship with the welfare officials contribute to welfare dependency? Does the neighborhood influence the life chance of people in poverty, is the question I pose in the fifth chapter. In the sixth chapter, the weak ties – which might offer an escape out of poverty – are central, and the question is: are these weak ties productive? In the seventh chapter, the informal work activities are analyzed and I ask why are these activities employed? In the concluding chapter, I try to demonstrate the effects of the interrelation between the studied fields. However, because these fields cannot entirely be analyzed separately, in each chapter I write something about this interrelation. In general, I describe the relations between fields and the relations between people in the various fields.
the next chapter, I will describe the research methodology and the characteristics of the respondents.
Notes

1 Exactly so: “Er blijkt jaarlijks een niet te verwaarlozen groep mensen te bestaan die langdurig van een laag inkomen moet rondkomen (vgl. SCP/CBS 2000). Van de personen die onder lage-inkomenspositie verkeren, moet 40% langdurig – dat wil zeggen, vier jaar of langer – van een laag inkomen rondkomen. Dit komt neer op 6% van alle personen in Nederland en 7% van de huishoudens (SCP; 2001; p. 40).”

2 See also Blanc (1998) and Cousins (1998).


5 In Bourdieu’s massive work on poverty and social exclusion (The weight of the world, 1999), almost the same kind of themes are distinguished: “The experience of poor housing and unemployment, social and symbolic forms of exclusion (a poverty that is hidden), conflicts between generations whether in a work or family context, interethnic conflicts, the confrontation between the powerful and the vulnerable in the state systems of education or law enforcement, the everyday anxieties of the gendered workplace, and the loneliness of the elderly and the sick” (Couldry, 2005; p. 355). This kind of reasoning can be traced back to the work of Max Weber. As examples of spheres, Weber mentions “the economic sphere,” “the political sphere,” “the erotic sphere,” and the “aesthetic sphere,” and he says that all of these have a certain autonomy and inner logic (Eigengezetzlichkeit, Eigenlogik) (Swedberg, 1998; p. 209). There are numerous spheres in society to understand the integration of people, like sports (cf. Krouwel et al., 2006), or the military (cf. Choenni, 1995).

6 In complex societies, much, if not most, social action is impossible to grasp, except by reference to the specialized fields where, according to Bourdieu, it takes place (Couldry, 2005; p. 357). According to Couldry (2005; p. 356), “Bourdieu saw social space in modern societies not as focused around one organizing principle (relations to the means of economic production, Marx) but as a space with multiple (if interrelated) fields of competition, where different forms of capital are at stake. In addition, although some critics have suggested otherwise, Bourdieu always acknowledged the complexity of the individual position, at least to the extent that for him, individual actions can only be understood by grasping individuals’ different structural positions in and historical trajectories across social space.” According to Bourdieu, “a field consists of a set of objective, historical relations between positions anchored in certain forms of power (or capital), while habitus consists of a set of historical relations “deposited” within individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; p. 16). Bourdieu also defines a field as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (Wacquant 1989; p. 39). So, field theory is a more or less coherent approach in the social sciences whose essence is the explanation of regularities in individual action by resource to position vis-à-vis others (Martin, 2003; p. 1). Field theory is nothing new. Lewin (1953) already wrote that individual behavior is seen as being determined by the totality of the individuals’ situation – their psychological field or life space. This contains the individual with goals, needs, and their perceived environment, and can be mapped using vectors (see Marshall, 1998). This line of reasoning can be traced back to the work of Marx. He wrote in Die Grundrisse (1971; p. 77 in: Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; p. 16) “Society does not consist of individuals; it expresses the sum of connections and relation-
ships in which individuals find themselves.” Thatcher said exactly the opposite: “I think we’ve been through a period where too many people have been given to understand that if they have a problem, it is the government’s job to cope with it. ‘I have a problem, I’ll get a grant.’ ‘I’m homeless, the government must house me.’ They are casting their problem on society. And, you know, there is no such thing as society. There are individual men and women, and there are families.” (Prime minister Margaret Thatcher, talking to Women’s Own magazine, October 31, 1987).

7 Goudsblom (1977; p. 105, in Mennell; 1992; p. 252) uses a similar line of reasoning. Drawing on the work of Elias, he elaborates on four principles: 1) sociology is about people in the plural – human beings who are interdependent, 2) that these figurations are continually in flux, 3) that the long term developments … are to be largely unplanned and unforeseen, and 4) that the development of human knowledge takes place within human figurations.

8 This article illuminates that symbolic exchange takes place not between abstract actors but between people who stand in structural social relationships to another (Haas & Deseran, 1981; p. 9).

9 Zickmund et al. (2003; p. 835) define stigmatization as attitudes expressed by a dominant group which views a collection of others as socially unacceptable. Link and Phelan (2001) define stigma as “the co-occurrence of its components-labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss, and discrimination.”

10 This study contributes to a sociological understanding of an economic phenomenon, and tends to operate on the edge between the discipline economy and sociology – or economic sociology. This discipline deals with all economic fields, although using social relations, status, reciprocity, honor, symbolic classifications, norms, structures, power, and social institution as explanatory variables for the interpretation of economic outcomes (Beckert, 1996; p. 803).

11 The concept of life-spheres entails crucial elements. One is that it reflects the individuals’ perceptions of reality, in particular of social reality. By pointing to perceptions, it unfolds the meaning that objects and actions have for individuals. For, as Schutz (1967; p. 230 in Passy & Giugni, 2000; p. 121-2) pointed out; “it is at the meaning of our experience and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitutes reality.”

12 Elias writes: “This … expresses well how from the interweaving of countless individual interests and intentions – whether tending in the same direction or in divergent and hostile directions – something comes into being that was planned and intended by none of these individuals, yet has emerged nevertheless from their intentions and actions. And really this is the whole secret of social figurations, their compelling dynamics, their structural regularities, their process character and their development; this is the secret of their sociogenesis and relational dynamic” (Elias, 1982; p. 160).

13 Paralleling Granovetter (1985), embeddedness is in the end a matter of the degree to which economic behavior is affected by or submerged in social relations (cf. Arnold, 2001; p. 86).

14 See also Lockwood’s distinction (1964; p. 245) between system and social integration: “Whereas the problem of social integration focuses attention upon the orderly or conflictful relationships between the actors, the problem of system integration focuses on the orderly or conflictful relationships between the parts, of a social system”.

15 Note that the concept of sphere is not the same as an institutional arena, but rather some kind of existential arena, perhaps a distinct and meaningful department of life (Swedberg, 1998; p. 209).

16 “Groups, institutions, and societies are nothing but concentrations of recurrent interactions among individuals. They can be identified as clusters in more-or-less continuous fields or chains of interaction, some of them sharply demarcated, others less clearly set
apart, but all of them creating densities of interactions distinguishable within their larger context” (Wrong, 1994; p. 227).

17 Noordhoff (1933; p. 6) emphasizes (drawing on the work of Weber) that a sociological study (to construct an image of society) should not describe the various compartments of social life independently. Instead, a sociological study should observe the entire object (i.e. society), distinguish between the various spheres, and should describe the connections between the various life-spheres.

18 The subjective world of actors is formed by all the life-spheres and by their mutual interactions. Schutz (1967) again, speaks of multiple realities in order to underscore the existence of various provinces of meaning in the social world (cf. Passy & Giugni, 2000; p. 122).

19 Wrong (1994; p. 232) refers to the effects of poorly system integration: “Unforeseen and apparently threatening impersonal ‘social forces’ typically emerge at the level of system integration, often producing reactions of uncomprehending anger or fatalistic alienation on the part of the ordinary citizens whose life routines they disrupt.”

20 Exclusion as a consequence “results from an inadequate separation of social spheres, from the application of rules inappropriate to a given sphere, or from barriers to free movement and exchange between spheres” (Silver, 1994; p. 542-3, in Littlewood & Herkommer, 1999; p. 5-6).

21 Not every field is equally important in people’s life. Their position in the hierarchy of value depends, among other things, on the frequency of activation. The more frequently a field is activated, the more likely it is to become important in people’s life. The hierarchy of fields will change according to the moment in the life cycle (Passy & Giugni, 2000; p. 122).

22 Furthermore, I use the concepts “field,” “market” and “sphere” randomly, because I think the words “labor field” and “neighborhood field” are a little confusing. When I use the term “market,” I do actually mean “field.”

23 Originally I used Blokland’s definition: A neighborhood is a geographically limited built environment, which individuals use practically and symbolically (cf. Blokland, 2005).

24 In the Netherlands, several authors address this “problem”. For example, Musterd et al. (2003) compared both the employed and unemployed. They argue that the socio-economic perspective of low-income residents in jobless areas does not differ from others. The environment has only a modest effect on the social mobility of households with a weak economic position, but proved to have a more powerful effect on the social mobility of households with a stronger economic position. Van der Klaauw and Van Ours (2003) empirical results show that the neighborhood affects the individual transition rates from welfare to work for young Dutch welfare recipients. These transition rates are lower if the unemployment rate within a neighborhood is higher. Other neighborhood characteristics do not have any effect (ibid.; p. 983). Van der Laan Bouma-Doff (2007) found that spatial segregation hampers the social inclusion of ethnic minorities, as it stands in the way of contacts between ethnic minorities and native Dutch.

25 It is extremely difficult to test the hypothesis that, everything else being equal, an individual living under any particular neighborhood condition is worse off than in the absence of that condition (Small & Newman, 2001; p. 30).

26 According to Bourdieu (1989; p. 19) “nothing classifies somebody more than they way he or she classifies.” Gadamer (1975; p. 9) uses a similar line of reasoning: “it is our prejudices that constitute our being.”

27 Most scholars conceptualize neighborhood in terms of informal relationships or social networks among persons living in a geographical space; thus, when scholars use the term ‘neighborhood’ they tend to mean social networks (Chaskin, 1997, in Small & Newman,
However, geographical location and social networks are separate and distinct attributes that may have different effects on individuals (ibid. p. 31).

A central element of social capital theory is the basic idea that people invest in social relationships with the expectations of some return. Programs that promote social capital and indigenous leadership and empower decision-making processes may provide sustainable positive outcomes for families living in low-income neighborhoods (cf. Brisson & Usher, 2005). Therefore, a solution to poverty lies in boosting social capital among the poor. One assumption is that affluent groups are in a better position to generate reciprocal relationships and therefore muster more social capital (cf. Fernandez-Kelly, 1995).

One reason to use this framework is to contribute to the structure/agency debate in poverty research. Ruth Lister (2004; p. 126) writes that: “How far what happens in society can be understood as the product of individual actions (agency) or of wider social, economic, and political institutions and processes (structure) has long been a central problem in sociological theory.” And according to her, the structure/agency debate parallels the discussion on the causes of poverty: “In the US, the second half of the twentieth century saw an increasingly polarized debate between those who attribute the causes of poverty to social and economic structures and those who hold culture or individual behavior responsible” (O’Connor, 2001, in Lister, 2004; p. 127). For example, there are many scholars who try to explain poverty by structural (Murray, 1984; Wright, 1995), situational (Wilson, 1987), individual (Herrnstein & Murray, 1984) or cultural aspects (Lewis, 1966; Rodman, 1971). The theoretical pendulum has swung at different times between an emphasis on agency and on structure but has, more recently been preoccupied with the relationship between the two. Therefore, this study aims to transcend the dichotomy between individualist and structuralist approaches. This analytic framework locates agency in the context (field) of the individuals’ social position in relation to wider forms of stratification and social relations of power (Williams, 1999, in Lister, 2004; p. 127). Doing this, this study may demonstrate an alternative explanation (with reference to poverty perpetuation), going beyond the traditional structure-individual dichotomy.
2. Methodology and description of research group

2.1. Research methodology

This study aims to explain the perpetuation of poverty and is based on data collected during the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project (1997-1999). More information on the background of this study can be found in several reports (Engbersen 1997; Staring et al., 2002; Ypeij et al., 2002; Ypeij & Snel 2002). Initially this chapter describes the data collection, processing, coding, analyzing, research reliability, validity, and generalizibility of this research project. Then, I explain why I chose for qualitative data analysis. In the second part of this chapter, I describe the research group itself. Although data gathered in several neighborhoods, the neighborhood turns out not to be the most pivotal element in the data analysis.

2.1.1. Data collection

Compared to other regions, low-income groups are concentrated in cities such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam (Engbersen & Snel, 1996; p. 129). Although similar poverty concentrations are also to be found in other Dutch regions, half of all poverty regions are to be found in the big cities (cf. Snel et al., 2000; p. 34). Therefore, research was conducted in three Dutch urban areas: two in Amsterdam (“De Blijmermeer” and “Amsterdam-Noord”), and one in Rotterdam (“Rotterdam-Delfshaven”). Compared to others on the list of poverty districts, some of these areas’ neighborhoods are at the top (cf. Engbersen, 1997; p. 19). The researchers supposed that in these neighborhoods poverty is expressed most distinctly, and that they could observe processes of social exclusion. During the project, two researchers respectively lived in Amsterdam-Noord and Rotterdam-Delfshaven. Their aim was to gain unconstrained access to people in poverty, and to collect eighty interviews per neighborhood. In chapter 5 (Sympathizing, fear and loathing in the neighborhood), these neighborhoods are briefly described on the basis of their characteristics. Furthermore, the researchers were in search of specific ethnic groups, to know Dutch (single) parents in Amsterdam-Noord, Turks in Delfshaven and Surinamese in Amsterdam Blijmermeer. But in each and every neighborhood, the researchers also interviewed various ethnic groups.
Amsterdam-Noord was the first area to be studied (1997-1998). The sub municipality Amsterdam-Noord contains some of the poorest neighborhoods in the Netherlands: Tuindorp Buiksloot, Volewijck and IJplein/Vogelbuurt. The chief researcher lived in one of these neighborhoods – Annelou Ypeij. She participated in multiple organizations, and she could follow some respondents over time. Because she lived in this area, this was especially appreciated by the respondents. The researchers were in search of the classic blue-collar workers who have been pushed out of the regular economy. The economic restructuring should have been most visible in these neighborhoods. However, according to the researchers (cf. Ypeij et al., 2002), it became easier said than done to find the classic unemployed blue-collar workers. These workers did not live in poverty; moreover, they also moved out of the neighborhood, or were not willing to cooperate. Only six respondents were obtained via direct social contacts. The original research sites (i.e. De Vogelbuurt) were proved insufficient, and therefore the research was expanded to other neighborhoods in the area of Amsterdam-Noord. Respondents were finally found via schools, prominent city dwellers, grass root organizations, migrant organizations, ringing doorbells, approaching people in the street, contacts via social workers and social service employees (cf. Ypeij et al., 2002).

Rotterdam-Delfshaven, as well, contains two of the poorest neighborhoods in the Netherlands: Spangen and Tussendijken. To conduct his PhD-research, Richard Staring – the main researcher – lived there from 1993 until 1996 (cf. Staring, 2001). Afterwards, he conducted many interviews for the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project. He knew the ins and outs of the neighborhood and maintained many social connections in the district. He was therefore able to officiate as a mediator between the respondents and other researchers. Interviews were conducted from 1998-1999 with the help of other researchers: one from Turkish descent, and one Portuguese-speaking woman, she conducted interviews among Cape Verdians. For the researchers, it was difficult to find sufficient respondents for several reasons; there seemed to be a research fatigue, negative media attention obstructed cooperation among dweller and researchers, some dwellers faced difficulties distinguishing between journalists and researchers, and the length of the interview was for some a problem (cf. Staring et al., 2002). Most of the respondents were indirectly approached; via grass roots organizations, social workers, prominent people in migrant networks and via the chief researcher. Five respondents were accessed via snowball sampling. Some interview topics were con-
troversial; for example the questions on informal labor, and illegal possessions in their home country\textsuperscript{31}.

*The Bijlmermeer* (the southeast district of Amsterdam) was the last studied area. From November 1998 until the summer of 1999, seventy interviews were conducted. The chief researcher – Annelou Ypeij – and four assistants conducted the interviews. Two assistants were from Surinamese descent. One of the Surinamese interviewers combined her research activities with her daytime job as a youth counselor. Her substantial social network provided access to other Surinamese. Thirty-three respondents were found via grass roots organizations, such as schools, employment agencies, and neighborhood centers. Twenty elementary schools were approached and this resulted in two respondents. An ad in a local newspaper proved successful. Ten respondents were found via ringing at the door and eight via snowball sampling (cf. Ypeij & Snel, 2002).

I did not participate in the original project, so in the summer of 2004, I revisited some respondents in Amsterdam Noord. I faced many difficulties. Addresses were lost or the old addresses were not available, some respondents moved out of the neighborhood, did not want to cooperate, or simply died. After biking through the neighborhood during many weeks, I only interviewed nine respondents. The amount of time spend in the neighborhood did not match up to the benefits – knowing that I still had to analyze about two hundred interviews. In the epilogue (see chapter 9, page 189), I use my collected interviews to understand whether the research results are still valuable in this century.

2.1.2. Interviews / questionnaire

The research objective was to conduct one hundred interviews per neighborhood. In the end, this project resulted in 216 transcriptions (eighty-eight in Amsterdam-Noord, sixty-six in Delfshaven and eighty in Amsterdam-South-East). Because of the quantity of questions, multiple conversations were necessary during several visits. This took many hours of interviewing, transcribing the interviews, and analyzing the transcriptions. Some respondents (N=25) were visited three times, the majority just one time (N=97), or two times (N=81)\textsuperscript{32}. The average interview duration is over four hours, with a maximum of twelve hours and a minimum of one hour.
Eleven sociologists and anthropologists conducted face-to-face interviews. The researchers chose to conduct face-to-face interviews for several reasons. First of all, if they send a regular mail questionnaire, they expected high rates of non-response among the unemployed. Second, many topics, for example on informal work and debts, are only talked about during an interview with someone the respondent trusts. Third, the researchers assumed that they could get detailed information on the life-world of people in poverty, and that they could get information that has not been gathered before, and cannot be collected via mail questionnaires.

The researchers used a structured questionnaire with open and closed-ended questions, and the latter were standardized. The questionnaire included about two hundred questions on several topics: neighborhood, labor, income, getting by, relationship with public services, social networks, and social participation. The interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed. The answers to the questionnaire were processed in SPSS – a statistical software program. The respondents did not answer all questions: some were not relevant, other topics were avoided because according to the respondents it violated their privacy.

2.1.2. Coding and analyzing

The quantitative data was processed using a statistical software program, and what was left were thousands of pages of interview transcription (2,297,920 words, approximately 4500 pages). Therefore, this was available to me: the transcriptions, the statistics, and my own interviews. The first thing I did was coding – the transformation of observations into categories and classifications assigning a number or symbol to each item of information or a statement. The analysis could be carried out subsequently. It is more or less the interpretative process by which data are broken down analytically (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 1990; p. 12). I assigned 213 codes to the transcriptions, and these codes referred to the respondents’ situations, interactions, attitudes, perspectives, opinions, feelings, life-strategies, etc. The codelist was developed from observation. After that, a software program was able to generate an output of a relevant code. I did not start from fixed categories, but from what I observed during reading the transcriptions.

This coding enabled me to examine the code output rapidly. After reading and coding, I distinguished between the relevant “fields.” These fields seem to play a
central role in the life-world of the respondents. After that, I read and reread the code output and transcriptions many times. Printed transcripts allowed for a careful process of reading and rereading the data so that the key themes per field could be identified. Through this process, emerging themes and clusters of themes developed as the analysis progressed through consecutive stages (cf. Lofland & Lofland, 1995). The process builds on the interchange of theory and empirical observation that permits the recognition of patterns in participants’ realities and their securing and explanation in a conceptual framework. So, I did not analyze the data fully inductively, nor fully deductively. But I constantly switched between theory and the data.

During writing and setting up this study, I use the statistical data to show the situation of the respondents. This data is primarily used to show background information on the respondents. Statistical data less capable showing how social relations, social mechanisms and processes contribute to the perpetuation of poverty. This kind of data cannot show the subtlety of interactions of people in poverty with others. I provide 141 interview fragments as examples of how the respondents interact with others in the relevant context and how they deal with everyday hardship. Many interview transcriptions provide much-detailed information, but not every interview contained information on social relations, processes, etc. Therefore, a full analysis of all transcriptions was not possible at all times, and I only use those illustrations that provided sufficient information. I selected those quotations that illustrated the particular situation coherently, and I used examples from approximately 86 interviews. After observing all the different patterns, the writing of the different chapters could start.

2.1.3. Reliability, validity, and generalizability

Questions must be answered as to whether this research is reliable, valid, and generalizable. This, however, brings about a difficulty. On the one hand, a structured questionnaire is used and many individuals are interviewed. This can be defined as positivistic research – for positivism embraces any approach that applies scientific method to human affairs, and conceives as belonging to a natural order open to objective enquiry (Hollis, 1994; p.41). On the other hand, the interview analysis concentrated on the life-world, social settings and interactions. This can be defined as naturalistic research – that focuses on the analyses of social interactions and social phenomenon (cf. Wester & Peters, 2004; p. 12-3). The concepts of reliability, validity, generalizability, and representativeness are terms
generally used for positivistic research, and are difficult to apply to naturalistic research (cf. Golafshani, 2003; Horsburgh, 2003). Despite this difficulty, I say something about the quality of the research, and how certain difficulties are being obviated.

**Reliability** is central in research and reflects its accomplishments. The central question concerning reliability is whether the same results would be produced if the research procedures were to be repeated; different researchers should produce similar results on a different time. If not, the findings could be based on coincidence. In point of fact of course, this research is not repeated by the same number of researchers with the same number of respondents. Although I cannot say something about whether the research findings are reliable, the use of literature and peer debriefing help to overcome some of the difficulties.

**Validity** refers to whether or not a measurement procedure actually measures what the researcher supposes it does; there should be a correspondence between the question asked and what has been measured. If not, the questions could have measured something completely different than originally intended. The validity of this questionnaire is guaranteed by using questions that have been used in other research. However, although validity is valid for positivistic research, it is not very useful for naturalistic qualitative research. The analysis concentrated on interactions and social settings and therefore analyzed the life-world. This study did not really measure prevalence of individual characteristics. Therefore, I cannot say much about the validity of this research.

**Generalizability** refers to whether what has been observed can be applied to a much larger group. However, again, this concept is useful while doing quantitative research, which measures individual characteristics of many people. Consequently, it questions whether these individual characteristics can be applied to a much larger group. Again, this is too positivistic. I do not attempt to make statements on people, but on processes, social relations, and interactions. However, to check whether these processes are generalizable is somewhat difficult. The use of literature, in which similar processes and interactions are described, will obviate some flaws.
2.1.4. Extensive and intensive research

In this study, there is a mix of intensive and extensive research (cf. Schuyt, 1986; p. 105). This mixture is used in various studies, both theoretical and empirical (cf. Lancaster, 1961; Engbersen, 1990; Blokland 1998; Savage et al., 2001; Downward & Mearman, 2006; Rusinovic, 2006). Andrew Sayer (1992: p. 243, orig. 1984) showed that extensive research – studying rapidly a large number of cases – is particularly good for mapping the characteristics of a population. Extensive research methods can be applied to concrete events to derive generalisations about their patterning. However, human agents are creative, experimental beings and their contexts of actions are constantly shifting. For this reason, extensive research programs commonly adopted in the empiricist/positivist research tradition often fail to untangle the dynamic and contextual relational links between social actions and economic structures.

To counter this, abstract conceptualisations of processes can be developed and intensive research – focusing intensively on one or few cases – of specific cases can be undertaken, in order to understand causation patterns (cf. Guy & Henneberry, 2000). Sayer claims that intensive research allows the researcher essentially to follow a cause-and-effect track in a specific situation and, therefore, it was better for studying cause and effect than extensive research. With reference to this study, because I want to uncover how people become socially excluded from various fields, thus following a cause-and-effect trajectory in a specific field, intensive research suits very well.

What did I do? This research project resulted in many interview transcriptions (qualitative data) and statistical data (quantitative data). I focused predominantly on the qualitative data (roughly intensive research). I only use the quantitative data to draw attention to differences between people in poverty, and to determine the position of the respondents in the field. I chose to focus on the qualitative data (intensive research) for several reasons. First of all, the theoretical notions themselves – fields, social interactions, social relations, etc. – determined the strong focus on qualitative elements. What happens in the fields is difficult to “measure.”

Second, quantitative data obscures how the respondents interact with the significant others in the various fields, and how the respondents interpret their situation
vis-à-vis others. Sociological perspectives, such as symbolic interactionism, hardly use statistical data (quantitative data cannot get the subtlety of the social interactions). With the use of intensive research, I am more able to understand the interchange – though ethnography is the best manner to grasp social interactions and exchange. Third, the use of intensive research enables me to observe the processes towards social exclusion. A process is difficult to detect with extensive research. Fourth, using intensive research, new insights into the respondents’ lifeworld are possible.

However, the qualitative data analysis suffers from some difficulties as well. First of all, the respondents interpret their past actions and choices. What they say is only a reflection on how they experience their past – not what actually really happened. The respondents’ verbatims and situations reflect their definition of the situation, and cannot be taken of face value. Second, the transcriptions are often summaries of the interviews. Therefore, a full analysis of what the respondents said was not always possible. Third, I interpret the situation of the respondents. However, the situation of the respondents is already an interpretation of how they understood their situation; I tried to understand an interpretation of their situation. Furthermore, I use my words to describe their circumstances. In the course of analysis, I use sociological terms, and these terms might obscure their reality.

Short, social interactions and how the respondents deal with their social environment are central to the analysis. I predominantly focused on the qualitative data. Second, because so many people were interviewed, I was able to outline the prevalence of social phenomena, for example, how many respondents experience the relationship with the welfare officials negatively. Lastly, I was able to obtain much information from the transcriptions, that – as a lone researcher – I never could have gathered myself. The strength of the project lies in the fact that the researchers were able to contact many different categories of people (age, gender, poverty duration, ethnicity, etc.). The entire project sheds light on the wide diversity of people in poverty. This diversity is sketched in what follows.

2.2. Description of the research group

First, let me sketch out a brief quantitative description of the respondents by emphasizing to their relative positions in society. However, we must be careful in interpreting these data. First of all, this data might suggest that I want to explain
poverty perpetuation from the individual level: the individual constraints, the individual traits, the individual shortcomings. This is not really the case. Rather I describe their impoverished situation, simply because knowledge about this is very important to understand their actions with reference to others in the field. Second, I need to say something about the representativeness of the data. Although many people in poverty were interviewed, it is only a fraction of all low-income people in the Netherlands. Therefore, these numbers express little about all people in poverty in the Netherlands. Practically, the only common characteristic of the respondents (N=216) is: they all have to live from a low income, not exceeding 105-110% of the social policy minimum. First of all, I will give an overview of the main characteristics of the research group – gender, age, poverty duration, and ethnicity. After that, I will give insight into the chief resources of the respondents; their cultural, economic, and social capital.

2.2.1. The situation of the research group

Recently, Gesthuizen (2006) used a multi-level statistical model to explain the determinants of poverty in the Netherlands. He found that the household composition is the most important factor to explain poverty; the neighborhood explains little. Various household attributes have an independent effect on poverty. If the head of the household is young (25-34 years), does not work, or has a low status job, the chance of being poor is relatively high. Furthermore, young couples with kids, single-headed households, and single-parent households have a high chance to live in poverty. The economic conjecture concerns the chance of living in poverty: during extensive unemployment, the chance of living in poverty is relatively high. Along these lines, there are numerous issues involved to explain the persistence and causes of poverty (cf. Nordenmark, 1999). Whether people in poverty are able to escape hardship often depends on their circumstances: the combination of their age, gender, household situation, their occupational status, health, and income. For that reason, I make an effort to sketch the situation of the respondents. This information is used as a starting point from which the qualitative analysis will proceed. I will start with poverty duration.

Poverty duration – Being poor for a single month is not thoroughly problematic. Being poor for several months, years, or even decades causes severe problems: resources run dry, the distance to the labor market increases, social isolation advances, people have to sell their house or car, and poverty can cause depressions (Brown & Moran, 1997). Recalling from the first chapter, approximately 40% of
all people in poverty were persistently poor, which means more than four years. This corresponds to roughly 6% of all Dutch citizens and 7% of all households (SCP, 2001). The “Landscapes of Poverty” researchers were able to get in contact with many long-term poor in the Netherlands, finding that seventy-seven respondents lived in poverty for more than ten years, forty-five lived in poverty between five to ten years, fifty-eight between one and five years, and only eight were living in poverty for less then one year. One of the chief characteristics of long-term poverty is its *enduring* hardship.

**Gender** – Evidence for the feminization of poverty has been found in the US and Europe. To varying degrees, and with the clearest exception of Sweden, women face a greater risk of poverty than men (cf. Lister, 2004; p. 55). In the Netherlands, half of all poor households are female-headed (Engbersen et al., 2000; p. 8). The incidence of poverty is largest among single parents with young children (often women), and single person households, in particular women in old age (Visser & Hemerijck, 1997; p. 42). During the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project, 143 women and 72 men were interviewed, and 46 female-headed households were part of the research group. From all the categories (see Table 2.1), more women than men were interviewed. In the forthcoming qualitative analysis, I use more examples of women experiencing poverty than men, simply because I have more information on them.

**Age** – Certain age groups have a higher risk of living in poverty. For example, a distinguishing feature of poverty in old age is that escape is more difficult, especially for the oldest and the frail, as paid work is rarely an option in societies that construct older age as incompatible with continued involvement in the labor market (cf. Lister, 2004; p. 67). Therefore, the chance of getting out of poverty strongly depends on age. Numbers on poverty in the Netherlands show that about half of all young poor people (age 18 to 34 years) escaped their poverty position in 1999. This is not the case for the elderly. The common rule is that the chance of escaping poverty declines from the moment people are getting older (SCP, 2001; p. 28). Young people have a fair chance to escape their poor position, which according to the literature, slightly reduces over time (see also SCP, 2001; p. 41). In this research, practically all age groups are present (see Table 2.1). The youngest respondent is 18 years old, the oldest is 85 years old, and the average is 46.
Migrants – Among (former) migrants, poverty is a common phenomenon (SCP, 2001; p. 83). Compared to native Dutch, the labor market position of these groups is unfavorable. The high unemployment rates among these groups has several backstories: inconsiderable labor market participation (especially among Turkish and Moroccan women), the severe number of people tested as medically unfit (older Turkish and Moroccan men), and the high number of single-headed households living on welfare (especially Surinamese and Antillean women). The (former) migrants pensions are often low, which results in high poverty rates among the elderly (ibid.). About 40% of the non-western migrant households had a low income, compared to 12% of the “autochthonous.” During the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project, the researchers were in search of the (former) migrants, and they were able to interview many of them. However, the majority of the respondents is native Dutch (N=102). Additionally, Turks (N=36), Surinamese (N=30), Cape Verdians (N=20), Antilleans (N=11), and Moroccans (N=6) were interviewed. Because the social positions within these ethnic groups differ strongly40, ethnic comparisons are difficult to make.

Household situation – According to the numbers of the SCP (2000; p. 15), single-parent households are most likely to live on a low income. From all single parents in 1999, 47% lived from a low-income. Furthermore, single-parent households have the slightest chance of getting out of poverty (SCP, 2001; p. 35). Singles are the second group most likely to live from a low income (SCP, 2001; p. 16). Women have a higher chance of living from a low income than do men (ibid.). Couples have the slightest chance of living from a low income. In 1999, about 8.6% of all couples with underage kids (under 18) had to live from a low income (SCP, 2001; p. 16). Similar groups are among the present respondents: about 36% of the respondents lives on his/her own, 31% is a single parent, 25% lives in particular as a couple – with or without children. Noteworthy is the number of respondents who went through a divorce (N=90).

Benefits – Welfare and unemployment beneficiaries are the most likely to live in poverty. In 1999, about 66% of them lived in poverty. Compared to the financial position of similar groups in 1981, their position is worsened (SCP, 2001; p. 16). Beneficiaries and the elderly had the slightest chance of getting out of poverty (compared to regular employees) (SCP, 2001; p. 32). People who live from a benefit or pension (compared to regular employers) and the duration of the poverty spell as three years and more (compared to just one year) most influence the
chance of getting out of poverty (SCP, 2001; p. 38). In addition, the financial position of entrepreneurs is precarious. The chance of living in poverty (compared to regular employment) is four times higher. If people are poor for a long period, the chance of rising above the low-income threshold becomes less (SCP, 2001; p. 13). To be brief, the kind of received income is significant, as well as the duration of poverty.

Then again, the main source of income among the respondents differs: 15% receive income from employment, 1% from entrepreneurial activities, 11% from pension, 47% from a welfare benefit, 3% from an unemployment benefit, and 18% from a disability benefit. The received benefit or income does not reflect the position of the respondents: 29 respondents who are tested medically unfit receive a welfare benefit instead of a disability benefit. If the disability benefit equals (financially) the welfare benefit, people receive the latter. Looking at the statistics, therefore it is difficult to pinpoint what the respondents’ position is in the labor market. Therefore, I analyzed all the transcriptions and more or less determined their position with reference to the labor market. I focused on whether they are able and / or obliged to work.

Reading the transcriptions, I analyzed whether the respondents were available for the labor market, their health status and household situation. I came up with approximately nine categories (see Table 2.1). Reflecting the respondents’ distance to and position in the labor market, these positions also mirror how they deal with the relevant fields, and how they interact with “others”. For example, whereas many single parents face difficulties in obtaining flexible day care, the elderly have hardly any relationship with welfare officials, while subsidized workers interact sometimes with the welfare officials. These positions say much about whether people might take up employment in the future, their obligation to work and the chance they will escape poverty.

From all the respondents, 55% (N=117) works or is obliged to work. I made a distinction between subsidized workers (N=23) and the working poor, because the first category started a reintegration trajectory or is attending a course. The working poor (N=21) have little to do with this kind of trajectory. They often have small-time jobs. The other 45% is not obliged to work. They are often the elderly (N=26) or were tested medically unfit (N=66). The elderly and people who are tested medically unfit are able to contemplate on their past, and can in-
form us on how they experience welfare policy, the neighborhood, their social relations et cetera. They are not expelled from the analysis. Furthermore, I distinguished between these categories to clarify that, I elaborate how, there are many differences between people in poverty.

Table 2.1 Labor market position, gender, age and poverty duration

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<th>Numbers</th>
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<th>NOTW = not obliged to work</th>
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<td>7 20 9 16 15 37 16 19 2 141</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>21 20 16 23 21 65 16 26 2 210</td>
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<table>
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<th>41-55</th>
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<td>7 8 6 6 4 29 2 0 0 62</td>
<td>2 0 5 2 1 18 0 26 0 54</td>
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<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>14 0 7 7 6 28 0 7 0 69</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
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<td>10 8</td>
<td>33 6</td>
<td>21 0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>4 2</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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<td>2 3</td>
<td>1 19</td>
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<td>211</td>
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The first category [1] consists of couples (N=21). They are available for the labor market, and some (N=12) do have children living with them. Most of them are Turks and native Dutch, middle-age, and their poverty duration is not very long. Because they are couples, it means that both the man and the woman are available.
for the labor market. However, there is little information on the labor market position of the partners. Where information is available, the woman and the man are in similar positions, which mean that they are both unemployed. [2] The second category consists of single parents with kids over five (N=20). In the 1990s, parents with children under five did not have to work, but the parents were obliged to work as soon as all the children were older than five (cf. Van Wel & Knijn, 2001). These single parents with kids over five, often in their mid thirties, Cape Verdians (N=6), native Dutch (N=5), and Surinamese (N=3), face the difficulties of organizing flexible day care for their children. These people are obliged to work and often belong to the long-term poor. The third category [3] consists of singles without children. They are available for the labor market and are obliged to work (N=16). These people are often lower-educated, native Dutch, mid age women and men. They often belong to the long-term poor. The fourth category [4] consists of the subsidized workers, trainees, or people who do some sort of job training (N=23). They are not fully employed, and still have some connection with the welfare institution. Their chances in the labor market are not that bad. They are often single parent families or couples with young children, Dutch and Surinamese. They are often younger than forty years old. They did not live very long in poverty. The fifth category [5] consists of the working poor. The working poor do not have a subsidized job, but a regular job, which is often part-time work or they run their own business (N=21). They are employed, but their income is insufficient to stay out of poverty. Sometimes they receive a benefit and they complement this benefit with a part-time job. They are often young, often Turkish and native Dutch, and are single parents. They did not live very long in poverty. The sixth category [6] (N=66) consists of people who are medically unfit – I have no information on whether they are fully or partially tested unfit. Eight of them are handicapped, two of them are temporarily ill. The latter group is likely to go back to the labor market. Most of the sixty-six people are not available for the labor market and are not obliged to work. Among the medically unfit are ten couples. The partner is often also medically unfit, or for several reasons, excluded from the labor market: s/he has to take care of her / his partner, or s/he has to, but cannot work. They are much older than the other categories, are often Turkish, Surinamese or native Dutch. Their poverty duration is severe. The seventh category [7] (N=16) consists of the single parents with young children – under five. At time of the interview, they were not obliged to work. However, they have to go back to the labor market in the future. Because they have young children, it does not mean that they do not want to work; only that they are freed from the
obligation to work. They are young, Surinamese and Dutch, all women, and relatively well educated. Their poverty duration is not very long. [8] The eighth category consists of the elderly. Not surprisingly, they are old, often Dutch, and their poverty duration is severe. They do not have to work anymore. They have hardly any prospects of changing their situation, but are able to say something about the neighborhood, their social relations, the experience of poverty. Therefore, they are not expelled from the analysis. [9] The last category consists of two illegal immigrants. They are hardly part of the analysis.

With the exception of the last one, practically all categories are part of the forthcoming analysis, and I will show the manner in which the respondents articulate their respective life-worlds. The first three categories are the most important, simply because they are fully available for the labor market. (The working poor and subsidized workers reflect on their labor market experiences). The single parents with children under five still have to go back to work in the future, and will reflect therefore on their future prospects to enter the labor market. Some of the elderly contemplate on their past, and the same goes for the ill and the handicapped. And although not every respondent is obliged to work, practically all of them can express their experiences in the labor market and other fields.

2.2.2. Cultural, economic and social resources

Besides the aforementioned position of the respondents, the possession of cultural, social, and economic resources might determine the chance to end a poverty spell; with sufficient resources at their hand, they easily can end their precarious situation. In the following section, I will give insight into the respondents’ resources⁴¹. In one of the first chapters I will show how they make use of it (see chapter 3, page 55). Table 2.2 shows the distribution of the resources among the respondents.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<td>4</td>
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<tr>
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<td>14</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low&lt;sup&gt;46&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>18</td>
</tr>
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<td>11</td>
</tr>
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<td>11</td>
<td>27</td>
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<th>Sometimes</th>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>19</td>
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<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Difficult</th>
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<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Much</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>24</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<th>Few</th>
<th>Moderate</th>
<th>Much</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>46</td>
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</tbody>
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49
Cultural resources – The respondents’ educational trajectories seem to differ. Some (N=22) do not have any form of educational qualifications, others (N=10) have a college degree. For these individuals, possessing educational qualifications do not guarantee a life living out of poverty. Between the different categories, there are hardly any differences. Only the elderly seem to lack diplomas. Compared to the couples, single parents and singles, the subsidized workers and the working poor are slightly more highly educated.

Economic resources – The forthcoming data mirror the respondents’ economic resources. The researchers asked the respondents about their financial situations. The majority of the respondents judges his or her situation as insufficient (N=117). But there are differences between the categories. The elderly often judge their financial situation as sufficient, while the majority of medically unfit judge their situation as insufficient. The working poor and subsidized workers seem to be more satisfied with their financial situation. Although the majority of the respondents considers his or her financial situation as insufficient, they do not perceive themselves as poor (N=104). There are hardly any differences, only the medically unfit often see themselves as poor (N=22). The majority of the respondents is not able to save (N=126). Comparing the categories, only subsidized workers and the elderly are more often able to save. The amount of people who have debts is worth mentioning (N=135). The elderly hardly have any debts. Debts are common among those who are tested medically unfit. Similar patterns can be observed whether the respondents are able to get by. Only the elderly say that they can get by with their income. These numbers reflect on the economic position of the respondents, and say something about their capabilities to buy goods, invest in education, invite friends over for dinner, to participate in society in general, etc.

Social resources – Table 2.2 shows the amount of material and practical support the respondents are able to obtain from their social network. Material support
refers to the amount of goods the respondents can receive from their social network. Practical support refers to the amount of aid (such as moving or helping with chores) the respondents can secure from their social network. Many of the respondents seem to have access to various resources. Looking at material support, many (N=83) have said during the interview that they are able to obtain material goods from their friends and family. Comparing the categories, the elderly seem to acquire few assets. The medically unfit and the single parents with kids under five seem to acquire relatively much support. Looking at the practical support, a similar pattern can be observed. In this fashion, the respondents have said that they are capable obtaining material and practical support from their social environment. The amount of support differs between and among the categories.

2.3. Positions, comparisons, mechanisms and policy

All the respondents have to live from a low income—not exceeding the approximate income threshold of a welfare benefit. This is the principal characteristic of the respondents. They all live in one of the poverty pockets in one of the two big cities, which is the second common characteristic. However, I observed many differences among the respondents; whether they are able to get by, their educational trajectories, their social resources, age, gender, ethnicity, and poverty duration. Above all, the aforementioned tables show that there is no dominant cluster of similar people. There exists a vast variety of different kinds of people living in poverty. For example, there is no massive group of Dutch lower educated men available for the labor market, which could be compared with a similar group of Turkish men. Because either their situation differs, or their social, economic and cultural resources or poverty duration is different, it becomes notoriously difficult to say something about differences in ethnicity—if everything else being equal.

I am particularly interested in what perpetuates poverty and the mechanisms that contribute to the phenomenon that people cannot escape their precarious position. These mechanisms not always have something to do with their individual characteristics. Rather, it is about their position (distance to the labor market), the resources they can make use of (social, cultural and economic capital) and the social context (with others) in which people in poverty are embedded (the fields). The interplay between the position, the resources, and the context influences whether people in poverty can end their poverty spell. Then again, the actions of people in poverty often depend on others in the field. Moreover, as I argued in chapter 1, poverty concerns the positions of people in poverty vis-à-vis others in
the field, the *relationships* between the fields, and how these bonds obstruct upward mobility. Analyzing *relationships* between people and *relationships* between the fields has one advantage: relationships can each be slightly modified. In other words, the strained relationship with welfare officials, the internal differentiation of the neighborhood, the social environment, the lack of coordination between agencies, the structure of the labor market can be modified with the help of policy. Therefore, I will focus on the structure of the social field, and the constraints faced by people in poverty. I will show the resemblances between people in poverty in their daily interactions with others and their daily struggle to carry on. In this fashion, as we shall see, people in poverty have to deal with the same kind of situations in the relevant fields: they all have to deal with other urban dwellers, welfare officials, employers, colleagues, friends, foes, and family. I want to show the similarities in the manner in which they deal with the fields and people in each particular field. In addition, I show how the interrelation between fields perpetuates poverty over time.

In forthcoming chapters, the respondents will be described in the context of each relevant field. Instead of providing a detailed description of the research group, I will focus on the processes and mechanisms that contribute to poverty perpetuation. Furthermore, the respondents are given names and numbers, but all names are pseudonyms. The basic characteristics of the respondents can be found – with the help of these numbers – in Table 10.1, page 201.
Notes

30 “Bond voor Baanloze Scheepsbouwers,” “De algemene bond voor Nederlandse oude-
ren,” “Stichting Baan” (Belangenvereniging voor WAO-ers).

31 Since 1995, I live in the West of Rotterdam (Coolhaven, and later Het Nieuwe Westen)
up to now (the writing of this book in 2007). Therefore, I am familiar with the neighbor-
hood.

32 Two respondents were visited four times, one five times, one eight times, and informa-
tion from fourteen respondents is missing.

33 The use of this kind of questionnaire excludes researcher biases.

34 According to Couldry (2005; p. 363), “Bourdieu avoids the misleading neutrality of a
structured questionnaire or survey that reinforced rather than softens the power differential
between interviewer and respondent.”

35 The transcriptions were coded in Atlas.Ti – a software program to structure transcrip-
tions.

36 I more or less used a grounded theory approach (see for example Dey, 1999).

37 After coding, 11.113 text fragments were available for analysis.

38 See Wacquant (2002); his subtle critique.


40 I hardly use ethnicity to explain the position of people in poverty. I cannot compare the
different groups, and I do not have sufficient information on their backgrounds. I want to
try to explain poverty perpetuation by looking at other variables. See for example Weber
who criticized the use of race and ethnicity to explain social phenomena. Swedberg who
studied Weber writes: “until his death, Weber sharply criticized the way that some of his
colleagues used race to explain practically everything in society. Even though race may be
an important phenomenon, he argued, there is practically no adequate research on this
topic. As a rule, one should ways try to explain a social phenomenon with the help of the
social sciences and resort to race only when everything else has failed. Many economic
phenomena, for example which at first may seem to be caused by race, are in reality the
result of tradition” (Swedberg, 1998; p. 150-1). Weber’s original text: “The same tendency
[to explain everything by one variable, FN] is now appearing in anthropology where the
political and commercial struggles of nations for world dominance are being fought with
increasing acuteness. There is a widespread belief that ‘in the last analysis’ all historical
events are results of the interplay of innate ‘racial inequalities’. In place of uncritical de-
scriptions of ‘national characters’, there emerges the even more uncritical concoction of
social theories based on the natural sciences. We shall carefully follow the development of
anthropological research in our journal insofar as it is significant from our point of view. It
is to be hoped that the situation in which the causal explanation of cultural events by the
invocation of ‘racial characteristics’ testifies to our ignorance” (Weber, 1949; p. 69).

41 Nee and Sanders (2001) argue that the mode of incorporation is largely a function of the
social, financial, and human-cultural capital of immigrant families and how these resources
are used by individuals within and apart from the existing structure of ethnic networks and
institutions.

42 LBO / MAVO.

43 MBO/HAVO/ VWO.

44 HBO / WO.

45 About thirty-five respondents face difficulties in paying the bills on time. Fifty-eight
respondents retrench on their medical expenses.
In 1999, about 28% of low income people faced difficulties in making ends meet (SCP, 2001; p. 18), and practically every year, about seven to ten percent of low-income people have debts (SCP, 2001; p. 18).

See for example Sen (1985).

Deprivation – From all people in poverty, 60% has insufficient resources to go on holiday, to be a member of a club and 30% cannot give a dinner party, and some do not have sufficient financial resources for a hot meal everyday (cf. Snel et al. 2000; p. 47). It seems that the majority of the respondents do not suffer from severe material deprivation. However, still, twenty-nine respondents cannot have a hot meal every day, fifty-four retrench on clothing, and twenty-six retrench on heating.

Any resemblance to real names is entirely unintentional and is thoroughly a matter of coincidence.
3. Conversion strategies to conquer labor market positions

3.1. Introduction: Labor market exclusion

In the Dutch welfare state, people in poverty are often but not always excluded from the labor market. To regain self-sufficiency, to evade welfare dependency, and to participate in society, they want to have or have to get a job in the labor market. But to enter the labor market is easier said than done. People in poverty often face many obstacles. These obstacles are ranging from disability, lack of access to flexible day care arrangements, a decline of their qualifications' value, old age, disappearance of traditional labor, to competition, discrimination, and stigmatization. These obstacles are numerous. Moreover, it is often an interplay between individuals' capabilities and labor market demands. Accordingly, this chapter illuminates how people in poverty vigorously, using their resources (which can be social, cultural, and economic), attempt to reenter the labor market.

3.2. The three forms of capital

Social, cultural, and economic capital seem to play a vital part. What are these resources? Moreover, why are they useful to understand labor market integration? Pierre Bourdieu (1986) identifies these forms of capital: first [1], capital exists as economic or financial capital that corresponds to material wealth, second [2], as cultural capital which – in turn – can exist in three forms: a) “in the embodied state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and the body; b) in the objectified state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.); and c) in the institutionalized state, i.e. educational qualifications (diplomas)” (ibid. p. 243). Third [3], as social capital, which is the capital of social relationships, that will provide, if necessary, useful supports (Bourdieu, 1977b: p. 503). For people in poverty these forms of capital are essential to gain entry into the labor market. With the help of educational qualifications (cultural capital), they can access the labor market – so the theory goes. With the help of social connections (social capital) they might get a job (or information on
jobs) via a friend. Moreover, with the help of economic capital, they can invest in their educational qualifications. Therefore, capital is fuel for social mobility and a resource for strategic action. People in poverty can acquire and employ these resources in their efforts to secure future desires, in allowing them to gain advantage in society; capital simply yields power (cf. Peillon, 1998; p. 216; Young, 1999; p. 203; Svendsen & Svendsen, 2003; p. 616; Savage et al., 2005; p. 39). The different forms of capital are acquired, accumulated, and of value in certain situations or are of worth in the labor market (cf. Spillane et al., 2003; p. 3). Relatively unknown is what people in poverty precisely do with their forms of capital to enter the labor market. The concept of conversion may help.

3.3. Conversion of capital

Capital does not do anything; people make use of it. The question is, what do people do with their forms of capital? As a rule, people try to transform one form of capital into another in order to improve their impoverished situation, to enter a particular market, to (maybe) achieve upward mobility, and to maintain social standing. When Bourdieu defines the different forms of capital, he immediately addresses the conversion of capital: “Social capital is made up of social obligations (‘connections’), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital (Bourdieu, 1986; p. 243, my emphasis), and in certain conditions, cultural capital is convertible, into economic capital and is institutionalized in the forms of educational qualifications” (ibid.). For example, when people invest in educational qualifications with the help of economic capital, with these educational qualifications they can enter a particular labor market. This is how their educational qualifications are converted into economic capital in this labor market. They can get an income in exchange for their effort. If they have cultural capital, their income will rise simultaneously. Moreover, with the use of economic capital – money – they can enter particular social networks – for example an expensive golf club. In addition, with the help of these social networks, they can strengthen their position in the labor market, since this new social network provides access to high paid jobs. Along these lines, it seems that the possession of any form can reinforce the power of another or the capacity to acquire another (Young, 1999; p. 204). The forms of capital are closely and inextricably interlinked (cf. Fuchs, 2003; p. 392). They interact in different ways, diversely affecting social positions. Moreover, if people successfully use these forms of capital (when capitals are
Several studies have shown how people invest one form of capital to strengthen another (cf. Borocz & Southworth, 1996). For instance, Pat Allatt has shown (in a study of middle-class families in Britain, which drew on Bourdieu’s model of social capital) how parents tried to teach their children to acquire a high level of social literacy, and encouraged them to access critical networks (Allatt, 1993; p. 154-7, cited in Field, 2003; p. 81). In addition, Bourdieu (1984) has shown how the ability of the bourgeoisie to reproduce their social position is not a result simply of their possession of economic capital, but is reinforced by their investment in cultural practices and in the education of their children (cf. Smart, 1993; p. 390). These studies show how the bourgeoisie tried to achieve upward mobility.

How (and if) people in poverty convert one form of capital into another is relatively unknown. However, I assume that people in poverty – with the help of money commodities, and other material assets – try to increase their opportunities by investing in schooling. If they invest in job training, their cultural capital expands, and a position in the labor market might more easily be accessible. Referring to specific skills or abilities that people in poverty may acquire, cultural capital increases their personal efficacy in the labor market. Further, social capital can be vital achieving upward mobility: the possession of this capital increases opportunities for their provision of information to individuals, which can subsequently enhance their chance in the labor market (cf. Young, 1999; p. 204). For example, Mark Granovetter’s study (1974) made clear how and why social connections are vital in “getting a job.” People can acquire information on jobs via their social connections, and via this route take part in the labor market. Consequently, I assume that people in poverty in modern society commonly strive for upward mobility and, if it becomes necessary, they struggle against downward mobility. The latter is probably more relevant. Presumably, they employ reconversion strategies to improve or to maintain their position, or to enter the labor market. However, how people in poverty use their forms of capital to reenter the labor market is relatively unknown. If people in poverty cannot make use of their forms of capital, they become durably excluded from the labor market. This enduring exclusion might contribute to the perpetuation of poverty. It is therefore this chapter’s purpose to shed light on the conversion strategies of people in poverty.
3.4. Packages of capital

It would be useless to study conversion strategies if people in poverty have absolutely no cultural, economic, and social capital. They cannot convert anything in the first place. However, numerous studies have shown that practically all individuals have some amount of resources. Yet, the distribution of these resources differs enormously. For example, studies have shown that people can be high on cultural capital and low on economic capital (teachers, artists), or low on cultural capital and high on economic capital (the self-made entrepreneur), or high on all three forms of capital (aristocracy). As a general rule, various scholars suggest that individuals have packages of capital rather than having or not having a certain type of another. For example, Anheier et al. (1995; p. 862-3) suggest that “positions are characterized by high volumes of economic capital, yet lower volumes of cultural and social capital; others will rank high in terms of cultural capital, yet somewhat lower in other forms.” Referring to Bourdieu’s seminal work on reconversion strategies, Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992; p. 99) argue that “some hold a lot of economic capital and little cultural capital while others have little economic capital and large cultural assets.” The question emerges as to what the distribution of the resources is among the research group.

I reaffirm the findings of other studies that show how individuals, rather than having or not having a certain type of capital, have packages of capital. On page 49, Table 2.2 shows the distribution of the respondents’ social, economic, and cultural resources. The elderly are generally low educated, low on social resources, but relatively high on economic resources. Subsidized workers have relatively much cultural capital, are relatively high on economic capital, and average on social capital. Single parents with children over five are relatively well educated but low on social capital, and low on economic capital. Single parents with children under five have relatively much social capital, are relatively well educated, and average on economic resources. Working poor have relatively much social capital and have moderate economic capital. Although I do not want to illustrate all the different possible varieties of the packages of capital, I do demonstrate that people in poverty are not low on each and every form of capital, and that not all people in poverty lack all forms of capital. If this were the case, it would be unproblematic to show why poverty is perpetuated: the lack of capital. But this is clearly not the case. Instead, they seem to evaluate their “capabilities,” and more or less unconsciously choose which form of capital they wish. Conse-
Sequentially they convert one of their existing forms of capital to strengthen their desired form of capital. However, for reasons to be uncovered they fail.

Table 3.1 Labor market position

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obligated to work</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cum%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Couple available labor market (kids and no kids)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Single parent (kids over five) available labor market</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Single available for the labor market (no kids)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Subsidized job, trainee, job training</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Working poor, part-timers, entrepreneur</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Medically unfit: full &amp; partially, handicapped, temp ill</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>30.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Single parent (kids under five)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Elderly</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Illegal Immigrant</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>211</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing the transcriptions, I concentrated on the first five categories (see Table 3.1): the couples available labor market (kids and no kids), single parents (kids over five) available for the labor market, singles available for the labor market (no kids), and subsidized workers (those who have some sort of job training, the working poor, part-timers, and the entrepreneurs). The seventh category is also included; the single parents who are not obliged to work. However, some of them want to work. All these people have to go back to the labor market, would like either to enter the labor market, or want to strength their position in the labor market. It is difficult to compare these groups because not all the interviews contain information on conversion strategies. Focusing at the conversion strategies of people in poverty, I am particularly interested what gets in the way to change one form of capital into another.

The question is, given that the respondents have resources, why cannot they get access to the labor market? What strategies do they employ to increase their efficacy and to increase their chances in the labor market? Do they succeed in transforming their capital, or why do they fail to employ conversion strategies? I want “to uncover the principles that regulate their conversion from one into another” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; p. 118).
Reading all the transcriptions, five themes emerged. These themes reflect why people in poverty cannot convert their capital and reenter the labor market. First, people in poverty lack economic resources and, therefore, they are unable to invest in other forms of capital. Second, because these respondents depend often on welfare, they have to deal with the state regulations. These regulations obstruct capital conversion and investments. Third, people in poverty do convert forms of capital, but in the long run, these investments hardly have any pay-off. Fourth, there are strong relationships between the forms of capital: the loss of one form of capital coincides with the loss of another, resulting in a multiple loss. In the end, it becomes difficult to convert capital. Consequentially, the respondents face a vicious cycle of poverty. Fifth, it seems that they need all three forms of capital to maintain a position in the labor market. In the next subsections, I elaborate on these themes. The interplay between the three forms of capital is central.

3.4.1. Cultural capital investments and the lack of economic resources

For people in poverty, one of the major difficulties is the lack of financial resources. Another is their weak labor market position—a truism. To strengthen their labor market position, they have to use certain forms of capital (economic) to help compensate for shortfalls in respect to other resources (such as cultural). With money, they can attend a course or job training. They are, however, often trapped in a vicious circle, that starts with having no money to compensate for shortcomings in cultural capital. Therefore, they are unable to strengthen their labor market position. For people in poverty, it seems that economic capital is the root of all other types of capital (Bourdieu, 1986; p. 252). Precisely, this kind of capital—which they lack—might help them to increase their chances in the labor market. The next cases show how this process operates.

Melanie [346], a Dutch 45 years-old single mother, lives on welfare. She is tested partly medically unfit, has sometimes a regular job, works off the books, and does some voluntary work. Her position in the labor market is far from secure. From her perspective, if she wants more security in the labor market, she has to have more money. She says that financial resources make social connections and investments in education reachable: “I can get by, but only if I don’t do anything, like going to the museum, and my son does not do anything and I do not make any phone-calls. But then I do not have a social life. Therefore, if you want some friends, if you want to develop yourself mentally, and if you want to conquer a job in the labor market, you have to have more money. In my current situation, I can-
Migrants often accumulated cultural capital in their home country. Although they have cultural resources, sometimes these resources only have value in their home country. Their cultural capital devalued (after migration) and it can only be revitalized upon economic investments. However, having few economic resources, they often fail to rejuvenate their socio-economic position. Guhan [207], a 36 years-old single man has lived in the Netherlands for ten years. He migrated because he could not get a job in his home country Cape Verde. He has lived on welfare for two years. “I am a chauffeur. In Cape Verde I drove a truck.” He does not have an official license to acquire a job in the Netherlands. “I live on welfare at the moment, and I need suitable schooling. The employers always ask for an official truck driver’s license. However, that costs a lot of money, which I do not have. If I go back to school, I cannot buy food. I asked the employment agency [for money], but then I have to wait so long and nothing happens.” To get by, he worked on the side, but was caught by the welfare agency, and his benefit has been ever since curtailed. To get by, he has severe debts, which further undermine his financial position. His network members are in a similar position, so they cannot support him. Thus, on the one hand, he needs more cultural capital to get a job, but on the other hand, he lacks the financial resources to invest in this cultural capital. It becomes clear that his poverty status obstructs capital investments and, consequently, upward mobility, self-sufficiency, and economic independence.

Some know well what their position is in the labor market, and they know that they have to invest economic capital in cultural capital. They want to try to compensate one form of capital for another, to convert one form of capital into another – economic capital into cultural capital. However, because they lack financial resources, investments are hard to make, and conversion fails.

3.4.2. Cultural capital investments and institutional barriers

Those who are excluded from the labor market often receive a state benefit. About 70% of the respondents receives some kind of benefit. In exchange for a benefit, they are restricted to state regulations. For example, they are obliged to apply for jobs, have to be available for the labor market, are only allowed for job training under certain conditions, and have to account for holidays. People who
receive a benefit have less freedom, are controlled, and feel that they cannot do everything with the money they receive. Ofentimes, they are restricted from investing in cultural capital. They are not always allowed to go to college. But people in poverty have to compete for jobs in the labor market, and therefore must have a good deal of cultural capital. People in poverty are thereby restricted from investing in cultural capital, but to compete for jobs they have to invest in cultural capital. This inconsistency causes tensions among people in poverty.

Since her divorce seventeen years ago, Jessica [104] lives on welfare. She is low educated, 52 years-old, and she wants to invest in cultural capital in order to improve her position in the labor market. In the end, she wants to gain more economic capital and to achieve financial independence: “Sometimes I wonder, should I attend a course in computers, because I will become as stupid as a rock." Interviewer: did you ever ask permission at the welfare agency to attend a course? Jessica: Yes, but I am not allowed. Interviewer: What is the reason? Jessica: You have to be available for the labor market. It is a peculiar line of reasoning. If you attend a course and you do not inform the welfare agency, they curtail your benefit.”

Monica [313] is a 56 years-old highly-educated woman. She is, formerly, a single mother. Single parents receive child support until their children are eighteen years old. After a child’s 18th birthday, the child support stops. From the moment Monica’s son became eighteen years old (financially an independent adult), her child support ended. As a consequence, her income declined dramatically, and ever since she cannot get by. She started to look for a job, but her cultural capital – in the form of a diploma – had lost its value in the labor market: “his 18th birthday ruined my welfare! I will tell you. Factually, I lost my child support benefit and my son’s schooling assistance. I lost about 300 Euros a month...cut off from my welfare benefit! His birthday meant a big problem. I panicked, can you imagine? From that moment, I started to look for a job very fast. Being outside the labor market for many years, I did not find anything in nursing. My diploma lost its value. Therefore, I wanted to attend a course, but nothing was available at that moment. And I could only attend a course after living six years on welfare.”

Thomas [317] a 62 years-old single man went through a similar situation. As opposed to Jessica, he was allowed to attend a course. He invested in cultural capital and this course was financed by the employment agency (an institution that nego-
tiates between employers and unemployed), but the employment agency shifted the expenditures to the welfare agency (an institution that organizes benefits to the unemployed): “One time, I was busy attending a course to become a social worker. The employment agency told me that they did not want to pay for it, but the welfare agency would pay for it. I was attending the course for half a year, and then I received a letter from the welfare agency. The welfare agency did not want to pay for it either. The reason: the course would take two years and they do not finance a two-year course. Therefore, I had to quit the course. And after that, we were in conflict. I said to them: ‘well, if you do that, I will stay on welfare for the rest of my life’. I want to go to work, and I expect them to offer me help.’”

Kevin [175], his wife and their kids have lived on welfare for ten years. He is 32 years-old, and is very low on cultural capital. He says that if you do not have any diplomas, your chances in the labor market are nil. He also says that it does not make any sense to apply for jobs. It is of no use. He is curtailed on his benefit because he committed fraud. “Every year I become poorer.” He invested his own money in a course to become a fully licensed taxi driver. Because he received a disability benefit, having been freed from the obligation to work, he was allowed to take a course. He obtained the diploma, and to buy himself in he needed money. He asked the welfare agency if he could borrow some money, but his request was rejected: “I am on welfare for about ten years. I saved some money and attended a course. I succeeded. If you get the taxi diploma, you have to have a job within a year. I could have started easily. However, I had to pay 1500 Euros car rental and insurance. Because you rent a car from the taxi company, you have to pay money in advance. I wanted to work so I went to the welfare office and asked them to lend me some money. But they rejected my request!”

Accordingly, the respondents do want to invest in cultural capital and get a job in the labor market. But besides their lack of financial resources, they are also restricted by state regulations. From doing so, these regulations obstruct investments in cultural capital as in the cases of Monica and Jessica. Since they are not able to gain more cultural capital, their chance in the labor market decreases. In the case of Thomas, organizations tried to reduce the costs of reintegration (the unemployment agency), or tried to live up to the rules (the welfare agency). But the result was that Thomas could not attend his job training any longer and his investments in cultural capital stopped. Nor did Kevin’s investments have a pay off. His economic capital enabled investments in cultural capital. However, to
convert his recently-acquired cultural capital, more money was necessary. He asked the welfare agency, but it denied access to additional financial resources, so that finally his cultural capital could not be used to get a job. These cases make clear that investment and conversion of capital depends partly on the state regulations and legislation. The respondents face investment barriers and, as time goes by, their cultural capital will only lose its value in the labor market. The relationships between the fields become evident: there seems to be a strong relationship between the state and the formal labor market, and there is a lack of “coordination between agencies” (cf. Wacquant, 1998; p. 31). Moreover, as a result of this lack of coordination, some people retreat from attempts to improve their position.

3.4.3. The investments’ symbolic and economic pay-off

The long term unemployed can, under certain conditions, acquire a subsidized job. For example, they can work in the urban security force or as school janitors. These jobs are subsidized and created by the state. The policy design is as follows: the unemployed can accumulate their cultural capital (in the form of work experience) while they are employed. In the future, it would be easier to get a job in the (official) labor market. Hence, cultural capital investment coincides with economic self-sufficiency and, probably, an increase in social capital.

However, these jobs are low paid, and hardly provide more income than would a benefit: the loss of means-tested welfare benefits and/or new income tax payments is equal to, or even exceed additional earnings (the poverty trap), in this case the subsidized job (the poverty trap exists because people – after accepting a job – lose part of their rental subsidy and their health care compensation changes; these grants are distributed, among others, via the ministry of housing and tax institutions and not always via the welfare office). Rebecca [201] is a Cape Ver- dian 50 years-old mother and lives on a disability benefit. Because of her father’s health situation – he already lived in the Netherlands – she migrated to the Netherlands 21 years ago. She was a teacher in Cape Verde and, after arriving in the Netherlands, she worked as a cleaner. After a while, she was tested medically unfit, and after a couple years re-tested. The employment agency offered her a subsidized job and told her that her income would increase after a couple of years. This was not the case: “I never would have accepted this job, if I knew beforehand that my income would be the same. Compared to the welfare benefit, I receive almost the same amount of money.” Besides that, she will never earn more than her benefit, but she also has to compete with others in the labor market.
“If you look at all the job applications, they only want people not older than 25 years old.” For her, this subsidized job is the only way out of her dependent position.

A 26 years-old averagely educated Cape Verdian woman [205] explains that her welfare benefit was financially better than her subsidized job. She receives less income since she works, and lost her financially profitable health care insurance. Interviewer: “did you know beforehand that your income would not improve?” “They told me, if you accept the job, you will receive more money. They said, you will improve, not lose, and after two years, you will get a regular job. They promised me a high salary. The improvement in salary is not true and the real job is not true. I think they lied to me. I do not want to live on welfare. I want a better job with a future. They [her colleagues] treat you badly. Having such a subsidized job, you have this negative mark. I do not belong to the real colleagues. They see us as good-for-nothings.” Since she does not belong to the “real” co-workers, in all probability, her social network will not get bigger, and she will not accumulate social capital.

They know that these subsidized jobs are oftentimes their only escape (from welfare dependency). In spite of this, with reference to the subsidized jobs, many respondents show their discontents. For example, these subsidized jobs suffer from a bad reputation: [105] “Interviewer: did you hear about these jobs? Respondent: Yes, but how can they think up something that ridiculous? I think it is terrible.” [154] “I do not want a subsidized job. I have this [negative] image of these street guards. I think it is so funny.” From their viewpoint, the personal gain is absent: [111] “They created all these jobs. They [the government] take advantage of it, we do not.” There seems to be a mismatch between what they have to do in a subsidized job and that which they are actually capable of: [121] “They offered me a subsidized job. It was an invented job. I had to do several minor chores in a company. Well, I refused. I can do more than that... bad job.” What is more important is the stigma (an attribute that is deeply discrediting (Goffman, 1963, p. 3)) that goes along with the subsidized job: [170] “You are branded too. Everybody knows that you have a subsidized job.” As a consequence, many respondents do not want to get a subsidized job: [142] “I see all these colored people and losers walking down the street in their uniforms [as street guards in subsidized jobs]. I cannot imagine myself doing that.” The media intensify all these images and labeling processes: [156] “In the Netherlands, they put you in a cate-
gory. I saw a television broadcasting. They interviewed three subsidized workers. Then you see somebody picking up garbage in the park. You also notice how bad they are paid.” As a result, the respondents distance themselves from the subsidized workers: [136] “with all respect to these people [subsidized workers], I am not going to be among them.” Another outcome: they resist it: [351] “I want to work, but I won’t contribute to this fucking system.” However, the mixture of the job’s reputation and the job’s payment intensifies the refusal to take up these subsidized jobs: [348] “I think it is a little embarrassing. I would rather have a job without the state [governmental interference]. This job gives me the feeling of being a loser, and the financial compensation is pathetic.” The last quote reflects both the economic and the symbolic exchange. If they take up a subsidized job, they think they lose both financial capital and their self-worth.

If people in poverty invest in their cultural capital, these investments not have an instantaneous pay-off. Moreover, from their perspective, there will be no financial compensation in the future either. Besides the impression that the investment does not have a pay-off, they also do not earn more than an average welfare benefit. Finally, the respondents experience these jobs often as stigmatizing. These subsidized jobs suffer from deplorable connotations, and those who occupy such a position feel marked as secondary. From the respondents’ perspective, these jobs fail to provide sufficient economic capital, cannot guarantee cultural capital, and even their social capital will not accumulate. In sum, although people in poverty do convert cultural capital in the labor market, it does not have a pay-off in the short run.

3.4.4. The marriage of economic and social capital

Scholars often have a positive view on resources and capital. As mentioned before, people can use their social, cultural, and economic capital to get a regular job in the labor market. As Granovetter (1974) shows, jobs are oftentimes found via informal information channels. So you have to have social capital to get job. However, for people in poverty, the situation is more complex. They have few economic resources, which has many consequences. These consequences shed light on the interplay between the forms of capital; the forms of capital are strongly interlinked. If people lose financial capital, they cannot maintain social connections. When their social capital drops, the likelihood to find a job via social connections (through conversion) also declines. The next cases show the relationship between social capital and financial capital.
Some examples: [147] “I used to have some real good friends. But with no money, it is becoming incredibly difficult (to stay in touch). If somebody earns much money, and you do not... you cannot buy a round of drinks in the bar.” [137] “We do not go to birthday parties, and we do not visit friends anymore. You have to bring presents. I do not want to visit them empty handed.” [203] “At the time I had a job, many friends came to my house. But now I do not have any money to buy beer and whiskey for them, so they do not come over.” The relationship is simple: without money, they cannot have a social life. Moreover, it becomes notoriously complicated to find a job without these social connections. Getting out of this vicious cycle is even more difficult.

Table 3.2 shows the relationship between social capital and economic capital. The interviewers asked the respondents whether their social network increased or decreased in size. The interviewers also asked whether their income changed over the past five years – their financial capital. If we look at the relationship between the change in financial and social capital, we see that a strong decline in income often coincides with less social contacts. Fewer economic assets often goes hand-in-hand with less social connections. This is also shown by González de la Rocha (2006; p. 69). She argues that rising poverty has had serious effects on poor people’s capacity to maintain networks of social exchange. She, furthermore, suggests that as economic uncertainty stretches on, apparently indefinitely, a social and cultural context of radical exclusion has emerged.
Table 3.2 Correspondence between economic capital and social capital

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change social capital [past five years]</th>
<th>Change financial capital [past five years]</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decline</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stable</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The process of the reduction of social capital and economic capital can be illuminated. Nicole [141] possesses relatively much social and cultural capital, but has few economic assets. Her friends are amazed that she does not possess a color television and other electronic devices: “Don’t you have a VCR?” She received an old VCR from her friends. Since she is living on welfare, she did not accumulate financial resources. However, her working friends’ capital did expand: “At a certain age, you have a number of friends. My contemporaries have work, they have built up something. But I did not build up anything during the past ten years. I lived on welfare for the last decade. If something breaks down, I cannot replace it. So I lost a large amount of stuff. People around me expand their possessions. Their [clothing] closet gets bigger, mine shrinks. Differences between us are getting bigger.” The bond between economic and social capital becomes visible. The non-accumulation of financial resources happens together with the loss of social capital. She gives an example of how this process operates: “Lately, a friend told me that I should do something with my hair. But I choose to have long hair, so I do not have to go to the hairdresser [to save money]. That is what I told her. She responded that long hair is out of fashion. I laughed my head off! Like I care! I cannot buy fashionable clothing for many years. Therefore, I do not want to be involved with this friend any longer. I will ditch her.” Her friend was condescending towards her life style. In addition, her lack of financial resources blocked an “adequate life-style and taste” (cultural capital), and in the end, her social capital declined. In this process, social, cultural, and economic capital are strongly interrelated, and influence the social position of Nicole.
According to Alyssa [223], her friends accumulated more cultural capital than she did and, as a consequence, more economic capital. Finally, her friends chose a social network that was appropriate to their life-style and taste: “Some of my old friends wanted to hang out with me. Because of my financial situation, I could not. They went to college and acquired good jobs. I did not. I always thought they were good friends. But they blamed me for lacking financial wellbeing. They do not want friends with problems. Instead, they want a friend with whom they can go out every week.”

These cases and Table 3.2 show the relationship between several forms of capital. These respondents often lost financial capital, and this loss has severe consequences for the possession of other forms of capital. The strongest relationship exists between social and economic capital. Social capital needs continuously to be refilled with financial capital – which they do not have. Precisely this social capital might be the key to the labor market. Another relationship exists between financial capital and a certain life style (cultural capital). Financial capital makes an appropriate life-style possible (going out with your friends), and this life-style is heavily merged with social connections (social capital). Consequentially, financial resources make a life-style possible, and a life-style can be a key to social capital. In any case, the respondents face difficulties maintaining their social relations and, hypothetically these social connections should offer entrance to the labor market. In this manner, the exclusion from the labor market results in fewer financial resources. Less financial resources results in less social capital. Then again, this social capital is necessary to get access to the labor market. These people face a vicious cycle of social exclusion: the exclusion from the labor market results in exclusion from social networks, and the field of social networks is strongly related to the labor market.

3.4.5. To maintain a position in the labor market

Among the respondents, many single parents have to or want to work (see Table 3.1). They are often outside the labor market for many years. The first years of their parenthood, they were not obliged to work. During that time, first, they lost work experience (cultural capital). They hardly worked and therefore lost qualifications (not all, there is still something left of it). Furthermore, because parenting is a busy job, they did not have the time and the money to maintain all the social connections. So they lost social capital. Enduringly outside the labor market, they ended up with debts losing economic capital. Even if they can get access to the
labor market, they hardly profit from the job financially – the previous benefit often exceed the job income. They also have few opportunities to get flexible day care for their children. Even if they do, day care costs a lot of money. These single parents lost practically all forms of capital, and face many obstacles reentering the labor market. To maintain a position in the labor market, single parents oftentimes have to have all three forms of capital: social capital to provide for flexible cheap day care, sufficient cultural capital to get a job which secures an income more than the average welfare benefit, and economic capital to pay for the day care. But precisely people in poverty do not have all forms of capital. If they lack any one of the forms of capital, their chance to maintain a position in the labor market becomes small.

Jennifer [121], a 32 years-old single parent, had a job. At the time she worked, compared to the welfare benefit, she received five Euros per month more. She does not have any friends to baby-sit for her baby girl. She also does not have much money, nor did she finish her schooling: “I started to work in the kindergarten. I worked five days a week. I went to my work at half past six in the morning. My child was still a baby. In the afternoon, I came home. So many things were involved: taking care of my kid and going back to work. I could not handle it. In the evening, I was still making phone calls for my work. I went nuts. In the bus in the morning, I started to get very uneasy. Then I thought, I want quit my job, what am I doing? I earned five Euros per month more. Then I made a decision and quit the job.”

Katelyn [348] is a Dutch single parent and is 35 years old. She has two children. One kid is three years old so Katelyn is not obliged to work. She attended college, but never got a degree. Her financial situation is not very good. She quit her job: “it was too intense. First, my child went to the kindergarten, but my ex-husband disagreed. In his opinion, it was too expensive. Therefore, I acquired a child-minder, prearranged. However, she lived miles away. I had two jobs, a baby-sitter out of town, and I was biking through the entire city taking care of everything. I tolerated it for one year. I received less money. I had to take care of my child support, I lost my tax exemptions, and I sacrificed so much for a job I disliked.”

If people in poverty have sufficient social capital, they can arrange flexible day care. If they have sufficient economic capital, they can pay for flexible day care
in the first place. If they have sufficient cultural capital, they can likely get a high paid job. However, people in poverty sometimes do not have all three forms of capital in their possession. This comes on top of labor market demands, which seems to request cultural capital. Jobs may offer fewer financial resources than an average welfare benefit. Endowed with all forms of capital, people in poverty might overcome these problems. Along these lines, there seems to be a severe disparity between the respondents’ cultural capital, labor market demands, financial earnings, and the availability of flexible day care. As a final point, to maintain a position in the labor market, they have to have all three forms of capital.

3.5. Conclusion: Conversion Obstacles
In conclusion, first of all, respondents can only access the labor market with sufficient cultural resources. They know this, and therefore try to invest in cultural capital to increase their chances. However, they have little financial resources and therefore investments in cultural capital are hard to make. They are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty. Finally, as time goes by, this circle further reduces their chances in the labor market. Second, state regulations make investments in cultural capital difficult. People in poverty depend on state benefits, have to deal with the state regulations, and have to conform to the state rules. However, they face the contradictions of the state. From their perspective, there are frictions between labor market demands and the welfare regulations. For example, the labor market requests that people have educational qualifications; without diplomas you are not much of anything. Nevertheless, people in poverty are not always allowed to invest in cultural capital, because they have to be available for the labor market. This contradiction makes it difficult to increase their chances in the labor market. Third, the only entrance to the labor market is often getting a subsidized job. People in poverty can get a subsidized job, which is available to them and is often the only entrance to the labor market. However, compared to the welfare benefit, these jobs often do not result in more economic capital. To make it even worse, these jobs suffer from deplorable connotations. Besides the absence of the economic gain, there is also a symbolic loss – a loss of social status. Because these jobs are stigmatizing, people in poverty have a hard time accepting these jobs. This double loss makes it difficult for people in poverty to accept a subsidized job and to enter the labor market. Fourth, they need all three forms of capital to maintain a position in the labor market. One form of capital can compensate for shortcomings of the other. For example, social capital can provide for
flexible day care, and this day care can facilitate people staying in the labor mar-
ket. Nevertheless, since people in poverty hardly ever have sufficient capital in all
ranges, it becomes difficult for them to maintain a position the labor market.

Several fields are interrelated (which has effects). First, the field of social net-
works is related to the labor market. We saw that the loss of income often coin-
cides with the loss of social contacts. Alternatively, in the capital lingo, the loss
of economic capital often means a loss of social capital. Second, the state and the
labor market are solidly interconnected. Whether people in poverty are able to
convert one form of capital into another depends on state regulations. What we
also observed is that people in poverty stop attempting to reenter the labor mar-
ket. Their conversion strategies did not have any effect, they faced so many state
regulations, or their economic gain was not compelling enough. The ultimate
consequence of the poor relationship between the fields: they stop applying for
jobs, do not start looking for jobs, or resign from social life. People in poverty
actively retreat themselves – as a kind of self-exclusion – from the labor market.
The final effect is that their position as impoverished is perpetuated.

Two elements are neglected in this chapter. First, I did not elaborate on the role of
social capital. Social capital was hardly used to enter the labor market. This raises
a question: Why didn’t they use their social connections to access the labor mar-
ket? Second, another factor is the position of the state, which seems to play a vital
role in the life world of people in poverty. The respondents experienced many
institutional barriers reentering the labor market. These barriers and state restric-
tions need more attention, which I will elaborate on in the forthcoming chapters.
Social capital will be discussed in chapter 6, and the role of the state will be dis-
cussed in the next one.
Social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain ends that in its absence would not be possible (Coleman, 1988; p. 98).

The concept of convertibility between various forms of capital is important; “It is a basis for strategies ensuring the reproduction of capital, and the establishment and maintenance of individual’s social standing” (Mateju & Lim, 1995; p. 121). The theme of convertibility is frequently referred to, but never systematically elaborated (Peillon, 1998; p. 219). Bourdieu readily admits his dissatisfaction with his treatment of the “conversion problem” (cf. Johnston & Percy-Smith, 2003; p. 323). “I constantly raise the problem of conversion of one kind of capital into another, in terms that do not completely satisfy even me… What are the laws governing that conversion? What defines the exchange rate at which one kind of capital is converted into another (Bourdieu, 1993; p. 33-34)?” The quest for such general laws is bound to remain elusive (Peillon, 1998; p. 219).

Strategies for preservation and upward mobility that Bourdieu outlines are e.g. the re-conversion of economic into educational capital by the business bourgeoisie, protectionism, segregation, discrimination, pretension, and imitation (Fuchs, 2003; p. 399-400).

Using the forms-of-capital model, Nee and Sanders (2001) argue, that the supply of social, financial and human-cultural capital possessed by immigrant families shaped the mode of incorporation in a given societal context.

Although some scholars suggest this is not the case: those who are relatively high on financial and cultural capital also tend to be high on social capital (cf. Field, 2003; p. 75).

A similar line of reasoning can be found in Savage et al. (2005; p. 40). They write that “there can be more or less (volume), and more or less different types (composition), which works in different ways in various fields, and which has varying potential for accumulations and convertibility.”

The most difficult aspect to explore is how people accumulated certain types of capitals, while they do not accumulate others. Probably, the amount of capital largely depends on the individual life-trajectories. For example Young (1999; p. 202) has shown how low-income African American men have accumulated certain kinds of capital throughout their lives.

Kolankiewicz (1996; p. 436) writes that “the ability to translate … educational attainment into entrepreneurial opportunity depends upon both individual and systematic factors. It also depends on factors such as the speed of transformation which can render certain assets obsolete or redundant.” As time goes by, cultural capital (diplomas) will become worth less in the market. The respondent blamed herself for being “stupid,” but actually did not take the “systematic factors” into account.

It seems that these people do not understand the deferred gratification principle; a principle which encourages individuals and groups to postpone immediate consumption in order to work, train, invest or gain in some other way an enhanced return at a future date (cf. Schneider & Lysgaard, 1953; Marshall, 1998). They can invest in a new job, even when this job is low-paid, so in the end they will get a better job. However, since they often need money right now, it is difficult to postpone their ‘gratification’. They immediately have to have money: to buy food, clothing, pay for education, their bills, the rent etc. They cannot accept less income, since they are forced to think about today. Understanding the deferred gratification principle, they have little space to maneuver.

Bourdieu emphasizes the interdependency between social and economic capital. According to him (1986; p. 249) the volume of the social capital possessed by any given agent
depends on the volume of economic capital possessed in his own right, and therefore social capital is never completely independent of other forms of capital.

61 “The reproduction of social capital presupposes an unceasing effort of sociability, a continuous series of exchanges in which recognition is endlessly affirmed and reaffirmed” (Bourdieu, 1986; p. 250).

62 According to Bauman “the poor of a consumer society are socially defined, and self-defined, first and foremost as blemished, defective, faulty and deficient – in other words, inadequate – consumers” (1998; p. 38).

63 According to Lamont and Lareau (1988, p. 158), Bourdieu argues that cultural capital is used by dominant groups to mark cultural distance and proximity, monopolize privileges, and exclude and recruit new occupants of high status positions. Bourdieu adopts a more Durkheimian approach and focuses on the necessary classificatory effects of cultural practices. Cultural capital is used to exclude and unify people, not only lower status groups, but equals as well.

64 Social capital according to Bourdieu is in its own right directly useful to network members and, additionally, might help to compensate for shortfalls in respect to other resources (cf. Field, 2003; p. 74).
4. Close Encounters of the Bureaucratic Kind

4.1. Introduction: welfare dependency

People in poverty often depend on social security benefits. Scholars, who try to explain social security dependency (often long-term receipt of welfare), focus on different aspects of the relation between people in poverty and the welfare system (Fraser & Gordon, 1994). They note, for example, that people in poverty often seem to have a choice between low paid work and living on welfare, and prefer the latter. For instance, Charles Murray (1984) suggests that, as a result of the strategic use of social policy, the number of people in poverty has been raised. The laws that were developed to relieve the poor became a major cause of poverty (cf. Wilson, 1987; Peterson, 1991; Kelso, 1994; Wilson, 1996). Therefore, public assistance – although originally designed to provide temporary relief – is said to have created incentives for permanent reliance on government support (Fernandez Kelly, 1995; p. 214). This perspective also became popular in the Netherlands; according to Engbersen et al. (1993; p. 227-8), the mixture of the corporatist, social democratic and liberal welfare state created a group of strategically operating welfare clients. Accordingly, there is a general concern that welfare creates dependency. The concern about this is that people have a choice what to do: living on welfare or taking up employment. The manner in which policy is designed reaffirms this line of thought. Policy programs to challenge welfare dependency often begin with the idea that people rather stay on welfare than going back to work. This vision still maintains centrality in policy and policy reform. Whether policy makers emphasize the carrot of making work pay and providing programs to enhance employability or the stick of time limits and sanctions for failure to adhere to social and program rules, norms and values, “reform policies purport to embody a commitment to a behavioral model that focuses on individual utility maximization based on the values that policy makers assume” (Tickamyer et al., 2000; p. 176). However, there may be other factors involved, for instance the manner in which welfare distribution is organized.
For decades, scholars developed another perspective. To analyze welfare dependence, contradictory arguments of scholars focus on the interactions between welfare officials and welfare clients. These interactions happen at the so-called street level, where policy delivery may be most critical, because the interactions of the welfare officials with clients have substantial and sometimes unexpected consequences for the actual direction and outcome of public policies (cf. Blau, 1960, 1965; Lipsky, 1980; Engbersen, 1990; Van der Veen, 1990; Meyers et al., 1998; Ypeij & Engbersen, 2002; Ypeij, 2004; Laakso & Drevdahl, 2006). These interactions between welfare officials and clients – in case of a poor relationship – might become an impediment for the latter to take up employment; if the client and the welfare official cannot get along very well, the chance that the client will go from welfare to work declines. Therefore, I am particularly interested in the interactions between welfare officials and clients, and what the consequences of the interactions are for poverty perpetuation. For that reason, this chapter addresses the nature of welfare dependency. After a description of the welfare bureaucracy, I will describe the struggle between the welfare officials and clients. Finally, I will give examples of how respondents (“as clients”) experience the bureaucratic encounters.

4.2. The bureaucratic field and the symbolic struggle

I am particularly interested in the field of social welfare provision (i.e. government programs which seek to provide a minimum level of income, service or other support for disadvantaged people), and whether this field enables or constrains clients from taking up employment. How does this field look? The welfare office is one of the major elements of the welfare field for people in poverty; if they want to apply for welfare they have to make a claim. At the welfare office, consequently, they face large-scale bureaucracies. Bureaucracies are goal-oriented organizations based on a clearly defined division of labor whereby each job in the organizational chart is spelled out in detail (Katz & Danet, 1973; p. 4). The Dutch state distributes welfare via these large-scale bureaucracies – and not via tax legislation. Because many people (for example, 412,320 in the year 1998) in the Netherlands depend on welfare, the bureaucracy is the most rational way to accomplish welfare distribution. Since a relatively small number of people (welfare officials) can coordinate the activities of a relatively large number of people (welfare clients), bureaucracy is inevitable (cf. Dahl & Lindblom, 1953; p. 237). Max Weber (cf. Ringer 2004; p. 221) characterized bureaucracy, on the one hand,
as a crucial element in the rationalization of modern political economic institutions: technically efficient, sustained by specialized knowledge, and indispensable as an organizational device in every realm of modern life. On the other hand, he characterized bureaucracy as a threat to individual freedom, equality, and cultural vitality (cf. Blokland, 2001; p. 64). However, it is unsatisfactory to argue that the bureaucracy is the ultimate cause of welfare dependency. To continue this line of reasoning, the bureaucracy becomes a big vague Kafkanian structure, which fully controls the lives of clients. This is not very accurate. What is real are the relationships and interactions between clients and welfare officials, which is why scholars argue that policy outcomes are to a large extent jointly produced through transactions between frontline workers in social agencies and their clients (Meyers et al., 1998; p. 2). Oftentimes, “the welfare state (and its bureaucracies) is defined, in a very literal way, in terms of the relationship between administrative agencies and clients” (cf. Offe, 1984, cited in Peillon, 1998; p. 215). Therefore, it becomes necessary to study the relationships and transactions between welfare officials and the respondents. These transactions and interactions can be observed, are real and relational, and show what actually happens.

Central question is: What are the features of these transactions? An important element of the transaction is that clients must prove they deserve social assistance. If people want to claim welfare, they have to demonstrate need. Welfare benefits in the Netherlands are characterized by income and/or assets tests, and are means-tested (Behrendt, 2000; p. 24). Means-tested indicates that the provision of the benefit takes place after a bureaucratic investigation and assessment of income and wealth, which demonstrates need. Welfare officials execute these bureaucratic investigations, and they have some discretion to determine whether clients deserve social assistance. Therefore, welfare officials interact directly with clients (Bovens & Zouridis, 2002; p. 175), they are mandated to determine eligibility, levels of entitlements, the actual benefits clients may receive (Hasenfeld et al., 1987; p. 397), then they continue to check on whether clients remain eligible – a continuous classification (Blau, 1973; p. 230).

The question: What precisely happens during the bureaucratic encounters? When clients have to show their deservingness during these bureaucratic encounters, they earn their rights by demonstrating that they are “deserving poor” – a symbolic and moral classification (Hasenfeld et al., 1987 p. 388; Knegt, 1987; Engbersen, 1990; Van der Veen, 1990). The deserving poor were those people who
are not able to take care of themselves. They were not expected to work because of their age, gender, family status, or physical limitations, so that they are thus deemed as meriting government support. The undeserving poor, on the other hand, are expected to work and consequently warranted only (limited) haphazard government support (Steensland 2006; p. 1274)\(^6\). This distinction is also used in the Dutch welfare system (cf. Engbersen, 1990; p. 151). People who are not entitled to any other social security benefit and prove to be incompetent to work, are eligible for welfare. Thus, during the bureaucratic encounters, this dichotomy is central. Hypothetically, – theoretically – clients want to belong to the deserving poor, and attempt to present themselves as deserving. For their part, the welfare officials have to decide to classify clients either as undeserving or deserving. In these processes, the client must present her / himself as deserving, while the welfare official has to accept or to reject their classifications as worthy. In these decisions, the interest of clients and welfare officials may conflict (Hasenfeld et al., 1987. p. 401). During the interactions, there is a tension between the welfare official and the client about whether the client deserves social assistance. Therefore, scholars often suggest that social welfare policy cannot be fully understood without recognizing that it is fundamentally a set of symbols that try to differentiate between the deserving and the undeserving poor (cf. Handler & Hasenfeld (1991; p. 11). However, if everything goes by the book, what is the problem?

Both the welfare official and the client have some space to determine the outcome of the transactions. On the one hand, scholars argue that “street-level bureaucrats” experience organizational pressure, have to make many decisions, and sometimes their individual preferences predominate in these decisions (Lipsky, 1980). Because welfare officials have some space to maneuver, they can interpret the rules to their own benefit (making work easy, reducing work pressure) (cf. Riccucci et al., 2004). This is often referred to as discretionary space or bureaucratic discretion (cf. Keiser et al., 2004). On the other hand, not only the welfare officials are afforded considerable discretion in meeting their roles and obligations, clients may well respond to “the practices of control through strategies of resistance or submission” (Peillon, 1998; p. 222). In this way, clients also have a kind of “breathing space” as do the welfare officials. During these bureaucratic encounters, they also have many choices at hand. They can avoid the bureaucracy, demolish the welfare office, threaten the welfare officials, or abuse the system. It seems that power operates both relationally and reciprocally. The bureaucracy is not a “one way street” in which welfare officials determine who gets what by the
book. The bureaucracy is a field within which people frequently regularly interact, classify, and struggle for their interests. The features of the relationship determine the outcome: either take up employment or stay on welfare.

Due to continuous eligibility checks, welfare clients develop a durable relationship with the welfare office, i.e. with various welfare officials. The quality of the relationship (and the exchange) might influence the outcome. To grasp the interactions and the relationships in the welfare bureaucracy, the dichotomy of deserving/undeserving can be used as a heuristic device. For several reasons, it enables us to analyze the interchange between welfare officials and clients. First, (as we shall see) the interactions and exchanges are interspersed with questions as to whether clients are entitled to welfare and whether they belong to the right symbolic category. Second, the Dutch welfare state draws boundaries between those who are entitled to welfare because they cannot work (the deserving poor, who have acceptable reasons for being poor), and those who claim welfare, while still able to work (the undeserving poor, those who many people thought could and should earn a living for themselves (Peterson, 1991; p. 10)).

Therefore, this chapter addresses two questions. 1) How do the respondents experience the eligibility checks and the relationships with welfare officials? 2) How do they react to these checks? This chapter begins with the premise that people are not passive entities that simply live through the bureaucratic encounters, but are active agents that shape the interactions with the bureaucracy, in general, and the welfare officials in particular. Therefore, people might employ several strategies to manage and, challenge practices of the state. Welfare dependency is not the outcome of a choice, but needs to be approached as a process. Thus, I address the question of welfare dependency and focus on how the respondents make sense of and deal with the welfare system and its related symbolic classifications. I take the client’s point of view. Although the respondents hardly used the terms deserving and undeserving, they told stories and gave examples that closely mirrored the meanings of these terms that are extensively found in both US public opinion and policy circles (Katz. 1990). Of course, the results and interpretations reported here cannot determine definitively the objected circumstances of how welfare functions for these individuals. What they do show is how the respondents perceive the reception of benefits. In what follows, the experienced encounters are described. First of all, I have to determine which respondents are part of the analysis.
4.3. In search of welfare dependency: The data

The majority of the respondents live from a welfare, disability, or unemployment benefit. They depend on these benefits for an average of seven years, with a minimum of one month and a maximum of thirty-seven years. Those who are depending on the state for decades often receive a disability benefit and are no longer obliged to work. About 21% (N=45) lives on a benefit up to two years, 25% (N=53) two to five years, 24% (N=52) five to twelve years, and 25% (N=53) lives on a benefit over twelve years. Hence, this researched group depends on welfare for quite a few years (see also Table 2.1 Labor market position, gender, age and poverty duration, page 46). Because many respondents live from a welfare benefit (or they apply for exceptional welfare needs), they have some sort of connection with the welfare office.

Table 4.1 Quality of interactions with the welfare officials

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feels treated without any respect</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands the checks, but does not like it</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory bond</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences no problems because of handicap or illness</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has no connection with the welfare office (old age)</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No info (old age, no interview, not asked)</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analyzing the transcriptions, I focused on how the respondents experience the relationship with the welfare officials (Table 4.1). Many of the respondents (N=59) accept the manner in which they are treated, and understand why they are checked. However, it is, from their viewpoint, not one of the most enjoyable things in life. Most significantly, forty-two respondents feel they are treated by the welfare officials without any respect. During the interviews, they harshly express their discontent towards the welfare officials; they absolutely do not like receiving a benefit, and feel dishonored during the encounters. Only fifteen respondents have a satisfactory bond with the welfare officials. Although some of them are obliged to work, they maintain a good relationship. About ten percent of the respondents do not have any trouble with the welfare officials.
### Table 4.2 Labor market position and quality of interactions

<table>
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<tr>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has no connection with the welfare office</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feels treated without any respect</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiences no problems because of handicap</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understands the checks, but does not like it</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfactory bond</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 shows the relationship between the bureaucratic encounters and the labor market position. The elderly are not included. What is noteworthy is that many of the subsidized workers express their discontent towards the welfare officials. The explanation: they are often reintegrated by the welfare office and still have a durable relationship with one of the welfare officials. They are often not satisfied with the payment and the manner in which they are treated in their new profession (see section 3.4.3. The investments’ symbolic and economic pay-off). This strengthens their discontent towards the government and the state. The majority of the respondents living on welfare shows their dissatisfaction towards welfare officials. It is precisely this group that struggles with the deserving / undeserving classification. This group is also relatively young, often consists of single parents, and couples with kids. Noteworthy is that many of the single parents with children under five – who are not obliged to work – have a difficult relationship with the welfare officials. Hence, all the categories are part of the analysis, although some do not have to work or already work. Furthermore, people who are tested medically unfit sometimes have to apply for additional welfare at the welfare office. Therefore they have often a connection with this office. These respondents contemplate on their past or their future prospects. Again, I am not particularly interested in which groups are better in dealing with the welfare officials, nor I am interested in which groups have a better chance in escaping.
their poverty situation; I am interested in the mechanisms and relationships between welfare officials and clients that might contribute to welfare dependency.

4.4. The bureaucratic practices

During the transcription analysis, it became clear that the respondents go through three kinds of classification procedures (after the regular intake) during the bureaucratic encounters. First, at a particular moment in the respondents’ life, they gained access to the welfare system and were at that moment a deserving poor. However, after a while, according to the respondents, the welfare officials started to approach (classify) them as undeserving poor. This is what I call the informal classification. Informal classifications are the subjective, individual and dynamic means welfare officials use to operate during the bureaucratic encounters. As research showed (cf. Engbersen, 1990; Ypeij & Engbersen, 2002; Ypeij, 2004), on the basis of their individual, subjective preferences, welfare officials make distinctions between the undeserving and deserving poor. Second, clients are officially classified according to their economic value, i.e. their chances in the labor market. This is what I call the formal classification, which may show degrees of institutionalization or standardization within the bureaucratic system. All the information is embedded into the structure, or simply the record keeping systems. These systems register as to whether a client is obliged to work and/or deserve social assistance. Hence, classifications may be either informal or formal. Third, the respondents are constantly checked and rechecked as to whether they continue to belong to the appropriate category of deservingness. The welfare officials’ task is to control whether clients continue to deserve social assistance. These three practices are central in the next three sections.

4.4.1. Informal classifications

In several qualitative studies, concentrating on how clients negotiate with welfare officials, scholars addressed stigmatization and classification (cf. Jarrett, 1996; p. 369). It was found that clients were reminded of their deviant status as they were queried about their sex lives, judged as reluctant workers, and overall treated as disrespectfully (ibid.). McPhee and Bronstein (2003) showed that welfare experiences did not take the form of shame at accepting assistance from the government but, rather, of the stigma created by welfare professionals. The clients perceived professionals as going out of their way to humiliate them through words and interactions, with the purpose of highlighting their lower status.
(McPhee & Bronstein, 2003; p. 38). Hence, because clients have to go to the bureauocracy, they consequentially become stigmatized by welfare officials. This stigma can attach, in particular, to receipt of means-tested welfare. It can be reinforced by the manner in which welfare is sometimes administered so as to degrade its recipients (Handler & Hasenfeld, 1997; Jones & Novak, 1999; Gilliom, 2001, cited in Lister, 2004; p. 117, see also Engbersen, 1990; Ypeij, 2004). In the following section, some cases will illustrate the respondents’ experiences with the welfare officials.72

Among the respondents, there is a general discontent with reference to the welfare office and its welfare officials. In the first place, they feel stigmatized. For example, Justin [170] dislikes living on welfare, and how he is treated at the welfare office. He would rather work: “welfare officials, they think it is their money you receive73. You have to show your gratitude, which I dislike. I am not gratified74 that I receive a benefit. I would rather have a job, so I can spend my summer in Spain. Going to the welfare office, they look at me as if I am a bum and that I have to be thankful… you have to beg for alms. That’s the feeling you get from it. You see them [the welfare official] thinking ‘there is another one’. If I get a job, they become unemployed. So in principle, we are the bureaucrats’ employers.” Nicole [141] wants to restrict the number of bureaucratic encounters. According to her, the women behind the counter are ‘dumb and ignorant’: “at the welfare office, I am in a dependent position. That is frustrating, annoying and irritating. You depend on her [the welfare official] and she represents the welfare office. They have to transfer the money every month, as we agreed upon. I’m sitting there, powerless.” She reflects on a social contract between her and the institution. But she sometimes feels misunderstood and misrecognised. It causes frictions and, in the past, something went wrong with the welfare distribution. One time she felt the urge to physically attack the welfare official: “you feel powerless, and because of this, you become outraged. Being there, I always think, what a bunch of suckers. I can completely understand the aggression at the welfare office. Many times, I feel misunderstood.”

Because the administration is complex and both welfare officials and clients make mistakes, much goes wrong. Brittney [237] feels dominated by the welfare office and the encounters are mostly negative. After it went wrong one time, ever since, she is labeled as a ‘welfare fraud’. But this is a misconception: “years ago I didn’t fill out a form, because I was in hospital. They stopped providing the bene-
fit. After I was fired from hospital, I went to the welfare office and they said to me ‘didn’t you notice that you didn’t receive any money?’ I responded that I was in hospital.” Ever since, the relation is strained between her and the welfare officials.

The respondents feel frustrated because they cannot do anything about their “deviant” status. They have to go to the welfare office and every time they go there, they are reminded of their position. Heather [153] is not obliged to work, because her children are still young. However, she feels powerless with reference to the welfare officials. Because the benefit is transferred every month, it can also go wrong every month: “The welfare office can make and break you. They have a lot of power, because if they do not pay you, you do not receive anything.” One time, the computers went down and she had to wait one week for the money transfer. She was desperate. She contemplates on her powerlessness: “they can easily do everything, and they do not give a shit. Even if you start to cry or molest the interior, they look passive. And if I didn’t exist, they [the welfare official] would be unemployed.” She also reflects on the patronage of the welfare officials and their condescending practices: “they put you down, and if they do that, I always say that I’m not less than you, and the situation could be reversed easily. I depend on welfare, that is the situation and I cannot do anything about it. So please stop preaching and the way you look at me, because I dislike it.”

Respondents feel treated without any rights, as outsiders. For example, Cynthia [311] dislikes the impersonal treatment: “I dislike how they treat me. You are a number, and they do not look at your personal trouble, your personal history. They are welfare officials in the first place, and then they are people.” To avoid conflicts, she lives up to the rules. She hands over all her personal information and she expects the organization to do the same: “well, we all know that many people are frauds. I don’t mind that they verify everything. I do not have anything to hide. But I think, if I ask them questions, I would like to have an answer.” The relationship between her and the welfare officials is flawed, because the welfare officials do not reciprocate information. “If I request something, I do not get an answer. If they ask me something (via mail), and I do not respond, they will send a registered letter. That’s not right.” She concludes: “power, that’s it. They are in the position of power and they abuse it. They can treat people in a normal kind of way.”
Welfare officials have to deal with a growing number of clients, changing regulations, work pressure, and have to make distinctions between clients who are likely to go back to work and those who cannot (cf. Engbersen, 1990; p. 183)76. Respondents experience these distinctions made by the welfare officials. For example, Elizabeth [133] is ambivalent about welfare. On the one hand, she is able to stand on her own feet as a single mother; on the other hand, the social distance between her and the welfare officials is enormous: “well, they feel privileged!” Michael [106] feels treated as a beggar, less than a refugee: “a younger welfare official started to become familiar on first names with me; I do not like that at all.” According to Ashley [105]: “some of them are nice and treat you well, but some of them are twerps. They think that they are the higher power.” Tiffany [156]: “They treat you like a stupid cow. They are in the power. You have to do what they ask you to do.”

The physical space of the welfare office also came up. Seats and tables are attached to the ground, and even the design of the welfare office desk enormously separates the client from the welfare official. Some respondents experience this as threatening. Jennifer [121] thinks that the office design mirrors the practices of the welfare official; “have you ever been there? All these seats are attached to the ground. I think it is terrible.” Allison [353] complained many times about the welfare office. Every time she has been there, she leaves angry. According to her, the physical space is threatening: “they are sitting behind this giant desk. It is like it is saying ‘well, you have to be down there, and we are up here’. The welfare officials are not interested, they walk away any time, and they do not know the rules. One moment, I was so angry that I almost blew a fuse.”

This illustrates the bureaucratic experiences of the respondents. First of all, many felt, as a general rule, stigmatized. During the bureaucratic encounters, they feel transformed to nonstandard citizens making immoral claims. They suffer from an utter feeling of powerlessness. Second, during the encounters, sometimes the transactions and exchanges went wrong. Ever since, they feel labeled as abnormal, and they are confronted with this label each time they go to the welfare office. For example, Brittney felt labeled as a welfare fraud, and, for her, it is very hard to escape this stigma. If she goes to the welfare office once per decade, it would be no problem. However, the bureaucratic encounters are a regular process. Her situation made clear that, from the viewpoint of the client or the organization, previous encounters influence present ones, and the outcome of the pre-
sent one may influence any or all aspects of the next encounter (Katz & Danet, 1973; p. 21).

Third, according to the respondents, the welfare officials display their privileged position. This ceremony reifies the respondents’ stigma. Fourth, the respondents experience an unequal power balance. This unequal power balance reaffirms their incapability to reciprocate goods and services, and this reminds them of their poverty status. For example, Cynthia contemplated on the norm of reciprocity; if she hands over information, the welfare office has to do the same. However, this is not the case, so it frustrates her. Therefore, she feels more or less labeled as a second-class person without the same rights as everybody else. At last, the physical setting is experienced as stigmatizing. The physical setting not only sets the stage for the interaction between officials and clients, it also affects the course of interaction. The architecture of waiting rooms has implications for the values of privacy, interactions, surveillance (Katz & Danet, 1973; p. 280). Being at the welfare office, means being different. Thus, during the bureaucratic encounters, the respondents feel that they have to submit themselves to the welfare officials. They feel treated as deviant, disadvantaged, abnormal, and approached as undeserving poor. This is contrasted with their self-image, as being deserving poor. There seems to be incongruence between the respondents’ senses of self and the states’ divisions.

4.4.2. Formal classifications

In Overseers of the Poor, Gilliom writes: “welfare programs need to simplify the world by focusing on a limited set of factors. The fundamental question, that is the bedrock for all the state’s knowledge about the poor, is whether they are ‘deserving’, ‘worthy’ or ‘eligible’ for assistance” (Gilliom, 2001; p. 22). Besides this simplification, people, in their encounters with bureaucracies, are transformed into clients, “identifiably located in a very small number of categories, treated as if, and treating themselves as if, the fit standardized definitions of units cosigned to specific bureaucratic slots” (Lipsky, 1980; p. 59): a vast number of different people is categorized into few sections. During the transactions and interactions between welfare officials and clients, these official categorizations cause trouble.

To shed light on the official classification practices, one of the most lucid state taxonomies is the “job seeker classification system.” This classification system was introduced to measure the individual labor market prospects (Sol, 2001; p. 86).
89). In the process, consideration is given to exemptions, the realistic labor market prospects, and impediments (intellectual, physical, or financial). All job seekers are classified accordingly. The system distinguishes four categories (phases):  

1. The job seeker is *eligible* for direct placement in the labor market.

2. Employment prospects require *limited* improvement by means of measures lasting less than one year.

3. Employment prospects require *more comprehensive* improvement by means, of measures lasting longer than one year.

4. *Hardly any* prospects of finding work.

The phasing determines the type of intervention and the services available to the job seeker (ibid.). Another taxonomy is the kind of benefit clients receive. The received benefit echoes the clients’ characteristics. Obviously, the sick receive a disability benefit, the elderly a pension, the majority of the single parents a welfare benefit, and the jobless an unemployment benefit. However, these classifications also reflect whether clients deserve social assistance. For example, based on their health situation, people who receive a disability benefit probably deserve assistance. In addition, people who are categorized as Phase 1 probably do not deserve social assistance. They simply can go back to work immediately. What happens if clients are categorized as such?

Brandon [178] did have some small time jobs but finally, he was fired. During the interview, he was unemployed for four years and he is obliged to apply for jobs. However, because it is useless, he laughs at this requirement. According to him, no one wants to hire him and he does not expect to get a job in the future. He does not have negative bureaucratic experiences, and is categorized as a “Phase 4” person: hardly any prospects of finding work. “I’m Phase 4. I received three job openings from the welfare office and I wrote some application letters to several employers, but it is utterly pathetic. I did not receive any response. However, I have to do it, but I will not find a job. I am convinced that I will be refused. That’s the way it is. After all, I am Phase 4.”

Ryan [174] is an artist. He is categorized as unemployed and, therefore, feels stigmatized: “I am recorded [in the computer] as an unemployed. That is a negative mark. I’m kept under control, and I’m the outsider of society.” He is a busy man, and he objects to the labeling of the welfare office; it does not correspond to
his self-image. “What I do not like is that they only look at my economic perspective. I have to have a job according to the welfare office. Artists do not fit into that picture. I am a very busy man, but I am labeled as a good-for-nothing.”

Sonya [245] has negative experiences with the welfare office record keeping system. She is in a wheelchair. However, the welfare office is not informed about her situation. One time, she had to go back to work: “Because my daughter became five years old, they said to me that I have to go back to work. I replied that if you have a job, I would like to work. At that moment, the official noticed my wheelchair, and she apologized. I asked them if my record did not include information on my health situation. It did not include any information, so I was very upset. I think the officials should know their clientele. They do not know anything.” The principle of reciprocity is involved. Sonya hands over information in exchange for a benefit. But if the welfare office is not functioning properly, the reciprocation fails.

These cases make clear that some accept their classification, others object to their label, and some categorizations are totally incompatible. Sonya felt classified as an undeserving poor, while in her opinion she is a deserving poor. Ryan is also classified as an undeserving poor, but in his opinion he is a hard-working man. Brandon is labeled as somebody who has hardly any prospects of finding work, and, as time went by, he gradually accepts his classification. And so the phase taxonomy defines respondents often as unwilling to work and sometimes through a kind of self-fulfilling prophecy, this definition of the situation structures the individuals’ future career. Oftentimes, the formal classifications seem to reflect the deserving-undeerving dichotomy once more. Because the respondents are treated too compartmentally (Katz & Danet, 1973; p. 6), a clash occurs between the state categorizations and how the respondents experience their situation. Due to this clash, it frustrates productive interactions between welfare officials and the respondents.

4.4.3. Controlling the clients

The state checks for undisclosed cohabitation, bank accounts, whether clients work on the side, illegal possessions, and illegal income. Welfare beneficiaries are restricted to go on holiday, are often prohibited from studying, and have to be available for the labor market. The state employs several technologies of control78, and these technologies do not pass over unnoticed – they penetrate deeply
into the personal lives of people. Scholars mentioned this decades ago. Jeffers (1967) and Valentine (1978) argue that if clients were served, they were harshly interrogated about their claims of economic deprivation, requiring multiple documents79 (in: Jarrett, 1996; p. 369). People are checked as to whether they are entitled to their benefit, they are controlled as to whether they still fit into the right category – the class of the deserving poor. If not, they lose their entitlement to social security. Then again, as we shall see in the next illustrations, these technologies of control influence the interactions between welfare officials and respondents.

Kathryn [315] understands the welfare office’s monitoring, “It is tax money after all.” However, she also dislikes it: “disgusting, my life already sucks. I do not blame the welfare office, I even welcome it. Being oppressed, you get into that kind of trouble [violating the rules]. And the government forgets that. I worked in the past and I condemned the unemployed. I did not know better. It is easy to criticize the unemployed. In this situation [state dependency], I experience the downside; now I judge differently.” However, she dislikes going to the welfare office to show that she is entitled to her benefit: “I always dislike going to the welfare office. You do not have any privacy. People in the waiting room can hear you. You have to fill out many forms; have to tell your personal history, hand over your bank duplicates. On one occasion, they threatened to curtail my benefit, because I didn’t bring my whole kit and caboodle.”

The eligibility checks about whether individuals belong the right category penetrated deeply into the personal lives. People feel sensitized to this intrusion. For example, Eva [169] is a married woman, has two children, and dislikes the complexity that goes with receiving a benefit. She feels treated like a child: “Welfare is the worst thing that’s ever happened to me. If I can escape this situation, I will keep it that way.” Although the inspections are severe, she understands it: “I have to show the bank duplicates of my children. I understand that they check everything, because there are so many welfare frauds. They are allowed to check everything, but this is out of line!” She is suspiciously approached by the welfare office and she undergoes humiliation: “they approach you as a swindler, and you have to show that you are not.”

Once a year clients have to hand over their bank duplicates, so the welfare officials can check whether they belong to the category unemployed – if they do not
work on the side. Checking the bank duplicates is felt as shameful. Welfare officials said to Angelica [157] that she should give away her dog to make ends meet: “you have to account for everything. Even if you have a bank account containing five Euros, you have to hand over the bank duplicates.” Jeffrey [320] experienced the equivalent: “checking bank accounts is a very bad thing. It violates my privacy. It is not their concern how I spend my money. Some time ago, I did a [illegal] job for somebody in home improvement. He deposited the money on my bank account. So stupid. The welfare official asked how I acquired the money. I lied, and said that some friends burned a cigarette hole in my couch, and my friends compensated me via a bank transfer. The welfare official believed this story.” Sometimes, these inspections are treated with irony, for example in the case of Stephanie [130]: “what are they doing? I have to show even the silliest bank duplicates, those of the children. Some time ago, I had to show everything. I was looking for all these bank duplicates, and I found a bank duplicate of one of my children. That bank account contained three cents. I said to the welfare official ‘you have to Xerox this bank duplicate, otherwise I’ll rip off three cents’.”

Home visits – to check for undisclosed cohabitation – are also experienced as humiliating. Single parents with children under five are not obliged to work. However, they must live as a one-parent family. If not, they lose their benefit. Victoria [308] does have a relationship for fourteen years. Her ex-husband tipped the welfare office off that she was living together with this new partner, which is not the case. Consequently, the welfare officials visited her on her daughter’s birthday: “they searched through the entire house. In the closets of my children, in the washing machine, and in the fridge to check as to whether I was living as a single parent. I also had to show my administration and what I spent the last couple of months.” Jennifer [121] did not experience the home visits, but she did hear the stories about the surveillance for undisclosed cohabitation: “if they check your situation, you will be in dire straits. They will visit you and count the number of toothbrushes in the bathroom, or search for male shoes under the hall-stand. They are very precise. I think you should not abuse the system.”

Respondents are categorized as unemployed. However, remarkably, they are not supported to get a job. According to the respondents, instead of labor market integration, the main concern of the welfare office is to check for eligibility. Jenna [359] feels treated like a number. They ask bizarre questions from her viewpoint, such as whether you are working on the side. As if you will answer that question
honestly. Interviewer: “do they help you to find a job?” Jenna: “No, you have to do it on your own.” Joshua [136] says he went through the same experience: “you have to go to the welfare office for investigation, once a year. They look at your possessions, your income, and as to whether you are working on the side. It has nothing to do with going back to work.”

This paragraph shows how respondents experience the eligibility checks, as to whether people fit into the category of deservingness. They constantly have to account for their expenditures and are checked for undisclosed cohabitation. Kathryn understands and even supports the eligibility checks. However, her situation made clear how these categories work. First, while she worked she condemned others, but now she is stigmatized herself, and experiences the eligibility check. Eva felt *a priori* categorized as an undeserving poor and, *a posteriori*, she has to show that she was a deserving poor. The *onus probandi* rests on her. For Victoria, the home visit was very humiliating. Other respondents show their discontent for having to demonstrate that they belong to the deserving poor, while not being supported to lose their poverty status. They are checked whether they belong to the right category, but are not supported to escape their unemployed status. Scholars address this notion, for example, Seccombe et al. (1998) suggest that clients view the welfare office with suspicion and distrust rather than as a sanctuary for help.

In sum, first, the bureaucratic encounters are experienced as stigmatizing. Respondents feel constantly reminded of their poverty status and approached as undeserving poor. Second, the respondents’ self-image does not correspond to the formal classifications. Third, the eligibility checks penetrate deeply into the lives of the respondents. The respondents frequently have to show that they fit into the right category, the deserving poor. These three mechanisms do not go over unnoticed; in one way or the other, the respondents react to these procedures. In the first part of the chapter, I outlined how the respondents experience welfare; in this second part, I outline the respondents’ reactions.

**4.5. Responses to the bureaucratic practices**

As we saw, respondents went through three kinds of practices: informal distinctions made by welfare officials, formal state categorizations, and, finally, the controlling mechanisms to check whether they belong to the deserving poor. Respon-
students are not helpless victims that fully submit themselves to the structures of the bureaucracy. Within their own leeway, they respond to the practices of control and the manner in which they are treated during the bureaucratic encounters. In response to interactions with the welfare officials, they might resist or submit to the fabric of the welfare field. Generally, there is a rich literature on various forms of resistance and responses by dependent people (cf. Hutchinson, 1988; Scott, 1990; White, 1990; Winter, 1996; Ewick & Silbey, 1998; Gilliom, 2001; Noble, 2004; Handler, 2005). Several scholars address the manner in which clients resist to the practices of the welfare officials. For example, responses of welfare recipients to finger-imaging reveal a mixture of themes, ranging from approval of finger imaging because it enables them to distance themselves from welfare fraud to outrage at a procedure that is viewed as criminalizing the welfare receipt (Murray, 2000; p. 39, my emphasis). Cooney (2006; p. 218) notes several strategies to manage welfare stigma. Two prevalent strategies are identified as: 1) distancing, also known as the “bad people exist but I am not one of them strategy” (Kingfisher, 1996; p. 61); and 2) reframing so-called deviant behavior (such as not reporting paid work) as evidence of their own resourcefulness and responsibility for their family in the midst of an irrational bureaucratic welfare system. Nevertheless, as a general rule, stigma and labeling do not easily slip away (see chapter 5): Richard Jenkins (2000; p. 9) brings to mind that labeling in general may evoke resistance. For example, people might conform or resist classifications (cf. Engbersen & Van der Veen, 1992; p. 222). Reading all the transcriptions, I distinguish several responses to the bureaucratic practices.

4.5.1. Take up employment

Because of the enduring checks, some desperately want to take up employment (only under the conditions that they are able to work). This is how they can escape their stigma. Other scholars already mentioned this; according to Rank (1994), women who received AFDC indicated that the lack of privacy and the stigma associated with the program, in part, fueled their desire to exit from welfare (Jarrett, 1996; p. 369). McPhee & Bronstein (2003; p. 39) argued that many of the women in their study expressed their desire to be independent and to maximize control over their and their children’s lives. I notice similar motivations. Alicia [372] took up employment exactly for these reasons. She experienced the relationship with the welfare office as extremely negative: “since I work, I do not have to go to the welfare office. I am not humiliated by showing all my bank duplicates. They always looked at my gold ring, as if I am not entitled to
have one. It is such a relieve. No longer these compulsory visits at the welfare office. That woman behind the desk who thinks she has to pay the benefit personally.” The next case shows a similar line of reasoning. Morgan [177] is a working single mother of one. Once she applied for additional welfare. But if people have savings, they are not entitled to additional welfare: “even if you have ten Euros on your saving account, you will not receive anything. That is so frustrating.” She experienced receiving welfare as humiliating. She works because she does not want to be associated with “welfare claimants”, those who refuse to work because they will not gain from taking up employment. She does not have any trouble working for a few pennies more: “living on welfare, your self-esteem suffers. You simply do not deserve the money you receive.” She hopes to avoid claiming welfare in the future. Besides the negative encounters, she disassociates from others who undeservingly take up benefits. Actually, Morgan and Alicia take up employment to avoid being stigmatized as undeserving. Although there is not a direct causality between the bureaucratic encounters and taking up employment, I might hypothesize that the negative bureaucratic encounters contribute – as an unintended effect – stimulating employment take up. In this manner, going back to work is one of the responses to the bureaucratic encounters and its classifications practices.

4.5.2. Assertiveness

Because clients during the encounters feel approached as undeserving poor, they articulate that they deserve social assistance. They try to convince the welfare officials with the help of arguments that they do belong to the appropriate category. However, only after several encounters they learned to do business with the welfare officials. After some experiences, they know the ins and outs, and this knowledge empowers them. For example, Melanie [346] sheds light on the bond between her and the organization: “I try to stand up for my rights, but it is getting harder. One time, I had to go to the welfare office for absolutely nothing. I did not accept it. To complain, I wrote a letter. I may receive a benefit, but I am not sitting all day at home waiting for them. At last, they apologized.” She more or less used the principle of reciprocity: if they are demanding, she can be demanding too. A similar situation: As a consequence of her divorce, Christina [154] had severe debts. She searched for help and knocked on the door of the welfare office: “according to them, I had to go to my ex-husband [to solve the problem], and therefore, I left with my tail between my legs.” She did not deserve assistance. Nevertheless, she learned from this experience: “I will never do that again, now I
stand up for myself.” She adapted to the customs of the welfare office and stood up for herself and her rights: “nowadays I have a big mouth at the welfare office. I try everything. You can always take no for an answer.” But there is some ambivalence. On the one hand, she [by nature] does not have a big mouth. On the other hand, she has to be bold, otherwise she will lose. So, if respondents are classified as undeserving poor, they become more daring in showing their deservingness.

4.5.3. To justify their deservingness

In the Netherlands, affirmative action policies are designed to reintegrate minorities into the labor market. These policies help people in a disadvantaged position to be encouraged to work and end their poverty spell. However, these policies might help minorities, but these methods might provoke some discontent among native Dutch. The latter opposes these affirmative action programs, merely because it does not empower them, but others. This is called opposition to affirmative action. Especially in the US, scholars pay attention to this phenomenon\(^8\) (cf. Nosworthy et al., 1995; Tougas et al., 1995; Hughes 1997; Hing et al., 2002; Martin, 2003; Lowery et al., 2006). For example, DiTomaso (2000, in: Lamont & Molnar, 2002; p. 175) describe white opposition to affirmative action by looking at how middle class and working class whites construct their experiences in the labor market compared to those of blacks, particularly whether they and their children receive more help than blacks. Among the respondents, some are opposed to affirmative action, which enables them to claim that they are the deserving disadvantaged poor. They use this affirmative action policy to justify their position, assign themselves to the deserving poor, and to evade the bureaucracy. Consequentially, they unintendedly reduce their chance of becoming reintegrated into the labor market. Justin, again [170], uses the affirmative action policy to justify his social standing. His bureaucratic experiences fueled his opposition to the state and its policies. “Interviewer: who’s responsible for your low-income situation?” Justin: “well, the wrong government policy. Everybody should have the same job opportunities. But particular groups are privileged, like women. The governments’ policy is wrong and responsible. I want the same opportunities as women, adolescents, and migrants. I am the low man on the totem pole. In addition, at the end of the line, we are of any significance. By any means, the sequence is wrong. Everybody should have the same opportunities.” Interviewer: “will your future change?” Justin: “well, it will stay the same, only if I win the lottery. But that will never happen, because I belong to the category that never
wins anything. So I do not play bingo anymore.” Interviewer: “can you do anything to improve your situation?” Justin: “maybe I can repair more bicycles. I thought about becoming an entrepreneur. The welfare office conducted a policy, which supported entrepreneurs. I went to them and they replied ‘No, you’re totally wrong’. Well, I was right; I only had the inappropriate descent. The policy was meant for migrants: at the moment they open a store, they receive financial support. That is so disgusting in the Netherlands. Everything is meant for migrants. [ironically] ‘the migrants are underprivileged’. Our disadvantageous is never looked at. They [the migrants] do not live in destitution. Everywhere I go, I meet colored employees. They are not unemployed at all! They work everywhere. I do not blame them, I blame the government. They do not offer us any opportunities. Look at the welfare officials. You should be happy if a white person sits behind the counter. All the colored people acquire these jobs. I do not envy them, but they are not underprivileged any longer. We are disadvantaged.”

Justin feels like living at the bottom of the pecking order, uses policy to justify his own position, and makes distinctions too. The bureaucratic encounters fueled his resentment, and this resentment probably obstructs a productive relationship between him and the welfare official.

4.5.4. Refusing to acknowledge a line of authority

To deal with the bureaucracy, clients can also relativize their position vis-à-vis the welfare officials. Although they are often approached as the undeserving poor, clients can say to the welfare official that they could have been in their position. The relationship between client and professional could easily be reversed, and the professional could have been an undeserving poor himself. By practicing this strategy, clients more or less put their own position in perspective, and disturb hierarchical differences between them and the welfare official. Ewick and Silbey (2003) describe different forms of resistance to legal authority. One of them is disrupting hierarchy: “Transactions among persons of different degrees of power and authority rely on a silent but mutual recognition of those differences. Because hierarchical differences so often go without saying, ignoring these structural differences is disruptive precisely because it requires power to articulate itself” (p. 1355). The respondents do not ignore the differences but actually “refused to acknowledge a line of authority or chain of command” (p. 1356), even though the hierarchical differences are clearly articulated during the encounters. Some respondents practice this strategy. Knowing that they are classified, they try to make clear that the welfare officials could be in their place. They say, i.e. that
they are no less than the welfare officials, and that they are the officials’ employers. Justin [170] said earlier that if he were not living on welfare, they would not have a job either. Heather [153] said that the welfare officials were condescending towards her. She also says that if she did not receive a welfare benefit, the welfare official would be unemployed too. She reverses the social hierarchy and emphasizes the arbitrary character of the relationship. She is more able to stand up for herself: “I learned dealing with the welfare officials. I used to be very shy and I always kept my mouth shut. Now, I say everything. I do not have any secrets, and I have to stand up for myself. I am nothing less than you, and I deserve being here. The mentality of the organization is entirely wrong.” Although she depends on the welfare office, they depend also on her. In addition, she emphasizes the capricious nature of the relationship. She more or less disrupted the hierarchy, trying to make clear that the welfare officials could be in her stigmatized position. When respondents are classified, they try to relativize their position vis-à-vis the person who classifies him or her. This is a barrier to the productiveness of the relationship between the welfare official and the client.

4.5.5. Welfare fraud

Kathryn [315] said earlier: “Being oppressed, you get into that kind of trouble [violating the rules].” Individuals become ironic and rule breaking because the bureaucratic rules are complex, laws change, welfare officials are unsupportive, and employment brings about many risks. Twenty-four respondents (11%) informed the interviewers on committing fraud (informal work not included). Some commit fraud to fit in the category of the deserving poor. Cynthia [311] receives a disability benefit, feels disturbed, and abandoned by the state. People who receive a disability benefit have to be checked as to whether they are able to go back to work. Although Cynthia receives a disability benefit, she is retested. Finally, she was tested medically fit and now has to apply for jobs: “they started to change the laws, and they started to haunt people. Many are not able to resist and for that reason end up in a mental institution.” She had to apply for jobs compulsorily, but she never took it very seriously: “well, I have to write many application letters. But at a certain moment, I thought, this does not make any sense. I go crazy. So, I started to write fake application letters.” According to her, the benefit offers more security than taking up employment: “each time I have to fill out forms, I get sick to my stomach. If I get a job, I am not sure if I can keep my rental subsidy, my health care insurance. Due to this scum. I’m so frustrated.” [Her income rises as soon as she gets a job, but she may lose her rental subsidy – that was dis-
tributed via the ministry of housing – so she finally receives less income]. Because she knows that she has to apply for jobs, she knows that she officially belongs to the undeserving poor. Nevertheless, if she is (fictitiously) rejected repeatedly for jobs (which means she is still not able to work), she can become part of the deserving poor. She more or less committed fraud (writing fake application letters), so that she could switch from undeserving to deserving poor.

4.5.6. Non-take up

Moffitt’s findings (1983, in Etzioni, 1988; p. 71-3) show that large proportions of people eligible to receive welfare refuse it because of the stigma attached. He points out that for those he studied income is not simply income; it matters where it comes from (see also Zelizer, 1994). These findings can be applied to this study. The respondents can also make use of additional welfare, for example to buy new glasses. For each additional benefit, they have to be checked as to whether they are entitled to it – if they really need new glasses. They have to be completely checked whether they deserve these goods. Because they have to show their deservingness, some of the respondents do not make use of additional welfare. Fifty respondents use additional welfare, twenty-eight are familiar with additional welfare (but do not make use of it), and forty-five are not familiar with the system [no information on 94 people]. Eva [169] is well informed about all the regulations. However, because of the unproductive welfare office relationship, she does not make use of it: “I know it is possible to apply for exemption for real estate tax.” I hate to apply for these exemptions, because you have to show all your personal information. There is no guarantee that you will receive it. I feel ashamed. And if you meet a moody welfare official, they do not treat you respectfully.” As a result, she pursues alternative strategies to pay the bills: “I will find another solution. For example, I use the child benefit to pay my bills. I think that’s terrible.” Monica [313] does have an ambivalent relationship with the welfare office. One time she had a negative experience: “all these forms, hopeless. It violates my privacy and I have been struggling with feelings of disgust over these forms. I want to throw these forms away, but I know that the consequences are nasty. Useless, because they will not get in touch with the true welfare frauds.” I never applied for additional welfare.” Because these further checks are experienced as stigmatizing, and although they are entitled to it, they do not apply for additional welfare. Along these lines, during the ongoing classification practices, clients are perpetually confronted with their alleged undeservingness. Consequen-
tially, they try to avoid these bureaucratic encounters. In the end, they fail to take up additional welfare.

4.5.7. Conservative resistance

In response to the bureaucratic encounters, clients might avoid going to the bureaucracy. Or, they can simply “just suffer through it.” This kind of response is almost similar to non-take up. Clients do not resist, but actually do quite the opposite: they surrender to the practices of the bureaucracy. For clients, this submission is probably the easiest way to deal with the bureaucracy. Just say “yes”, avoid conflicts, and wait until the storm is over. They seem to accept the category of undeservingness and then face the consequences of being an undeserving poor. Scholars call this “conservative resistance”. Conservative resistance strategies include overt resistance to innovation, covert foot-dragging, scepticism about officials’ wisdom and abilities, chronic criticism of policy, and risk avoidance (cf. Markham et al., 1985; p. 132). Although conservative resistance is outwardly passive, it is apparent that conscious hostility toward officials underlies it. This hostility is seldom expressed openly (cf. Gulick, 1958; p. 77, my emphasis). Jordan (1993; p. 215, in: Dean & Melrose, 1997; p. 115) suggests that people who are structurally disadvantaged – by class or gender relations – “choose not to challenge the dominant order, but seek a measure of autonomy within it.” The costs of them of doing otherwise would be too high. For those who practice this strategy, submission is probably more liberating, and resistance probably more alienating. They meet head on this paradox of the dominated, and there is no way out of it (cf. Bourdieu, 1990, p. 155) ⁸⁹.

Because Chelsea [208] receives a benefit, she feels uncomfortable. She knows she is entitled to it: “I was ashamed, but I do not see any other option. I have to live, and without money, you cannot live. Everybody is entitled to it, so am I. Deep in my heart it does not feel good, but now I am used to it.” Receiving a benefit triggered some uneasiness. However, as time went by, she accepted her situation and her welfare dependency. She does not contest her classification, but endures it. Kimberly [210] had also some trouble becoming accustomed to encounters with the bureaucracy: “I always had troubles with the welfare office. I wasn’t used to it.” Individuals seem to have some difficulties accepting their new situation (depending on welfare) in the first place. Nevertheless, in the long run, permit the influence of the bureaucracy, in such way that they finally submit themselves. They are not overtly in conflict with the bureaucracy. Although some
did have a conflict, but as time went by, they became more apathetic. The case of Jasmine [231] illustrated this. She does have a negative relationship with the welfare office. If she telephones the welfare office, she has to wait for a long time. She is confronted with an enormous bureaucracy. She is asked how she experiences the relationship: “negative, you feel like a beggar. Money-wise, you have a hard time, and you feel like a worthless person. Your self-esteem suffers, and that is caused by the manner in which they talk to you.” She suffers through it, misses much information, and fails to take up additional benefits. Instead of becoming a loudmouth, she surrenders to the complexity of the bureaucracy.

In this manner, many respondents are not really in conflict with the welfare officials. On the contrary, they seem to have and sustain a neutral relationship with the welfare officials. However, this kind of relationship is not very productive. The welfare official and the client might have a good, but infertile bond.

4.6. Conclusion: infertile bureaucratic bonds

This chapter addressed welfare dependency concentrating on the respondents’ perceived interactions with welfare officials. Elaborating on the premise that enduring classification practices take place to differentiate between the deserving and undeserving poor, the respondents experience three kinds of classifications. First, from the perspective of the respondents, the welfare officials unofficially categorize them as the undeserving poor. Second, the state employs formal categorizations to manage diversity. However, these formal classifications regularly differ from the situation of the respondents. Third, the welfare officials have to verify whether the respondents still belong to the appropriate categories. These three practices provoke responses among the respondents who responded in numerous ways; on the one hand as cunning, provocative, and aggravating, on the other hand, they act passive, avoid communication, and refuse to take up additional welfare. Via these (harsh) reactions, they reaffirm the image of an unenthusiastic individual, who does not want to work or wishes for job training or a subsidized job. Ultimately, they reproduce the image of an undeserving poor. In the end, they contribute – unconsciously – to the reproduction of their own position.

In this field, a symbolic struggle occurred between welfare officials and respondents centering on whether people belong to the category of the deserving or undeserving poor. Respondents often felt stigmatized and approached as undeserv-
ing for social assistance. In order to become a deserving poor, respondents could stretch their own classifications. They can simply say that they deserve social assistance or they can commit fraud. By not going to the welfare office, they could avoid this stigmatizing. These symbolic struggles may have serious economic consequences. If respondents avoid the bureaucratic encounters (only get in touch with the welfare office for the yearly checks), they lower the chance to become reintegrated into the labor market. Moreover, inevitably, their poverty is perpetuated.

Correspondingly, the unintended consequences of social action are very well observable. The respondents did have some choices to deal with the bureaucracy. Because of the manner in which they were treated, some took up employment; others became more assertive, or passive. Another group relativized their position with reference to the welfare officials. Others committed fraud or failed to make use of additional welfare. Their alternatives seem to be the best options in the short run. However, in the long run the relationship between the welfare officials and the respondents did not improve. Factually, the relationship between them became more tensed and infertile. For the respondents, this might result in fewer chances for employment take up.

Finally, there is a strong relationship between the welfare field and the labor market. For the respondents, the welfare field is often the passage to the labor market. However, if the relationship between them and the welfare officials is tensed, problematic, and unproductive, the labor market is even more difficult to enter. Inevitably, the difficult bond between welfare officials and clients in one field has consequences for integration in other fields.
Notes

65 Elijah Anderson (1999; p. 310) recalls that the existence of welfare has encouraged dependency, “to be sure, but without jobs and income what other alternatives exists?”

66 This chapter’s title is derived from Godwin & Markham (1996).

67 The relationship between welfare officials and clients is binding and roughly reciprocal. Scholars emphasized the interactions, exchange and reciprocal relationship between officials and clients. For example, according to Bovens & Zouridis (2002; p. 175) the encounters involve individual transactions: citizens ask for a benefit, rent rebate, or a permit and they hand in their tax return or are ticketed now and again (ibid.). Welfare clients also lose their own power over the direction these organizations may take, since the welfare state bureaucracies are endowed with the authority to act on their behalf (Hasenfeld et al., 1987; p. 404-5). Vesting the bureaucracy with power in exchange for benefits underlies the contract between the individual and the organization (ibid.); the welfare client provides information and is restricted to bureaucratic rules. In return, s/he is given a benefit. In principle, the norm of reciprocity is at stake, and exchange does take place. Therefore the social exchange theories can be used to understand the interchange between client and official. According to the social exchange model, “each party in a social interaction setting tries to influence the other’s attitude, yielding a rewarding reciprocation. This view suggests that clients are more than passive entities” (Weimann, 1982; p. 137, see also Homans (1961) and Blau (1964)).

68 In the US-debate, the dichotomy between the deserving and the undeserving poor is prevalent (cf. Handler & Hollingsworth, 1971; Katz, 1990; Gans, 1996), and centers on the question as to whether the poor are eligible for assistance, and if they deserve governmental support. According to Herbert Gans, the poor have regularly been dichotomized “at least by critics of the poor, and formulators of the laws about poverty, into two groups. The first encompassed the sick and the old, as well as the working poor, and was considered good or worthy of help, while the second, able-bodied nonworking poor people, have been deemed unworthy” (Gans, 1996; p. 14).

69 The deserving and undeserving poor dichotomy is not clearly articulated in the Dutch discourse and is not often mentioned. Only in 2003 a Dutch journalist mentioned this dichotomy in a newspaper. He referred to the Dutch policy to reintegrate welfare recipients by curtailing their benefits. This, according to him, is based on deservingness. In Dutch: “Volgens De Geus doet de uitkeringsgerechtigde pas zijn best als hij het voelt in zijn portemonnee. Het is een terugkeer naar het idee van de undeserving poor. Niet onmacht, maar onwil is het grootste probleem in de sociale zekerheid.” De Volkskrant, September 15, 2003.

70 The terms deserving and undeserving are a pattern of cultural classification. This pattern of cultural classification has been documented in interviews (Halle, 1984; Hochschild, 1981; Lamont, 2000; Rieder, 1985, cited in Steensland, 2006; p. 1274).

71 Jarrett (1996; p. 369) refers to several studies (Jeffers, 1967; Rank 1994; Rogers-Dillon, 1995; Rosier & Corsaro, 1993; Stack, 1974; Valentine, 1978).

72 Zelizer (1994) describes how throughout the centuries the poor received charitable money. The money transfer – from the caritas to the poor – was not only meant to support the poor for their primary need. There was another objective. The poor needed to learn how to spend their money, to live economically, and to save what’s left of it. Therefore, the given money could convey a moral message: the poor were given cash, but with strings attached. Money was budgeted by strangers and therefore never entirely of their own (Zelizer, 1994; p. 169).
Laakso & Drevdahl (2006; p. 89) interviewed a 36-year-old African American mother who said: “they think it is their money. Caseworkers decide who gets what.” Another example: “It is the way they talk to you, they way they talk down at you that’s humiliating. They’re working for the government. You’re here to get something from the government, so I’ll talk down to you any way that I want to” (McPhee & Bronstein, 2003; p. 38).

According to Simmel: “Es ist zunächst eine Ergänzung der rechtlichen Ordnung, die die Dankbarkeit vollbringt. Aller verkehr der Menschen beruht auf dem Schema von Hingabe und Äquivalent” (Simmel, 1958; p. 443).

Because of the five years welfare limit, the US-situation is more severe. Again, reading quotes from US-research, similarities are present. For example; Laakso & Drevdahl (2006; p. 89) interviewed a 43-year-old African American mother of five: “the welfare system is designed to humiliate you, basically. And they say they help you, but it is really humiliation.”

Hendrickson and Axelson (1985) found that many professionals who work with the poor do not think that the poor want to work (in: Gray, 2005).

See for example Garfinkel (1956).

According to Peillon (1998; p. 217-8) relief programs are based on investigatory and classificatory practices: policing the failure to maintain dependants, testing the availability for work or spying for undisclosed cohabitation illustrate such technologies of control.

Perlmutter and Bartle (2000) noted that, providing with inaccurate and inadequate information, recipients report being made to wait for long periods to see unsupportive and inflexible workers who are frequently openly hostile (in: McPhee & Bronstein, 2003; p. 39).

“We all have read Kafka and Orwell” (Katz & Danet, 1973; p. 3), and many respondents experience contemporary society as an Orwellian 1984. One of them [233] uses this book as a metaphor to describe his position: “I’m forced into a certain position. The state regulations are suffocating. These rules. People are dishonored as in the book I read from Orwell. It is a suffocating society.”

I underscore the argument of Scott (1998), because so much goes wrong during the encounters. According to Scott, the lumbering world of the bureaucracy sets off resistance: for the power of surveillance is often an almost clumsy power that miscasts the world and its people, overlooks vital points of information, and fuels its own resistance through its ongoing misunderstanding of knowledge.

She also suffered from discrimination and racism: minority ethnic groups tend to be disadvantaged within the welfare state. A number of factors are involved, including: rules that discriminate against first-generation immigrants; universal services that fail to accommodate cultural differences; racist attitudes among officials; and low take-up among minority ethnic communities (Platt, 2002; cited in Lister, 2004; p. 63).

How did the others take up employment? Some respondents do have jobs (N=34), however their regular income is insufficient to stay out of poverty. What’s the role of the welfare agency? How did they get a job? Six found a job via employment agencies, two found a job via an ad, five found a job via their social network, one is an entrepreneur, four were able to swap their voluntary work for regular work. We have no information on eleven persons. Only five respondents were activated by the welfare agency, and that is about 15% of the working poor (and thus approximately 2% of all the respondents).

Baines (2004) forms of unpaid work are seen as resistance against an increasingly alienating society, as well as a way to meet the needs of clients, relatives and friends.

Tilly (1998; p. 244-5) is also sceptical on affirmative action policies. He argues that these policies concentrate on the individual decisions of employers. Advocates of these policies have accepted “a narrow, individualistic view of inequality.” They should, instead, examine every organization as a collection of sites for exploitation, opportunity, hoarding,
emulation, and adaptation. Analysts should take the organizational *processes* into account, and less the individual *decisions*.

86 Other research noticed similar responses. One of McCormack’s respondents said: “I feel as though if we wasn’t on social service, they wouldn’t have a job either” (McCormack 2004; p. 377). McCormack describes this as a discursive reversal of the dominant understanding of welfare.

87 She refers to “gemeentelijke belastingen” collected by the municipalities.

88 Even welfare recipients tend to cope with the stigma of welfare by separating self from other through criticism of the motivations and commitment to work and family of other assistant recipients (Monroe & Tiller, 2001; p. 818).

89 The original text: “la résistance peut être aliénante et la soumission peut être libératrice. Tel est le paradoxe des dominés, et on n’en sort pas” (Bourdieu 1987, p. 183-4).
5. Sympathizing, fear and loathing in the neighborhood

5.1. Introduction: The neighborhood as a productive field

There is a common concern that in some kind of way deprived neighborhoods aggravate the lives of people in poverty. Therefore, this chapter’s central concern is how the neighborhood might influence the lives of people in poverty, and whether the neighborhood is a fruitful social environment. This can be pivotal for particular reasons, for example, that people in poverty may receive information from their neighbors concerning job opportunities. This information enables them to get a job and, consequentially end their impoverished position. With the help of neighborhood ties, people in poverty can convert their cultural capital into economic capital in the labor market. The neighborhood and its social bonds can muster productive social ties, which offer an escape out of poverty. Then, the neighborhood becomes a springboard, from which people jump to other fields. But if – for people in poverty – the neighborhood is not a field that offers resources, it consequentially diminishes opportunities to get ahead. Therefore, it becomes worthy to analyze how people in poverty are subjected to their neighborhood. To understand how people in poverty perceive their neighborhood and, thus, if they might have access to resources, I analyze how they deal with the neighborhood’s reputation – or stigma. Understanding how they deal with this stigma enables us to grasp the internal differentiation and underneath the neighborhood’s significance.

5.2. The foundations of the neighborhood: its stigma

One of the key features of deprived urban areas is its negative image. This image is often durable, difficult to change, and fortified by the manner in which the neighborhood is discussed. In deprived urban areas, the media stigmatize neighborhoods, so that as a consequence their inhabitants are looked down upon and discriminated against (Forrest & Kearns, 1999; Lupton, 2003). People in poverty of course are themselves consumers of the media. They see and hear the
stigmatizing images and language (Goffman, 1963; Soss, 1999; in Lister, 2004). Such a stigma is felt keenly by many and is often bitterly resented (Corden, 1996; Wood & Vamplew 1999). Studies of deprived estates reveal how the attached stigma “impoverishes all areas of residents’ lives” (Dean & Hastings, 2000). The result might be ecological contamination: all persons in “bad” neighborhoods are viewed as possessing the moral liability of the neighborhood itself (Sampson & Raudenbush, 2004; p. 321). Area stigma can be lasting, even in the face of large-scale renewal (Hastings & Dean, 2003). The Amsterdam high-rise area Bijlmermeer, one of the research sites, is probably the most stigmatized area in the Netherlands (Wassenberg, 2004; p. 275; Helleman & Wassenberg, 2004). The reputation is the bedrock of the neighborhood. How might people in poverty react to this infamy? Analyzing how people in poverty respond to this stigmatized reputation enables us to understand the internal differentiation (or social fabric) of the neighborhood.

5.3. The internal differentiation of neighborhoods

Noteworthy is that people react in various ways to neighborhood stigma, which enables us to understand the social fabric of the neighborhood. According to Rogers-Dillon (1995), although not all will react in the same way and its effects can depend on the situation, the impact of stigma can be intense. People in poverty, like Goffman’s stigmatized people, “are faced with a choice to control the circulation of discrediting information about themselves with the help of various concealment techniques, or by trying to pass in the community by acting in a ‘normal’ way, or opt for disclosure” (Misztal, 1996; p. 137; Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Shih, 2004). After Goffman’s seminal work on stigma (1963), several scholars elaborated on his ideas. One response is to accept the stigma (cf. Waxman 1977, p. 91), but other studies showed a vast range of strategies. Kusow (2004) asked how Somali immigrants in Toronto react to dominant color-based stigma. He shows that through reverse stigmatization, counter devaluation, and rejection of discrimination, Somalis reveal the problematic of stigma establishment. He raises the question of who is stigmatizing whom. Roschelle and Kaufman (2004) studied stigma management strategies among homeless kids and illustrated strategies of exclusion. There are aggressive and nonconciliatory attempts to gain social acceptance, including verbal denigration and physical and sexual posturing. These strategies had the unintended effect of reinforcing their spoiled identities (ibid., 2004; p. 23). However, these studies hardly incorporated
“place” or neighborhood in their analysis. Others did. Elias and Scotson’s (1994, org. 1965) seminal work on neighborhood stigma is a good example.

Concisely, the Elias neighborhood study demonstrates how “established neighbors attempted to impose their definitions of situations on newcomers. The newcomers developed a negative self-image of their group and reinforced social inequality between the groups” (Blokland, 2003b; p. 10). In this process, “exclusion and stigmatization of the outsiders by the established group were thus powerful weapons used by the latter to maintain their identity, to assert their superiority, keeping others firmly in their place” (Elias & Scotson, 1994; p. xviii). Stigmatization can have a paralyzing effect on groups with a lower power ratio (ibid. p. xxiv). The outsiders more or less accepted their inferior position. Via this trajectory, the areas in which the outsiders lived more or less shaped their future possibilities. Moreover, there is a strong relationship between place, people, stigma, and the reproduction of inequality. Loïc Wacquant uses a similar line of reasoning. According to him, to deal with neighborhood stigma, individuals develop distinction strategies (Wacquant, 1993; Wacquant, 1999b; p. 131). Strategies of distancing (I am not one of them) further undermine local solidarities and confirm deprecatory perceptions of the neighborhood (Wacquant, 1999a; p. 1644). Urban dwellers “overstress their moral worth as individuals and join in the dominant discourse of denunciation of those who undeservingly ‘profit’ from social assistance programs, faux pauvres and ‘welfare cheats’. It is as if they could gain value only by devaluing their neighborhood and their neighbors” (Wacquant, 1993; p. 374). Additionally, Wacquant distinguishes between several of these distinction strategies: mutual avoidance, reconstitution and elaboration of “infra-differences” or micro hierarchies, and the diversion of public opprobrium onto scapegoating such as notorious “problem families,” foreigners, drug dealers, and single mothers (ibid.). In the 1980s, Engbersen (1990; p. 106), heavily influenced by Robert Merton, used his reference group theory (1957) to show three mechanisms of internal differentiation in the neighborhood; 1) competition between native Dutch and migrants, 2) references on the basis of life-style, and 3) scapegoating. Blokland (2003b) analyzed an empirically complex picture of how native Dutch residents develop relationships with migrant neighbors. A case study of a Rotterdam neighborhood was used to show that four routes to discriminatory vocabulary could be distinguished: indifference, an antiracist discourse, conflicts, and again scapegoating. Many of these scholars use space – not as a residual phenomenon in which social action occurs – but as “a constitutive dimension of so-
cial life that shapes life experiences and action” (Gotham & Brumley, 2002; p. 267). Thus, analyzing how people in poverty respond to the neighborhood stigma enables us to assess whether the neighborhood is a fruitful environment for its inhabitants. Accordingly, neighborhood stigma causes individuals to react to this with internal differentiation and strategies of distancing, which consequentially annihilate potential social ties.

By showing responses to territorial stigma, I can illuminate how the social environment affects the life chances of people in poverty. I have already argued that stigmatized groups are not simply victims or passive recipients of stereotyping but rather, actively attempt to construct a buffering life space (Oyserman & Swim, 2001; p. 1). Moreover, since stigmatized individuals manipulate their interpretations of their social environment to protect their sense of self-worth (cf. Blokland, 2007), they make selective social comparisons. The effect is that individuals create status hierarchies within the neighborhood. They place themselves in the hierarchy, and the neighborhood becomes an elementary point of reference. In line with Durkheim, the socio-spatial organization of groups becomes the model for the mental organization of ideas (Gotham, 2003; p. 725). These primordial reference points (the neighborhood) are mirrored in the mental structures of people in poverty, finally affecting their practices and life chances. Beliefs and practices could not be facetiously explained as a complete fantasy, corresponding to nothing in reality (ibid.). If people in poverty have an aversion to other urban dwellers, perceive them as good-for-nothings or as unproductive resources, the social environment is not exceptionally productive. Urban dwellers are reference groups. Individuals construct their definition of the situation relationally; either in opposition, or in conformity to others. They create this internal differentiation. By comparing different groups within different areas, I am able to illustrate whether the place in which they live is a productive field.

5.4. The boundary work approach and stigma management

Boundary work offers a compelling tool that enables us to grasp individuals’ stigma management and strategies of distancing (cf. Lamont, 1992; Lamont & Fournier, 1992; Lamont et al., 1996; Lamont, 2000; Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Boundary-work is a “perspective by which sociologists examine relationships between individuals or groups not by studying their inherent characteristics but by analyzing the boundaries they draw between and among one another, such as
when the working poor define themselves in opposition to the poor who do not work” (Small & Newman, 2001; p. 38)\textsuperscript{18}. People interpret their position in relation to others. Moreover, after analyzing how people in poverty define a morally worthy person in the neighborhood, knowledge is produced whether and how urban dwellers cooperate with each other, and whether they have fruitful social ties in the neighborhood. Boundary work is a prism through which the internal differentiation of an organization, status group or in this case a neighborhood can be analyzed. People everywhere organize a significant part of their social interaction around the formation of social boundaries “us-them boundaries matter” (Tilly, 2004; p. 213).

Two strategies exist for demarcating boundaries: “realist” and “nominalist.” The realist strategy takes the point of view of the actors involved, treating a group “as a social fact only in that it is consciously experienced as such by the actors composing it.” The nominalist strategy proceeds from the concepts and purposes of the social-scientific observer instead, taking the correspondence between “the investigator’s analytically drawn boundaries and the subjective awareness of these boundaries by participants (as) an empirical question rather than an assumption” (Laumann et al., 1983; p. 20-1, in Emirbayer, 1997; p. 303-4). I use the realist strategy for demarcating boundaries, which involves an inductive technique used to illuminate alternative social stratifications. I do not start from fixed categories such as “black” and “white,” native, or immigrants – only to structure the text. In the course of transcription interpretation, I analyzed whom the respondents define as a morally worthy and unworthy person in the neighborhood. By doing this, I demonstrate how urban dwellers create moral boundaries between and among one another and, consequentially, disentangle practices of internal social differentiation and distancing. To complement the boundary work perspective, I use Gramling and Forsyth’s (1987) taxonomy on stigma management. Gramling and Forsyth (1987) explored the use of stigma exploitation in the exchange process. They identified seven strategies; 1) eliciting special consideration, 2) evoking selected aspects of a stereotype, 3) avoiding a more serious stigma, 4) avoiding interaction, 5) using submissive manipulation, 6) avoiding membership, and 7) gaining membership.
5.5. Findings

Before turning to the qualitative analysis, I will show some numbers on what the respondents think of their neighborhood. Table 5.1 Opinions on the neighborhood shows that the majority of the respondents is positive about their neighborhood. In this, differences between the neighborhoods hardly exist. But this contradicts the opinions on neighborhood transition: the majority of respondents declared the neighborhood to be changed negatively. Again, the majority feel safe in their neighborhood, half of whom is in contact with their neighbors: the same number of people wants to move out. Noteworthy, many respondents feel at ease in their neighborhood. However, because there are no stark contrasts, these numbers express little. We still do not know what they precisely really think of their neighborhood. As we shall see, some are positive on their neighborhood, but at the same time, distance themselves from others. Further, based on these numbers, we hardly can say anything about the differences between the neighborhoods and how place shapes the lives of people in poverty. By looking at these numbers, I have to go in depth to search for the neighborhood’s internal differentiation and the consequences of neighborhood stigma. I will start with a brief description of the neighborhood – Amsterdam-Noord.
Table 5.1 Opinions on the neighborhood

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Noord</th>
<th>Delfshaven</th>
<th>Bijlmermeer</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quality of neighborhood</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Nice</td>
<td>55.7%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>56.5%</td>
<td>52.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not nice</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
<td>7.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depends</td>
<td>31.6%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighborhood change</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>22.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>56.9%</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>69.4%</td>
<td>61.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other answer</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling safe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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5.6. Amsterdam-Noord

After the construction of the North sea-canal in 1876, Amsterdam needed space for its industries (cf. Ypeij et al., 2002). After the First World War Fokker established its first factory on the north side of Amsterdam. During the 20th century, Noord developed as an important industrial area within Amsterdam. Heavy, petrochemical, and shipbuilding industries flourished. Amsterdam-Noord obtained its original shape in 1921 after the Amsterdam municipality confiscated the northern rural parts. That year, the municipalities Buiksloot, Nieuwendam and Ransdorp, and partly Oostzaan were absorbed in Amsterdam. “Tuindorpen,” referring to city districts with a rural character, aiming at neutralizing the blue collar inner city houses’ deterioration, are Amsterdam-Noord’s marked feature. Built from the 1920's on, the absence of inner city pleasures, combined with the single-family housing, Tuindorpen were aimed to foster the development of decent individuals. Single-family houses with gardens and green surroundings characterize Tuindorpen, like Nieuwendam, Buiksloot, and Oostzaan. Still a large part of the
district exists as a rural area with small villages. The district of Amsterdam-Noord includes some of Holland’s poorest neighborhoods. Many inhabitants worked in the aforementioned industries, which had to compete with low-wage Asian companies and eventually went bankrupt. The 1980s failure of these industries caused massive unemployment. Immigrants gradually replaced the native working class.

5.6.1. The stigma of Amsterdam-Noord

On the one hand, the Amsterdam-Noord respondents are proud of their neighborhood. On the other hand, they feel stigmatized. They believe that the image of the area is not always positive. Some time ago, the local television network made a documentary on the neighborhood and its poverty. One woman says: “the bizarre Amsterdam Television broadcasting on poverty gave the neighborhood a bad reputation. Amsterdam Noord, a place where the down and out live. I think that is nonsense.” This comes on top of the widespread idea that their neighborhood is peculiar, as one man says, “We believe that they picture Amsterdam-Noord as a backward neighborhood. That is out of line.” Some respondents constantly experience confirmations of this stigma, especially in the labor and housing market; “I go to the employment agency many times. If I find a job opening, I write an application letter. Employers do not respond, because they do not want somebody from Amsterdam-Noord.” This man feels stigmatized and discriminated against. Some note other images, for example, in the newspaper; “people who look for a house do not want to live in Amsterdam-Noord. I noticed the ads.” This means that individuals, who search for a house in Amsterdam, do not want to live in the northern part. All these confrontations contribute to the impression that this area bears a bad reputation. Moreover, to deal with this, many act in response.

5.6.2. Classifying the undeserving poor: Natives’ viewpoints

First, I give several examples of how the native Dutch deal with their territorial stigma. The initial observed pattern was that the native Dutch classify others as the undeserving poor. For example, Amanda [118] witnessed the neighborhood’s deterioration. From her viewpoint, people are more rebellious and unsanitary and she thinks that all the Turks and Moroccans in the neighborhood engage in growing cannabis. Because she sees “others” effortlessly securing state benefits, she, like many other native Dutch, feels socially and economically deprived: “Nobody supports us, but migrant neighbors are supported. The government saved so much money. The government should think about us [single mothers]. I think that
Christopher [124] points at migrants in the neighborhood who possess a Mercedes. These status symbols mirror the migrants’ ostensible prosperousness. Living in poverty, he pursues recognition for his impoverishment, feels relatively underprivileged since migrants receive more from the government. He is astonished that the migrants are real moneybags. Migrants are seen as a foreshadowing; because they produce more children, they can take over the Netherlands. He is in favor of retrenchments on child support subsidies: "Maybe they will say that I am discriminating. What I would like is that the government cuts off the child benefit. We always had to take care of our children. And if they want to raise more than two children, they have to pay for it. Let me tell you, the Turks and the Moroccans have many children, and they are going on holiday to Turkey or Morocco for six weeks. They buy many houses, and I can point at them in the neighborhood, they drive a Mercedes! That is awful. They [the government] will save billions [if they retrench child support for migrants].”

Brittany [108], a former homeless woman, feels dishonored by the state. While she was homeless, she never received governmental help. Again, migrants do receive support from the government. She refers to the Moroccan cafeteria owner in the street who – in her opinion – never has to pay any taxes. “He’s in the lap of luxury, they’re more privileged. It seems that we are discriminated against.” She continues: “While I was homeless, where was my refugee camp? They [the government] do not make a special effort for us, but only for those coming from far away lands. They migrate, and why do they migrate? Look at the cafeteria in this street, a Moroccan owns it. That is his business. But he is dodging taxes! All the migrants dodge taxes. Do you understand? I think, that’s terrible.”

Amanda drew a boundary between, on the one hand, those who are willing to work, conforming to society, and, on the other hand, refugees and migrants who do not conform. Christopher dissociates himself from the migrants by drawing a boundary between those who undeservingly “profit” from social assistance programs, and his sort: abandoned by the state and living in despair. He endeavors to
protect his acquired privileges. However, he does not blame migrants for his misery, but rather the government’s allocation of goods. [It seems that not only the neighborhood reputation is considerable]. Hence, many of the native Dutch think that they do not receive as much as others receive. For that reason, they feel economically deprived, underprivileged with reference to others (cf. De Swaan, 1990; p. 181). To deal with both stigma and this deprivation, they distance themselves from others in the neighborhood, who, from their viewpoint, gain more from the state. They see themselves as the deserving poor, and refer to others as the undeserving poor. All three respondents drew a boundary between the deserving and the undeserving poor. They cannot escape their neighborhood, because they lack the means. However, they hold often the state responsible for their misery, not so much the newcomers.

5.6.3. Neighborhood devaluation: Natives’ viewpoints

The second manner in how the residents deal with neighborhood stigma is to distance themselves from those who deteriorate their neighborhood. They make distinctions on the basis of life-style, and not on class or economic position. For example, Melissa [150], a 58 years-old woman, experienced the neighborhood’s deterioration. “Interviewer: what do you think of the neighborhood? Melissa: tolerable. The quality is declining. Antisocial people came to this neighborhood. And I do not mean colored people. Because above me live some people from Eritrea, and the next-door neighbors are Turkish. I do not care. In general, more antisocial people. Interviewer: what do you mean by antisocial people? Melissa: at the time, I lived in the Jordaan [an Amsterdam neighborhood], I met the same kind of people…calling names, cursing, not talking in a normal kind of voice. Color is not a concern. Because I only know two kind of people, kind, and unkind people.”

Furthermore, Kayla [166], a 38 years-old woman likes her own part of the neighborhood. Interviewer: “Are you satisfied with the neighborhood? Kayla: well, this part of the neighborhood is good. That is because of the many elderly. But the other part of the neighborhood is a real mess. That is because of the many alcoholics, and some people who are not normal, odd people. They booze it up every weekend. The rest of the neighborhood, it is a chaos. Walk down the street and look what a mess. They throw everything on the street.” From her viewpoint, others’ behavior coincides with a geographical location.

113
Accordingly, Melissa distances herself from people who are untidy, noisy, and undisciplined but draws a boundary between sympathetic and unsympathetic people. Kayla drew a boundary between purity and impurity, and behavior and place are firmly related. This manner of dealing with neighborhood stigma is to differentiate on the basis of life-style. The native Dutch draw moral boundaries, because they see others devaluing their neighborhood. They make distinctions contingent on others’ behavior, independently of color. By pointing at odd behavior, they avoid being stigmatized as a person who deteriorates the neighborhood.

5.6.4. Classifying the undeserving poor: The migrants’ viewpoints

Whereas the native Dutch classify the migrants as the undeserving poor, the interviewed migrants classify the native Dutch as the undeserving poor. Samir [116], a 37 years-old Moroccan experiences the neighborhood deterioration, dislikes his house, and thinks he has to pay too much rent. He distinguishes between the native Dutch who easily obtain comfortable houses, and “his sort,” who has to live in decayed houses. “If I request for a decent residence, I will not get it. They say, it is too expensive for you. You cannot afford it. But they give these houses to the Dutch in the neighborhood. Suppose we both apply for a residence, you will get it and I do not. That is awful. I won’t get it, always this moldy old house.”

A Surinamese woman [148] feels underprivileged with reference to Moroccans and Turks. She marvels about her neighbors’ plentitude and she speaks about “stepping down, so they can receive favors.” She compares herself with individuals in her surroundings, and feels as if her social position shifts downwardly. “Looking at these Turkish families, they are constantly moving from house to house. I wonder, how can they accomplish this, while I can’t? For example, the downstairs neighbors, I do not know where they are coming from, a kind of Tamil family. They get a house, floor covering, a fridge, and everything. The man of the house drives a Mercedes. Their grandmother is dropped off by taxi everyday. I do not get any favors. And we? We take a step down, and they rank prior to us. There are so many others looking for a house. Refugees always get the houses.”

According to Samir, the institutions offer the native Dutch more prerogatives. He draws a boundary between the haves and the haves-not, assigning himself to the latter. The Surinamese woman feels increasingly underprivileged. She draws a boundary between people in the neighborhood who obtain state benefits and she, who is underprivileged. These cases made clear that migrants also classify others
as the undeserving poor. They, as well, distance themselves from others who gain more from the state. In short, drawing boundaries between the deserving and undeserving poor is not particularly restricted to specific ethnic groups.

5.6.5. Neighborhood devaluation: The migrants’ viewpoints

Not only have the native Dutch pointed at those individuals who contribute to the negative neighborhood image. For example, 58 years-old Turk [159] negatively refers to other migrant fractions. From his viewpoint, not the native Dutch are impure, but Moroccans: Interviewer: ‘what do you think of the neighborhood? He: It is unclean, because more migrants came to this neighborhood. Many Moroccans, Moroccan children. Moroccan children are dirty. They get together until midnight. They do not think, ‘Let’s go to school’. They walk through the city, and do not do anything.’ He dissociates from other migrants, and makes a clear distinction between purity and impurity.

5.6.6. Conclusion: Noord

So far, two patterns to deal with neighborhood stigma are distinguished. First, boundaries are based on fairness/justice/righteousness. Both native Dutch and migrants feel underprivileged: “others” rank prior to them, have additional privileges, and are more prosperous. They feel left to their fate and abandoned by the state. They refer to a bias in the distribution of scarce resources. Both native Dutch and migrants classify themselves as members of the deserving poor. The second pattern of stigma management consists of drawing boundaries between disorderly and orderly behavior. Again, both the native and the migrants dissociate from the “neighborhood scum.” The most remarkable characteristic of Amsterdam-Noord is that there are no real differences between the native Dutch and the migrants99 (concerning their reactions to the territorial stigma).

5.7. Rotterdam Delfshaven

Delfshaven is situated in the west of Rotterdam. From 1860, entrepreneurs started to build low-priced houses to accommodate Southwestern Dutch migrants. The contemporary physical structure was established between 1870 and 1920. The neighborhood did not suffer from the 1940 German bombardments on Rotterdam (some neighborhoods did suffer from collateral damage from US bombs). The 20th century district, by contrast, has wide, stylish avenues with large mansions interspersed by small alleys with densely packed houses. Since its founding, it
attracted Dutch migrants to work in the Rotterdam harbor economy. These inhabitants were partly replaced by foreign newcomers who started to work in the late 1960’s in the related economy, as cleaners, retail entrepreneurs, and factory workers. The “native” inhabitants left the district, and the newcomers changed its social fabric. The consequences are lucid: different languages could be heard, retailers modified their merchandise or were replaced by migrant entrepreneurs, and many natives moved to the city outskirts. One distinctive feature is the vast residential mobility. Inhabitants continuously move on as relatives from Turkey or Cape Verde can settle in the neighborhood (cf. Staring, 2001; Staring et al., 2002; p. 16). Two third of the inhabitants are from non-Dutch descent. The ethnically heterogeneous Delfshaven accommodates many traditional migrants (e.g. people from Suriname, Turkey, Cape Verde and Morocco). Accordingly, many migrant organizations, churches, mosques arose in the district. The average educational level and income is low, the number of people on welfare high, and unemployment severe (ibid; p. 20).

5.7.1. The stigma of Delfshaven

Similar to Amsterdam-Noord, the inhabitants of Delfshaven suffer from the neighborhood reputation. Though some like living in the neighborhood, they are also aware that their neighborhood has a reputation. One man: “My neighborhood is not a bad neighborhood; they gave it a bad name.” Family and friends outside the neighborhood reaffirm the neighborhood reputation. As one woman says: “If I tell people where I live, they respond very surprisingly.” Moreover, another woman said: “Poor people always lived in this street, and this street always had a reputation of hardship. I became aware of the status via my family. They ask: why did you decide to live there?”

5.7.2. Neighborhood devaluation: Natives’ viewpoints

The remaining native Dutch declare that they live as the only few whites among many migrants. Although some display their resentment, they have hardly any other option than to accept the situation and make the best of it. Some native Dutch refer to those who try to devalue their neighborhood. Both Amy and Kenneth, the next two illustrations, suffer from territorial stigmatization, but try to throw off their stigma.

Amy [228], a 31 years-old woman lives, “in spite of everything” in the west of Rotterdam. Her sister is anxious to visit her, and her father often asks, “When do
you leave that shitty neighborhood?” Although some parts are unsafe, she does not complain about the neighborhood. She does complain about the downstairs café and, several times, she telephoned the police to complain about the nuisance. The café owner does not care. Except for the café nuisance, Amy does not have any social contacts with her neighbors. She does not have any difficulties with the people in the street. Noting that she lives as the only white among many migrants: “I notice, all the foreigners are so close to each other. It is hard to make friends with them. Sometimes I say hello, then they look stoical.” The social distance is severe and she cannot communicate with her Turkish neighbors adequately. “Well, it would be nice to chat occasionally: you do not have to visit them twenty-four-seven.” Amy makes a distinction between orderly and disorderly people: “Before the Turkish neighbors, I had some very rough neighbors. They threw everything in the lobby, chairs, bicycles. If I complained about it, they freaked out, calling names, disorderly people.”

Kenneth [233] lives in Spangen, a neighborhood with a bad reputation in his words; “They gave Spangen a bad name. Ten years ago, before the renewal, it used to be a nice cozy neighborhood. But not anymore. There used to be many small shops, a grocery-shop, a butcher. Now, the post office is gone, and I am forced to go to the big super markets.” The urban renewal, from his viewpoint, turned out unpleasant. Many old residents did not come back to the old neighborhood and, for that reason, he feels estranged. “After the renewal, I got many new neighbors. The old ones left the neighborhood.” He dislikes his own neighborhood: “It is becoming a second-rate neighborhood. The neighborhood is for people who are out of place. They are often migrants, they have a criminal record, or they live on welfare. The Dutch in this neighborhood do not enjoy the neighborhood any longer. They leave the neighborhood one by one. I saw it happening the past twenty years. People left because of the mess in the streets. I can give you a tour through Spangen and easily point at those who live up to the rules of the game and those who do not. Interviewer: rules of the game? Kenneth: well, we are all raised with several norms. There is no reason to throw garbage in the street! These inhabitants are not raised in a normal kind of way.”

Although Amy accepts newcomers, she dissociates from those who have a low moral standard. She does not make ethnic distinctions. Accordingly, Kenneth’s definition of a good neighbor is “a dead neighbor.” Decency in the neighborhood is gone, and he hardly makes distinctions between individuals; they all are im-
moral, and criminal. The boundary he draws is between him – a morally decent person – and the “rest of the neighborhood.” This is how he dissociates between those who live up to the social norms and those who do not.

5.7.3. Neighborhood devaluation: The migrants’ viewpoints

In Delfshaven, many Turks are interviewed. Achmed [271] is one of them: “everybody knows, this is not a good neighborhood.” He does not see many Dutch in the streets anymore. He estimates that about five native Dutch live in his street. There used to be more Dutch, but they all left the inner city: “it is better to live among the Dutch. They have a better income, but they all left the neighborhood.” If he had more money, he would leave too. He suffers from the drug-related nuisance. He is often asked to give money to drug-users, whom he passes apathetically: “Dutch people, the more the merrier. More Dutch means less criminality. Everybody knows that. Also, here, the Middellandstraat, there used to be many Dutch shops. But not any more. It is unsafe, so they all left. If I had more money, I would go away.”

Yuksel [274] dislikes his house, the neighborhood, and his disorderly neighbors. He does not bother anybody. However, his neighbors are a nuisance to him. In his apartment building, many lamps are molested and bicycles are stolen. In his opinion, two Dutch brothers are responsible. These two brothers are alcoholics and his downstairs Cape Verdian neighbor is a prostitute: “I want another house in another neighborhood, but I do not have the money to move out.” His neighbors are disorderly and he makes distinctions within his own ethnic environment. “The inhabitants are disorderly. They all have a different culture and they come from small villages and rural areas. They do not know how to live in such a neighborhood. In the mountains, where they come from, it is normal to put the garbage in the street. They still do it here in the Netherlands. You are not in Turkey, this is Holland. The respectable people leave, and who stays? The alcoholics and people like us, who do not have any money.” Furthermore, he wants his children to grow up well, in a neighborhood with a good reputation.

According to Yusuf [262], too many migrants live in his neighborhood: “the Dutch left, and many foreigners arrived, Surinamese, Moroccans. Because the Dutch left the neighborhood, the quality of the neighborhood declined. One time, somebody broke into my house. I know who did it: it is a Moroccan.” The neighborhood is significant for his children. He refers to the junkies, who in his
opinion create a hostile environment. About the migrants: “in the schools in this neighborhood, there are not many Dutch kids. Therefore, many of the children don’t do as well as they should academically. The migrant children learn to curse, use dirty words, calling names. I do not like that. I want my children to grow up well.”

Yeter [255] makes clear that many Pakistanis, Turks, and Moroccans live in his neighborhood, though not many native Dutch. His upstairs neighbors are Surinamese. He does not have any social contacts with his neighbors, nor do they visit each other. A good neighbor is somebody who does not bother other people: “The Surinamese make a lot of noise. They turn the music on very loud. We Turks do not. If our children are noisy, we correct them. We do not like making noise.”

Kelsey [212] used to have contacts with her neighbors, but not any longer. She, a Cape Verdian woman, witnessed the neighborhood alteration, and she is worried about whether the neighborhood is a good environment for her children. “It used to be a nice neighborhood, living with some Dutch and a few Turks. It used to be better. However, it is getting worse. Many junkies reside in the neighborhood. I am afraid to let my children play in the streets. The backdoor used to be wide open. Many Turks and Moroccans live in the neighborhood. The Dutch left.”

Achmed feels safe in the neighborhood, but he worries about the safety of his children. He makes a distinction between criminal and non-criminal behavior, and he distances himself from the junkies and associates himself with the native Dutch. Yusuf makes a distinction between decent and indecent people. Child rearing values are central to this distinction. Yeter dissociates himself from other migrants and their life style by clearly drawing a boundary between individuals who are able and unable to discipline their children. Kelsey associates the rise of criminality with the arrival of Turks and Moroccans. She dissociates herself from these groups by referring to their deviant behavior. In this way, many migrants resent the absence of the native Dutch, and refer to disorderly behavior. They try to distance themselves from other migrants. They make social distinctions to avoid a more serious stigma.

5.7.4. Classifying the undeserving poor: The migrants’ viewpoints

Yener [261], a working poor, works, but receives less money than people who work on the side. He draws a boundary between those who practice immoral be-
behavior and moral behavior. He can point at the undeserving poor in the street, those who deliberately offend the rules. His feelings of destitution are intensified since these fraudulent urban dwellers earn more but do less: “Looking at this street, I can point at many people engaging in the informal economy. Not only Turks, but also Moroccans and Dutch. They also divorce, so they receive both an (welfare) income. I know these people. I think it is unfair. I can go to the welfare office and tell them that I divorced my wife. Then I quit my job, and take up two welfare benefits. I can save money, so I can go on holiday with my children, underhand. All these people in this neighborhood drive a nice car. I cannot.” He distinguishes between the deserving and the undeserving poor, and situates himself among the former. From his viewpoint, the undeserving poor are immoral.

5.7.5. Conclusion: Delfshaven

The native Dutch live amidst many migrants; they barely have any other option then to accept the multi-cultural society. Some feel estranged and draw a boundary between morally superior and inferior behavior. On the other hand, many Turks draw boundaries on immoral, criminal, and disorderly behavior, child-rearing values, referring to other migrant fractions who display “odd” behavior and “unusual” lifestyles. Two patterns of resisting the neighborhood stigma are identified. First, both native and migrants point at those who devalues his own neighborhood. By doing so, they avoid the stigma of being a person who deteriorates his own neighborhood. The second pattern: some dissociate from the unworthy underprivileged. By practicing strategies of distancing, they avoid being stigmatized as the undeserving poor. The most distinctive characteristic of Delfshaven is similar to that of Amsterdam-Noord; all practice more or less the same strategies of distancing. However, many migrants also make distinctions with reference to their own population.

5.8. Amsterdam South-East, Bijlmermeer

Situated in the southeast of Amsterdam and constructed from the 1960’s on, the Bijlmer springs from Le Corbusier’s architectural thoughts (cf. Ypeij & Snel, 2002). His ‘Functionalism’ prescribed that life’s purposes (working, living, recreating, and shopping) have to be spatially separated. This ‘Form Follows Function’ principle resulted in large ten story apartment buildings amidst the green parks, well connected with Amsterdam’s center via subway. The middle classes could live quietly in the outskirts of Amsterdam, while working in high-skilled
It turned out differently. The Amsterdam middle class did not choose the Bijlmer; facilities developed slowly during the construction, the modern apartments had to compete with conventional houses in the province, and the parking garages differed from the original planning (causing dark spots). Many apartments were vacant. Marginalized groups concentrated in the neighborhood, among whom are many former Dutch colonial migrants (Suriname became independent in 1975). The Bijlmer has one of the largest Surinamese communities of the Netherlands. One third of the Bijlmer inhabitants are Surinamese, one third native Dutch and one third from non-western countries. Several social problems are present. First, the Bijlmer suffers from a spatial mismatch between supply and demand of labor. Many banks and insurance companies are close to the Bijlmer, offering high-qualified jobs. These jobs cannot be fulfilled with the relatively lowly educated Bijlmer immigrants. Second, the Bijlmer has an unsafe reputation. The crime rate is far above the Amsterdam average. The many dark spots are an excellent place for drug dealing. With its many escape routes, the Bijlmer offers a hide out for drug runners. In the 1990s, urban renewal began. Many high apartment buildings were bulldozed and replaced by smaller houses and the remaining has been fully renovated. The urban renewal claimed to have a more blended composition as a result. But despite these good intentions, the Bijlmers’ reputation did not change.

5.8.1. The stigma of the Bijlmermeer

The Bijlmermeer is one of the most stigmatized areas of the Netherlands. Despite the 1990s urban renewal, it is hard to get rid of its negative reputation. Some of the respondents, a man, experience the urban renewal as discriminating. “The neighborhood renewal. I disagree. The motivation is negative. Poverty has to leave the neighborhood. To do this, they built classy houses. That is discriminating. They do it to doctor up the respectability of the neighborhood.” From his viewpoint, the renewal is a symbol that he is part of a public issue, while his personal troubles have not been addressed. Others confirm this idea, expressing their discontent towards the media; “How they talk about the neighborhood. It seems that only bad people live in the Bijlmer.” The neighborhood image has effects; “outsiders are frightened to go to the Bijlmer, I noticed. Because the streets are so grubby, I feel embarrassed to invite coworkers for dinner.” Because the neighborhood is stigmatized, they are reluctant to invite people over, showing a latent relationship between social networks and the neighborhood.
Contrasts are vivid in the Bijlmer. The inhabitants experience the poor living conditions in the Bijlmer; its green environment is juxtaposed to a drug-related nuisance. Through the eyes of the native Dutch, this nuisance is paralleled to the existence of the Surinamese inhabitants. Many native Dutch equate drug-related nuisance with blackness. William, a Dutch man, witnessed the neighborhood’s moral decay and speaks about deterioration of norms, and ties this to the migrants’ arrival: “The riff-raff from abroad arrived in the Bijlmer. They have different standards than the native Dutch. Ghanaian, Surinamese, or Turks, it does not matter what skin color. They have different norms than we have. ‘We’ means the average Dutch. And Amsterdam Southeast becomes a garbage can. You see the quality of the neighborhood declining. More nuisance and criminality in the neighborhood. It is part of a ‘bad’ process. It is not only my opinion.” He makes distinctions between individuals in the neighborhood: “I used to have some well-mannered neighbors. They were decent, but they left the neighborhood. They were replaced by something less comfy. In my nature, I am not a person who easily discriminates. I judge people on their behavior. That is the problem! I observed the behavior of these people, and based on their behavior, I drew my conclusion. Do you understand that I do not live comfortable in this neighborhood?”

Many Dutch Bijlmer inhabitants do not use words like “migrants” or “foreigners” to describe their next-door neighbors. They use less ambiguous terms to describe others, such as blacks, as does Whitney, a 53 years-old Dutch woman. They – the blacks – display immoral behavior: “Yes, the neighborhood is deteriorated. The Dutch used to live in this neighborhood, but they are gone now. That makes a big difference. I do not have anything against blacks, but some of them are a real goof-off. They are probably used to different standards in the bush. If you walk down the porch, you see how dirty everything is. I think, that is so disorderly. They throw everything out in the street. It is becoming a ghetto; the housing association puts the riff-raff in these houses! If my grandson comes over, he is disdainful towards my neighborhood!”

Kristen dislikes living in the Bijlmermeer and she blames the Surinamese for her misery: “When I came to this neighborhood, a labeled myself as a non-racist. But after so many negative experiences, I am avoiding the Negro-
Surinamese. I mean, the Hindustani women are OK, but these men treat you shitty. If have two kinds of experiences. I have to be slammed in the face, or I have to be fucked, and that kind of behavior starts at age ten. None of them ever apologized.”

William drew a clear boundary between “them” who have low moral standards and “us” the average native Dutch. Whitney did not blame the migrants, but the housing association. The housing association distributes ‘social problems’ fallaciously. As a consequence, she has to deal with immoral behavior. Kristen emphasized the black/white dichotomy, but also makes distinctions within the Surinamese community. She insists that she hardly discriminated before she moved to the Bijlmer, but her worldview changed. It seems that the neighborhood influences individuals’ viewpoints. Accordingly, the native Dutch do not want to be held responsible for the neighborhood deterioration. Moreover, to avert their neighborhood stigma, they point at the black community, which, from their viewpoint, deteriorates their neighborhood.

5.8.3. Classifying the undeserving poor: Natives’ viewpoints

In the Bijlmermeer distinctions are made on the basis of social positions. Caitlin, a 49 years-old Dutch woman is not a Bijlmermeer enthusiast: “What I extremely dislike about the Bijlmer is that so much is organized for the black community. Not for whites. I feel discriminated in my own country. Go to the market, accidentally bump into someone, I guarantee you, it is black and it does not say sorry. I do not want to discriminate. But this is out of line. Damn, I live in my own country, it doesn’t say sorry.”

Travis, a 36 years-old Dutch man has been living in the Bijlmermeer for twelve years. He witnessed the rise of the drug economy, and the exit of the affluent individuals. From his viewpoint, he thinks he has to accommodate to the newcomers: “As a Westerner, you are a kind of ‘allochtoon’ [a minority member]. To keep it livable, I think, they have to adjust to Dutch norms. Why should I adapt to others in the neighborhood. To whom do I have to adapt? To my Antillean neighbors, or the Ghanaian over there? I should adapt to all kind of different groups in all directions. That is unrealistic.” Travis declares: “what’s coming to the neighborhood are people who do not have any money and no future prospects. They do not speak Dutch or even English. The last couple of years, many have-nots came to the neighborhood. That is affecting the neighborhood. Nobody
has money, conflicts arise, and they are not able to communicate, quickly losing
their temper. That is a bad development.”

As a result, the boundary Caitlin draws is based upon righteousness; “they” re-
ceive more and therefore she feels underprivileged. She draws secondly a bound-
dary based on behavior. Travis makes a clear distinction between civilized and
uncivilized people, stressing the idea that all inhabitants have to get along, and
that all social problems are accumulated in the neighborhood. He draws a bound-
dary on moral behavior. Nevertheless, what appears is a third pattern of dealing
with neighborhood stigma, by expressing sympathy for others’ positions and so-
cial problems. Although he is not personally involved, Travis understood others’
problems well.

5.8.4. Classifying, distancing and sympathizing in the Surinamese community

As a logical consequence of being the largest ethnic group in the Bijlmer, the
Surinamese feel accustomed to the nei ghborhood. They experience a sense of
belonging and are pleased about the Surinamese festivals: [323] “Yes, I feel at
ease in the Bijlmer. The neighborhood includes many nationalities. It is like living
in Suriname. I affiliate with these people.” [331] “Many activities are organized,
for example a Surinamese dancing.” [341] “I live comfortable in this neighbor-
hood. I enjoy the multi-cultural society.” Additionally, although intolerance is
clearly present, the Bijlmer offers a safeguard against race prejudice. The third
manner to deal with neighborhood stigma – sympathizing – is best illuminated at
some Surinamese accounts. Leslie [367], a Surinamese woman, explains; “Since I
moved to the neighborhood, I think it is wonderful. You see many foreigners, just
like me. Thinking about discrimination, I feel secure. But the last couple of
months the neighborhood starts to deteriorate, it is becoming dirty.”

Obviously, the Surinamese experience the neighborhoods’ deterioration. Some
Surinamese distinguish between those who can adhere to conventional norms and
those who cannot. An internal segmentation occurs and many express differences
within the “black” community: [339] “Surinamese and Antilleans from Curacao,
do not get along. And people from Aruba, they go along with the Surinamese. And
Antilleans from Curacao are different. A lot of discrimination occurs.” Marissa
[322] says she is living comfortably. However, she also experiences the other
negative side of the neighborhood. “They throw everything from the balconies. A
couch, Christmas trees, diapers, and the elevator is very filthy. Some people can-
not fit in. I can fully understand it, they come from a different society in which everybody lives in the open-air. They have to adapt, facing difficulties to do so. And I think that this vandalism is the result of financial troubles. They do not know how to cope with limited sources.”

“I’m a white Surinamese”, says Shannon [321], a 42 years-old Surinamese woman. She feels underprivileged because she can hardly get access to the institutions, although others can: “the government takes care of refugees. They quickly build new shelters for them, and money comes in very fast. However, if I want something, because I am ill, I have to go to the healthcare services twenty times. They have to verify everything, and this and that. Always the little suffer for the great.” She is “whiter” than the average Surinamese and she experienced discrimination in the neighborhood and in Suriname. “Everything is thrown on the street. Interviewer: who is doing that? Shannon: well, I think, in this neighborhood, most of the people are foreigners. Therefore, these people seem to deteriorate the neighborhood. Interviewer: what do you think of the neighborhood? Shannon: I like the surrounding, but not the people. That is the difference. I do not like these fellows. My own people. I have been beaten thrice because I am white. I do not like that. Because they think, I am Dutch, so you can beat me up. I have the same experience in Suriname. Therefore I am caught between a rock and a hard place. I do not know where I should live.”

In short, Leslie did not make firm distinctions, but by taking up positive connotations, she neutralizes the neighborhood stigma. Rather than practicing strategies of distancing, some sympathize with others. But also within the group, distinctions are made. Shannon disconnects herself from the Surinamese community. She dissociates from the undeserving poor and she points at the foreigners who deteriorate her neighborhood. She employs both strategies to shift off the neighborhood stigma.

5.8.5. Conclusion: Bijlmer

Native Dutch draw boundaries on disorderly versus orderly, moral versus immoral behavior, civilized versus uncivilized, sexually honorable versus disgraceful behavior, and they feel underprivileged with reference to the “blacks.” On the other hand, many Surinamese draw moral boundaries on purity and impurity. However, these boundaries are less dramatized, because Surinamese enjoy living in the Bijlmer. All groups equally experience nuisance. This misery is drug-
related, and linked with the deteriorated built environment. In the Bijlmer, none of the inhabitants want to be blamed for the neighborhood deterioration. All groups, native and migrants, point at those who are devaluing the neighborhood in order to avoid and to lessen the neighborhood stigma. Both the native Dutch and the Surinamese feel underprivileged. They want to show that they are part of the deserving poor. At last, to deal with neighborhood stigma, some sympathize with others’ impoverished social positions, and show their consideration.

5.9. The incidence of the strategies of distancing

Particularly interested on how the stigmatized areas were related to the internal differentiation of the neighborhood, this chapter identified three stigma management techniques. Using one or more of these management techniques, people in poverty are able to avoid, lessen, counter, cope, or otherwise manage their stigma (Gramling & Forsyth, 1987; p. 402). The respondents made three distinctions between other urban dwellers based on: 1) behavior, 2) deservingness, and 3) neutralizing the discrediting mark. In the first technique: people in poverty express their moral worth by disqualifying “others” who are impure, immoral, or disorderly. By pointing at bad behavior in the neighborhood, those who throw out the garbage in the street, use much alcohol, and bring up their children in the wrong kind of manner, they try to avoid a more serious stigma: “in this strategy the actor displays a mark in order to conceal, mask, draw attention away from, excuse, or negate a more serious stigma” (Gramling & Forsyth, 1987; p. 408). In the second technique: people in poverty make social distinctions between the undeserving and deserving poor, and assign themselves to the latter. They point at others who seem to secure state benefits effortlessly, while from their perspective, these “frauds” do not deserve social assistance. The respondents feel underprivileged, abandoned by the state and therefore point at welfare beneficiaries driving a Mercedes. The distinctions they make are based on assumed economic prosperity and privileges; people in poverty avoid being a member of the undeserving poor (and they evade group membership): “the essence of this strategy is that the marked individual wishes to avoid membership in a group or association, or obtain non-member status in a group or association of which s/he is currently probably a member” (Gramling & Forsyth, 1987; p. 410). In the third pattern, people in poverty express sympathy for others position. They understand others’ behavior in the neighborhood and embrace positive connotations of the neighborhood and its dwellers. Consequentially, they try to neutralize a discrediting mark. Rather than pointing at others’ behavior negatively, they display their considera-
tions for others’ position, which is not based on bad behavior or economic privileges, but on humanistic grounds. The three techniques are not mutually exclusive. Some dissociate from others, while simultaneously expressing their sympathy (cf. Bourdieu, 1999; p. 4).

Ninety-five respondents made distinctions based on life-style, twenty-five on deservingness, and forty-five respondents expressed their sympathy for others’ position (see Table 5.2 Relationship strategies of distancing and the neighbourhood). Commonly, the respondents made distinctions on the basis of life style, and secondly they oftentimes express their consideration for others. Looking at Table 5.2, there are differences between the neighborhoods. How can I explain these differences?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Noord</th>
<th>Delfshaven</th>
<th>Bijlmer</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>33(51%)</td>
<td>33(67%)</td>
<td>29(57%)</td>
<td>95(58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deservingness</td>
<td>18(28%)</td>
<td>1(2%)</td>
<td>6(12%)</td>
<td>25(16%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive connotations</td>
<td>14(22%)</td>
<td>15(31%)</td>
<td>16(31%)</td>
<td>45(27%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (P&lt;0.05)</td>
<td>65(100%)</td>
<td>49(100%)</td>
<td>51(100%)</td>
<td>165(100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In three neighborhoods, the common manner to deal with the neighborhood stigma is to make distinctions based on life style. However, the Amsterdam Noord dwellers often feel underprivileged with reference to others. But this manner to deal with the neighborhood is not often practiced in Delfshaven and the Bijlmermeer. Even so, taking up positive connotations is repeatedly practiced in both Delfshaven and the Bijlmermeer. So there are differences between the neighborhoods, but is this due to the social environment, or are other factors involved? How can I explain these differences? Maybe I can explain the differences by focusing on their ethnic background.
Table 5.3 Ethnic composition of the neighbourhoods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Noord</th>
<th>Delfshaven</th>
<th>Bijlmermeer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antilleans</td>
<td>1.213</td>
<td>1.967</td>
<td>4.895</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccans</td>
<td>7.215</td>
<td>8.300</td>
<td>1.564</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native Dutch</td>
<td>50.079</td>
<td>23.487</td>
<td>23.465</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verdian</td>
<td>6.408</td>
<td>50.079</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South European</td>
<td>1.585</td>
<td>3.342</td>
<td>1.214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surinamese</td>
<td>7.881</td>
<td>10.113</td>
<td>26.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turks</td>
<td>4.434</td>
<td>10.166</td>
<td>800</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: O+S, Gemeentelijke Basis Administratie (GBA)

Looking at Table 5.3, which shows the ethnic composition of the neighborhood in general, we see quite a few differences between the neighborhoods. First of all, native Dutch are the majority in Amsterdam-Noord; there is not a majority in Delfshaven, and a lot of Surinamese reside in the Bijlmermeer. The “Landscapes of Poverty”-project consists of interviews with various people from different ethnic backgrounds, and the ethnic composition of the neighborhoods mirrors the ethnic composition of the research group. So, in Amsterdam-Noord, sixty native Dutch, in Delfshaven twenty-nine Turks and twenty Cape Verdians, and in the Bijlmermeer twenty-three Surinamese are interviewed. It seems that there is a relationship between neighborhood and the manner in which people distance themselves from others, but these differences may be traced back to the respondents’ ethnicity.

Table 5.4 shows the relationship between the respondents’ ethnic background, and their strategies of distancing. The data shows that the three techniques are not exclusively restricted to particular ethnic groups. Both native Dutch and migrants feel underprivileged, display their moral worth, sympathize with, and dissociate from others. Differences are not very clear, although the native Dutch relatively often refer to the undeserving poor, quite a few Surinamese embrace positive connotations of the neighborhood, and the majority of the Turks makes distinctions based on life-style. Why?
Table 5.4 Relationship ethnicity and strategies of distancing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Dutch</th>
<th>Moroccans</th>
<th>Surinamese</th>
<th>Turkish</th>
<th>Cape Verdian</th>
<th>Antillen</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle</td>
<td>46 (55%)</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>10 (43%)</td>
<td>21 (75%)</td>
<td>7 (54%)</td>
<td>6 (86%)</td>
<td>4 (80%)</td>
<td>95 (58%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deservingness</td>
<td>18 (21%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>3 (13%)</td>
<td>1 (4%)</td>
<td>1 (14%)</td>
<td>25 (15%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>20 (24%)</td>
<td>2 (40%)</td>
<td>10 (43%)</td>
<td>6 (21%)</td>
<td>6 (46%)</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>45 (27%)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>84 (100%)</td>
<td>5 (100%)</td>
<td>23 (100%)</td>
<td>28 (100%)</td>
<td>13 (100%)</td>
<td>7 (100%)</td>
<td>5 (100%)</td>
<td>165 (100%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The native Dutch feel often abandoned by the state, and witnessed the arrival of new groups in the Netherlands. According to the Dutch, migrants seem to acquire more privileges. For that reason, the native Dutch probably make often distinctions on deservingness. Because so many Surinamese feel responsible for others’ behavior in their neighborhood, they persistently take up positive connotations. After all, they are the largest group in the Bijlmermeer. However, these distinction strategies cannot be entirely related to a person’s ethnic background. Almost all ethnic groups practice one of the three strategies of distancing. Nevertheless, because there are more similarities than differences between the various groups, it is difficult to explain their distinction strategies. Though, it seems that a common pattern emerges; a pattern that is not particularly restricted to ethnic groups, but is common for people in poverty and their impoverished position: a moral code that distinguishes between deserving and undeserving, pure and impure, and kind and unkind persons. Making distinctions, drawing moral boundaries and creating status hierarchies appears to be a common activity. Nonetheless, the low-income positions produce these distinction strategies: they want to maintain their self-worth, do not want to be reminded of their poor status, avoid responsibility for the neighborhood deterioration and, therefore, somebody has to suffer.

5.10. Conclusion: Distant bonds in the neighborhood

The manner in which urban dwellers deal with each other has an unintended effect. To know, the strategies of distancing reaffirm the negative neighborhood image: an image of community absence, struggles between urban dwellers and a bad livability. It seems that the neighborhood is trapped in a vicious circle: poor livability and a bad reputation result in stigma management techniques. These techniques tend to widen the social distance between people and, consequentially, people become even more dissociated with their local communities, which undermines local solidarities (Wacquant, 1999a; p. 1644), cultivates differences (cf.
Lamont & Fournier, 1992) and all this eventuates in few productive ties to get ahead.

In this chapter, I tried to grasp as to whether the neighborhood influences the life chances of people in poverty. First of all, in such disintegrated areas, the chance of escaping poverty via neighborhood resources is minimal. In the neighborhood, people in poverty seem to lack productive social ties for social leverage. Second, the neighborhood, I think, only has a modest effect; the neighborhood influences the lives of people in poverty in such way that it merely fortifies feelings of destitution. Whether the neighborhood contributes to the perpetuation of poverty is undecided, but it will hardly contribute to upward mobility.
90 Oftentimes, scholars use the notion of collective efficacy, referring to the capacity of a neighborhood to intervene when a problem arises, and in which trust, social ties, and reciprocated exchange exist among neighbors (Browning & Cagney, 2002; Duncan et al., 2003; Skrabski et al., 2004; Cancino, 2005).

91 Stigmatization often works as a double-sided process. The established attribute to themselves a special group charisma that confirms their virtue and superiority, while at the same time imputing to the outsiders a special group disgrace which proves their anomie and inferiority (May 2004, p. 2162). Simply, the quintessence is: “give a group a bad name and it is likely they live up to it” (Elias & Scotson 1994 [1965], p.xxviii).

92 Wimmer (2004) provided an empirical contribution to the debate on multiculturalism and racialization by looking at patterns of group formation on the level of social categories and personal networks in the immigrant neighborhoods of Basel, Bern and Zurich. He found that ethno-national categories are secondary principles of classification.

93 In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious life* (1965), Emile Durkheim developed a theory of knowledge premised on the assumption that the socio-spatial organization of groups is the model for the mental organization of ideas. He maintained that the first collective framework for understanding the world and classifying knowledge was the model of spatial relationships. In particular, individuals constitute themselves as groups based on their collective comprehension and expression of concepts of direction, distance and center (Gotham, 2003; p.725).

94 The concept of “the habitus” may help.

95 A reference group becomes any collectivity, real or imagined, envied or despised, whose perspective is assumed by the actor (Shibutani, 1955; p. 563).

96 Thomas pointed out many years ago that what a man does depends largely upon his definition of the situation. One may add that the manner in which one consistently defines a succession of situation depends upon his organized perspective. A perspective is an ordered view of one’s world – what is taken for granted about the attributes of various objects, events and human nature. It is an order of things remembered and expected as well as things actually perceived, an organized conception of what is plausible and what is possible; it constitutes the matrix through which one perceives his environment (Shibutani, 1955; p. 563-4).

97 The link between boundary work and stigma was mentioned earlier, “Erving Goffman has best shown that social life is a form of theatricalization with a front stage and a back stage masks and makeup. His telling descriptions reveal that the distance or boundaries that separate individuals are never, even in total institutions, purely physical. They are symbolic representations that often take the form of stigma” (Lamont & Fournier, 1992; p. 3).

98 However, first of all, “much research remains to be done to determine whether and how this boundary work has lasting effects on the perpetuation of urban poverty” (Small & Newman, 2001; p. 38). Secondly, since many scholars operate within this no-Durkheimian perspective (cf. Lauderdale, 1976; Davies, 1982; Epstein, 1992; Philips, 1996; Rock, 1998; Bourdieu et al., 1999; Southerton, 2002; Rajah, 2006), it can be questioned if this boundary work is a thoroughly novel attempt.

99 According to Andreas Wimmer, in many cases, there is bitterness precisely about not having to share what has been achieved with the others, who gave nothing in return for these privileges. According to this moral economy of reciprocity, refugees and immigrants are not only a source of disorder, non-decency violence and uncleanness, but also profi-
teers of a welfare system to whose erection the old-established contributed hard work and high taxes (Wimmer, 2004; p. 12).
Lamont (2000) social class-focused research strategy shows that despite all differences between the views of white and black Americans, French and immigrants from the Magherb, a common pattern emerges: a moral code that distinguishes between disciplined and lazy, responsible and irresponsible, straightforward and devious, and caring versus uncaring persons (cited in Wimmer, 2004; p. 3).
6. Bonds in everyday life: The weakness of weak ties

6.1. Introduction: Boosting social capital

Since the 1970s, welfare states have faced difficulties in preserving social security arrangements and, therefore, they continuously reformed these systems. In search of achievable reforms, one alternative is that citizens – instead of the state – take care of its members. This alternative is related to communitarism, who favor a social order in which “the community” identifies the common good, and persuades its members to act towards it. A prominent founder of this movement and an advocate for Dutch policy, Amitai Etzioni, argues that advanced industrial societies of the capitalist West suffer from “rampant moral confusion and social anarchy” because individuals have been given too much freedom and not enough responsibilities (Etzioni, 1996). Communities must therefore be revitalized, because more community means less government (Briggs, 2001; p. 5). To revitalize communities and thereby be able to cut back on social security arrangements, policy could be directed to boost social capital – the actors’ ability to secure benefits by virtue of membership in social networks (Portes, 1998; p. 6)\textsuperscript{101}. In practice, policy seeks to increase social capital by “mixing” various people, usually the poor with the non-poor. The idea\textsuperscript{102} is that affluent groups are in a better position to generate reciprocal relationships and, therefore, muster more social capital (Fernandez Kelly, 1995; p. 218). For example, the World Bank has declared social capital a key tool for both understanding poverty and reducing it worldwide (Briggs, 2001; p. 4). Mai Wann proposes a strategy of “building social capital” in order to create a welfare system based on the principle of subsidiarity, through active public support for self-help and mutual aid groups (cf. Wann, 1995, in Field, 2003; p. 118). According to Robert Putnam (2000; p. 318), as the only changeable form of capital, policy should be aimed at increasing social capital: “precisely because poor people (by definition) have little economic capital and face formidable obstacles in acquiring human capital (that is, education), social capital is disproportionately important to their welfare.” Putnam (see also 1995)
found that the USA appeared rich in terms of its associations and civic life, but appeared to be quickly declining (cf. Halpern, 2005; p. 199). He suspected a gradual death of American community, that would cause many social problems. This idea to solve social problems with the help of social capital is, however, criticized by other scholars (Portes, 1998; p. 19; Portes & Landolt, 2000; p. 535; Boggs 2001; p. 282-290). For example, DeFilippis (2001; p. 800) argued that social capital becomes divorced from other forms of capital, stripped of power relations, and imbued with the assumption that social networks are win-win relationships; and, that individual gains, interests, and profits are synonymous with group gains, interests, and profits. For these reasons, social capital becomes a panacea for social problems: scholars advocate its enhancement as a remedy for social ills, but they can also be oblivious to its negative effects (Portes & Landolt, 2000; p. 534). According to Blokland (2002; p. 107-8), Putnam does not consider social inequality – economic or racial. In fact says Blokland, Putnam reduces social inequality to the logical outcome of social contacts, community, and social cohesion, rather than being the result of lack of opportunities and exploitation. Once social inequality becomes synonymous with disintegration, solving social inequality is just a matter of building more social bridges and connections. Concerning social inequality, there is more at stake than just the lack of community and social cohesion. Claibourn and Martin (2000; p. 267) furthermore argue that despite the growing push to build social capital as public policy, and the ever growing literature, there is still much “uncertainty about the mechanisms that foster social capital.”

Indeed, there is much disagreement among scholars whether boosting social capital is an adequate policy intervention. It may be a very pleasant idea, of course, to solve poverty by mixing the poor with the non-poor. Some even question whether this is really the original intention behind social mixing and gentrification. In the Netherlands, the rationale behind social mixing is not to promote upward mobility among urban dwellers. According to Uitermark (2003), urban restructuring policy (which is almost the same as mixing the poor with the non-poor) attempts to facilitate the social management of disadvantaged neighborhoods. It serves to mitigate (by spreading) the social effects of the integration of ethnic minorities. He and his colleagues argue that gentrification is used to pacify tensions and to reduce concentrations that pose a problem for authorities (Uitermark et al., 2007).
To pursue this question of whether this is an adequate policy intervention to promote upward mobility, I have to take a closer look at how people in poverty deal with their everyday social bonds. This enables us better to grasp social capital theory and its policy designs. I need to know how people in poverty might use their social capital to get out of poverty, and why they fail when they do. Consequently, this chapter examines mechanisms behind social capital, and answers the question why the respondents’ social connections (which they have, see Table 2.2) do not necessarily offer an escape out of poverty. By answering this question, we will know in the first place whether boosting social capital is an adequate policy intervention to lessen poverty and, second, why the respondents’ social capital is insufficient to get out of poverty.

### 6.2. Social capital theory and the strength of weak ties

Research on social capital and impoverishment distinguishes between social support (getting by) and social leverage (getting ahead). Ties that offer social support help individuals to get by or to deal with the demands of everyday life. Social support is most often associated with strong (bonding) ties, which tend to be made among kin, neighbors, and intimate friends (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; p. 112-3). Affiliative networks that offer social leverage help individuals to get ahead, changing their opportunity structure. Leverage-producing ties – bonds outside one’s immediate family – are often weak ties. Weak ties are relationships characterized by infrequent interaction or low intimacy. They are wide ranging and are likely to serve as bridges across social boundaries (cf. Bian, 1997; p. 366). These ties promote upward mobility by providing access to education and employment (Boissevain, 1974; Campbell et al., 1986; Granovetter, 1974; in: Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; p. 113). However, because these weak ties can promote upward mobility, they are assumed to be very powerful. People in poverty can make use of these weak ties to find, for example, a job, ending their underprivileged position. Therefore, scholars speak about the strength of weak ties (Granovetter, 1973). Nevertheless, how do these weak ties operate?

Just how does the “strength of weak ties” work? As I argued before, strong ties offer resources for daily getting by, making it difficult to change one’s opportunity structure. According to Wacquant (1998; p. 27), these strong ties are even impediments to get out of poverty. He writes: “Affiliative ties and bonds of obligation with friends and associates in the ghetto constitute a resource for survival,
but they create impediments and obstacles when attempting to move up and into the official labor market – ties that bind and keep you down” (Monroe & Goldman, 1988; MacLeod, 1994, in Wacquant, 1998; p. 27)\textsuperscript{105}. Because these strong ties seem to prevent people from getting out of poverty\textsuperscript{106}, the necessary condition for real economic development entails a shift to other, looser networks. Thus, a shift from getting by to getting ahead entails a shift from bonding to bridging social networks (Leonard & Onyx, 2003; p. 189); and accordingly, from strong to weak ties. These weak ties are productive, but the question remains, what makes them valuable? Scholars address this hypothesis. Granovetter interviewed (1974) many people to find out how networks are used to get new jobs. He found that most jobs were found through “weak” acquaintances. The hypothesis of “the strength of weak ties” is that weaker ties tend to form bridges that link individuals to other social circles for information, which is not likely to be available in their own circles, and that such information should be useful to the individuals (Lin 1999; p. 469). Weak ties reach out beyond the immediate community of fellow-workers or neighbors, where information on jobs rapidly becomes redundant, to people and places that provide new information and help in finding work (Richards & Roberts, 1998; p. 3)\textsuperscript{107}. Overall, the results of social capital models suggest that individuals with well-connected (read: weak ties) social networks do better in the labor market (Mouw, 2003; p. 871). These weak ties offer job information and access to the labor market and, consequentially, provide resources to get out of poverty. Scholars are particularly interested in these weak ties, because they promote upward mobility. As a policy intervention, providing people in poverty with more weak ties – mixing the affluent with the poor – might help the latter to end their dependent position. I present some results from studies using this distinction, that will enable us to grasp whether this is actually a good suggestion.

Social scientists know that everyday survival in poor urban communities frequently depends on close interaction with kin and friends in similar situations (cf. Stack, 1974). The problem is that such ties seldom reach beyond the inner city, thus depriving their inhabitants of sources of information about employment opportunities elsewhere and ways to take advantage of them (Portes, 1998; p. 13-4). These results are corroborated, and among the authors who address the difference between getting ahead via weak ties, or getting by via strong ties\textsuperscript{108}, Beggs et al., (1996; p. 217) support the idea that strong, homophilous ties and dense, homogenous networks are more effective channels of social support in routine and crisis
situations than are weak, heterophilus ties and wide-ranging networks. The findings of Henly et al. (2005) support the contention that informal aid is important for the everyday survival of low-income families, but it is less able to assist with economic mobility\textsuperscript{109}. For those receiving financial support, the level of support was only a fraction of the typical welfare payment or monthly earnings (ibid. p. 135)\textsuperscript{110}. Fernandez Kelly (1995) writes that research on impoverished populations shows that their survival largely depends on relations of mutuality (Fernandez Kelly, 1995; p. 218). Her research proved that some networks are loaded with strong family and friendship bonds; but they lack bridges to other social networks that control access to a larger set of opportunities and meanings (ibid. p. 242). Dutch researchers concluded that the majority of the research group either received social support from relatives or did not have any social connections at all (cf. Engbersen, 2000). Briggs argues, if the group in question is chronically poor, within-group solidarity is typically a much generator of getting by support than getting-ahead leverage (Briggs, 1998); a finding that underlines the critical importance of effective and durable social bridges (cf. Briggs, 2001; p. 8). Recently Putnam and Feldstein (2003) attempted to “descend from the statistical heights of Bowling Alone to ground level (p. 5),” by acknowledging that “bridging social capital is harder to create than bonding social capital...the kind of social capital that is most essential for healthy public life ... is hardest to build (p. 3)\textsuperscript{111}.” The authors focus on the social-capital success stories (p. 5), especially on how bridging occurred on the micro level. However, they failed to show how people in poverty could get ahead via weak ties. Even though these scholars note that bonding equals strong ties, and bridging equals weak ties. In fact, there is little evidence anywhere on how people in poverty use their weak ties to get ahead.

There are also some difficulties involved in social capital theory. First, scholars dispute the general notion that bonding coincides with strong ties, and bridging with weak ties. For instance, Leonard and Onyx (2003) suggest that loose and strong ties are not synonymous with bridging and bonding. In general, loose and strong ties differ in degree rather than in kind and people prefer to bridge through their strong ties. Second, Granovetter’s study (1974) is often used as an exemplar for how the so-called weak ties operate. Although, many studies have shown that social capital theory is a powerful tool in explaining how labor markets operate, they often exclude the unemployed and the underemployed (Aguilera, 2002; p. 871). Consequently, how weak ties operate among people in poverty is relatively unknown.
In sum, research shows that people in poverty often have bonding social capital that, however, lacks bridges to other networks: it constrains upward mobility, not facilitate it. The concept “bridging,” in particular, remains unexamined (Leonard & Onyx, 2003; p. 191). Since bridging is of more importance than bonding to get ahead, I want to focus on the weak ties. Whether the respondents either cannot make use of their weak ties, or do not have any, in either case, it might contribute to poverty perpetuation. The respondents seem not to possess any weak ties. However, is this the case?

6.3. Methods and perspective

The interviewers collected the names of the respondents’ friends, family, and acquaintances. The respondents provided many names, and this information was processed in SPSS. An initial examination of the data shows that many respondents said to the interviewers that their social network does consist of friends and acquaintances (see Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 Labor market position and nature of social network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type social network</th>
<th>OTW= obliged to work</th>
<th>NOTW= not obliged to work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family (strong ties)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. OTW couples</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. OTW single parents with kids (&gt;5)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. OTW single no kids</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Subsidized job, training, job training</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Working poor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. NOTW medically unfit</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. NOTW single parent kids under five</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. NOTW elderly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Illegal</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintances (weak ties)</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. OTW single parents with kids (&gt;5)</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. OTW single no kids</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Subsidized job, training, job training</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Working poor</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. NOTW medically unfit</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. NOTW single parent kids under five</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. NOTW elderly</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Illegal</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>27.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed (both strong/weak)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. OTW single parents with kids (&gt;5)</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. OTW single no kids</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Subsidized job, training, job training</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Working poor</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. NOTW medically unfit</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. NOTW single parent kids under five</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. NOTW elderly</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Illegal</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social workers</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. OTW couples</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. OTW single parents with kids (&gt;5)</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. OTW single no kids</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Subsidized job, training, job training</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Working poor</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. NOTW medically unfit</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. NOTW single parent kids under five</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. NOTW elderly</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Illegal</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.1 shows the relationship between the nature of social network and the labor market position. The kind of the social network reflects whether a respondents’ social network primarily consist of family, acquaintances or both. It indicates whether the respondents primarily have weak (acquaintances) or strong
ties. At first sight, one third is endowed with the so-called weak ties, and even seventy-four people have a mixed network of acquaintances and family members. Approximately half of all the respondents have some sort of weak ties. A closer look at the table shows that the majority of the respondents who are available for the labor market also possess weak ties (N=36). However, thirteen respondents who are available for the labor market seem to lack these weak ties, but only have family members in their social network. Thus, data shows that people in poverty may have weak ties that might produce social leverage and offer an escape out of poverty. Since they are in a precarious position, I ask why these weak ties seem so unproductive. Why is so little exchanged over these bridges?

Though it seems that they have many friends and acquaintances, the quantitative data obscures what really is exchanged, and what the quality of these relations is. Studying quantitative data on networks, we need to be careful. Quantitative data can scarcely get at the qualitative subtlety of exchange relationships. Gratitude, dependence, loyalty, and deference might serve as items of reciprocation and these are notoriously difficult to measure (Nelson, 2000; p. 293). However, these numbers say little about the quality of the networks. Therefore, I am particularly interested in what is qualitatively going on in the social networks. Furthermore, because policy makers want to boost weak social ties among people in poverty, as a consequence, I have to focus on the exchange between people in poverty and these ties – although in the forthcoming examples I provide also illustrations of bonding ties.

Along these lines, I have to take into account that the social support process is more often characterized as “social exchange” rather than as a one-way provision of care or assistance: social exchange emphasizes that support involves costs as well as benefits to actors who engage in it and that supporters make choices about resource strategies in the context of scarcity (Uehara, 1990; p. 522). The term “social exchange” is generally applied to interactions in which giving and receiving material or intangible resources is, at least, partially predicated on the expectation of return or reciprocity (ibid. p. 523). The principle of reciprocity is essential in understanding the exchange relations, and I use this “give and take” principle as a prism through which I look at the respondents’ social relationships. This will hopefully illuminate the dimensions of the bonds’ quality.
In this manner, I use the social exchange perspective, and analyzed the data in search of examples how respondents dealt with their weak ties (and some strong ties). Because I have no information on how they use their social ties to look for jobs, instead, I focus on how respondents deal with their everyday social bonds. If I identify how they deal with their everyday bonds, I can perhaps deduce why they cannot / do not make use of their weak ties to get ahead.

6.4. Analysis of the data

Reading the interview transcriptions, I concentrated on how the respondents dealt with their weak ties. Inductively, several themes come to the fore about why “not much traffic goes over the bridges.” First, dilemmas of honor and status seem to be of importance: safeguarding social honor, being self-sufficient, and community enforcement are crucial. Second, reciprocity expectations and the work of time are important understanding the gradual disintegration of social relations. Third, risk assessment is significant in understanding social relations. These concepts illustrate how social relationships function.

6.4.1. Dilemmas of honor and status

Karl Polanyi (1944, in Baxter & Margavio, 2000; p. 412) is among those who argue that economic life is typically submerged in social relationships to such an extent that people do not always act to safeguard individual interest in the possession of material goods; instead they act to safeguard social standing and social honor. Applied to this study: although these people under study live in poverty, it does not mean that they want to sell their souls to the devil and want to gain from exchange at all costs. They do not rip off their friends to buy groceries, and do not desire to gain from the personal exchanges as much as possible. This would simply end their social bonds. They, like so, juggle between their moral standards and the opportunity to benefit from the exchanges. Oftentimes, people rather maintain their social honor and reputation, than to profit financially from social exchanges. They want to be known as amiable, and not as a profiteer – although many desperately need money. Even so, sometimes, if people lose from an exchange, they suppress this loss in the face of the other (cf. Bourdieu, 1977a; p. 196). Along these lines, honor and custom are indeed concepts to understand the functioning of exchange relations, and precisely put, this honor might prevent people from making use of their weak ties.
As for honor and dishonor, Brandon, [178] a Dutch man, dislikes receiving money from his friends. He does some chores for them and his friends offer money, but although he needs the money enormously, he refuses. “I helped moving a friend, and then you get something, which I do not like at all. I gave it to my wife, and she puts it in a closet and buys groceries from it. I think, you have to support your friends, you do not have to be paid for it. But factually, you have to accept it. Last week, I fixed a lamp, and then you get some money to buy beer. Then we quarreled: ‘you fool, take the money’ and then I say no. You do not have to pay me for everything. While, I need the money, but I will not take it! I know that’s pathetic [ironically].” In his opinion, doing chores for friends does not have to be repaid. He also does not want to borrow stuff: “I can’t, because I cannot give it back. Many times, they give it [instead of lending it]. I detest that.”

It can also be the other way around. Ashley [105], a Surinamese single parent borrowed money from a good friend. But at the moment she wanted to give the money back, her friend refused it: “once, I borrowed money from a friend, and at a particular moment I gave it back to him. He was all balled up…my best friend. He said to me ‘are you nuts, paying me back?’ I replied ‘well, you do not name it borrowing, would you?’ Then he said ‘well, I give it to you’.”

Transactions within Rebecca’s [201] social environment are, instead of gaining the maximum amount of profits, characterized by optimizing social standing and honor: “I can get something extra from a friend, but I do not want that. He comes up to me and asks ‘if you need anything, just give me a call’. Then I reply ‘well, I do not need anything’. My daughter is used to the same. She never asks money from others, she only asks me. I taught her to stand on her own feet. I said to her ask no one but me for money. Therefore, you never have to be thankful; you did it on your own. You have to live, but you do not have to live well off. You should help each other, but you should never take advantage of the situation.”

Like this, within Brandon’s social environment, he thinks you should support your friends, without giving and receiving money. Although he desperately needs it, he felt dishonored at the moment they offered him money. Ashley did not have to return it in the first place. She should have showed gratitude, instead of returning the money. The return was different than she expected. The norm in Rebecca’s social environment is self-sufficiency. She rather stands on her own feet. Consequentially, for both partakers honor is decisive in understanding transac-
tions and the norm is that you should do things unconditionally. They try to optimize the quality of their social relations, not to profit from the exchange. However, optimizing the quality of the social relations hinders people in poverty making use of their weak ties in search of a job. For, it gives them the feeling of profiting from their friendships. So, they do not like or want that, since they do not want to be labeled as a profiteer, a selfish person: they are rather self-sufficient.

We saw that honor channels social exchange relations. Individuals also want to act in accordance to other norms 113, which are strongly related to honor and status. For instance, there is a general concern of people not to appear too dependent on others (Pahl, 1984; p. 25). For example, Uehara’s research showed that some women were extremely reluctant to mobilize their associates, much preferring to rely on their own resources and to suffer through it (Uehara, 1990; p. 544). The harsh realities of life dictate that a person should stand on his own feet. High value is placed on this norm of self-reliance 114 (cf. Nelson, 2000; p. 297). But when people in poverty are fully self-sufficient, it hardly comes to mind to make use of their weak ties. If they are familiar with living on their own, making ends meet without the help of others, it is not part of their custom to make use of their acquaintances.

A young Turkish [251] woman illustrates social support within her network. "Interviewer: Do you sometimes receive a present, something nice from your family? Respondent: I do not have such a wealthy family. I would like to have a wealthy family. I have a big family and many acquaintances, but they are down to chili and beans and cannot offer me help. I do not want them to offer me help." In her social network, social support transactions are only done in time of real poverty. If someone gets bread or some potatoes, that person is in bad shape. People in her environment, also friends, ask her for help, and she cannot offer it. Three processes are going on here. In the first place, she is not poor enough to receive help from her family, so she does not get anything. Second, she does not want to be reminded of her poor position, and avoids being given gifts. This is the reason why she does not like to accept and tries to avoid, as much as possible, being given gifts (cf. Simmel, 1996; p. 47). Third, her social network is low on resources. Therefore, she also cannot obtain anything. Hence, for her it becomes notoriously difficult to make use of weak ties. She probably thinks that her weak ties operate in the same manner – which is probably the case. They almost certainly copy their reciprocity expectations from their strong to their weak ties.
Community enforcement is another element in “dilemmas of honor and status.” Although fragile embedded in a small community, exchanges are oftentimes observed, judged, or disapproved. For example, giving carries with it the obligation to reciprocate, an obligation enforced by community sanctions (Nelson, 2000; p. 291, my emphasis). If members, who are viewed as capable, fail to come forth with support (or fail to reciprocate), what might be the community sanction? One might be that “words spread rapidly throughout the community, and criticism of the offender is likely to come from various members” (Uehara, 1990; p. 540). These often negative “words” are nothing else than gossip. During gossip, via conversations about other people, individuals can disapprove of others’ transactions. Although such discourse can have an integrating function, it serves primarily as a highly effective instrument of rejection (Elias & Scotson, 1994; p. 94). Gossip is thus a powerful sanctioning mechanism, which obstructs people from practicing transactions. It can also hinder people from making use of their weak ties.

One Cape Verdian woman [216] uses a metaphor – the giving of a glass of water – to describe gossip: “In the Netherlands, I have a lot of family and friends ... two aunts. However, I am not in touch with them. I do not want to. Interviewer: at the moment you arrived in the Netherlands, the relationship was good? Respondent: Yeah, the relationship was good, but not anymore. Because sometimes you observe things that are not right. For example, after they gave you a glass of water, everybody must know that you have been given a glass of water. And I do not like that at all. I learned so much. I do not do it anymore.”

One [367] Surinamese woman dislikes gossip intensely. Therefore, she hardly lends and borrows commodities in her social environment: “It is not in my nature to borrow money from people. I try to live without bothering anybody. I have always been independent. I never had the luck to have many friends. It is always the he-said-she-said-bullshit [gossip]. Therefore, I always keep people at a distance. I always talk about nothing.”

Katelyn [348] is a Dutch single parent of two, and she is thirty-five years-old: “I only borrow goods from very close friends. You know, in this neighborhood, people gossip. I prefer to borrow from people who I trust. I hate to borrow goods. I
detest that in the community it is known that I cannot give it back. Suppose that people talk behind my back, and they say that I cannot pay it back.”

In this manner, in the Cape Verdian woman’s community, she knew that her behavior would be observed and gossiped about. She experienced being the subject of gossip at the moment she accepted aid. Because of the gossip, the Surinamese woman kept others at a distance, and Katelyn was a little afraid that others would talk behind her back. They seem to recognize that gossip is one of the constraints on their behavior (cf. Davis, 1969; p. 74; Misztal, 1996; p. 129). To avoid being the talk of the town, they choose to be independent, and because of this independency, for these women, it is probably difficult finding a job via their weak ties. If they start looking for a job, other people might gossip about it and this encumbers them using their bridges to other social networks.

However, according to Misztal (1996; p. 129) the role of honor – as a crucial control mechanism on people’s behavior – is insignificant in the modern urban world. This is clearly not the case. Even in the modern urban world, transactions involving social capital are socially embedded, and cannot be understood without moral considerations. Other cases illustrated that a gift might dishonor a person. By giving money back after borrowing it, can also dishonor the other. Hence, several mechanisms of reputation are present in the urban environment – a code of ethics (values), conformity to social pressure (in the reciprocity of exchanges) and formal control (sanctioning, monitoring, discipline, and gossiping). If people in poverty are via social mixing provided with more weak ties, they copy these mechanisms of reputation into these new situations, so that these social constraints around reputation might consequentially hinder people in poverty from making use of their fresh weak ties.

6.4.2. Reciprocity expectations and the work of time

Building on the argument that social exchange emphasizes that support involves costs as well as benefits to actors who engage in it (Uehara, 1990; p. 522), social exchange is thus obviously reciprocal. However, if social exchange is reciprocal, this brings about a difficulty: there are no laws to guide the exchange. Without laws, the social exchange between individuals becomes notoriously difficult. Partakers in the exchange have to rely on trust. They have to trust that they will obtain almost the same amount of goods as they have given. If trust is absent, people might lose from the exchange, or they do not want to be involved in trans-
actions in the first place. At the same time, if trust is entirely absent, how can they make use of their weak ties? The next cases show why trust is essential during the transactions.

Courtney [202], a Cape Verdian woman, gave shelter to illegal immigrants; but now she dislikes having strangers in the house. She believes she did not receive any compensation for helping out others. The others disappeared at the moment they did not need Courtney any longer: “I used to help many people: illegal migrants without food. I gave them shelter, food ... a place to sleep. Interviewer: How did you meet these people? Respondent: Via an acquaintance or they came up to me. ‘I do not have any food today’, they said. But I do not do that anymore. At the moment, you help other people, that’s good, but now they do not care about me. Well, I do not have to be repaid, but they do not pay attention to me, they do not even say hello. They have an attitude.”

Ashley [105] again, a Surinamese single parent, speaks about her relationship with a friend. She looked after her friend’s kids. But when she wanted her friend to baby-sit, her friend did not respond, as she puts it: “A friend, she had two children. I always took care of her children. If I had to do something, she took care of my children. At one moment, I had to go to a funeral, and she was my child-minder. She called me the day before, and asked ‘when do you bring your child’? I said ‘at two in the afternoon’. At the moment I arrived at her house, she was not there. I really did not like that at all. Because sometimes, I am stuck with her kids for three, four days. Her two children and my kid, in my house on my expenses. You never hear me complaining, but the one time I ask her to take care of my children, she is not at home. So far, I didn’t hear anything from her, so I think she already felt trouble... she didn’t take a good decision.”

In the hiatus between the giving and the reciprocation of an item, obligation, trust, and cooperation are ideally created and extended among exchangers (Sahlins, 1965; Mauss, 1966; Gouldner, 1960; in: Uehara, 1990; p. 524)117. This is often not the case, however, the cases of Ashley and Courtney made clear that they expected some sort of return in the future. They invested in social relationships and expected that their friends were willing to help them out or show their gratitude, which clearly did not happen. In the end, their social capital gradually disintegrated. Moreover, in the future, they will probably be more careful with whom they will start an exchange relationship. It became clear that others could abuse
their trust. It seems that although exchange relations are bonding, these relations also include a risk of non-reciprocation. The time-interval enables others to abuse the exchange. Many authors addressed the work of time (Bourdieu, 1990; p. 98). For example, Sykes (2005; p. 114) writes: “the timing of the gift changes everything about human exchanges because it makes people reflect and act upon their reflections. What people understand about the gift changes as they reflect upon it, and in turn changes the way they create their relationships with each other. The timing of the gift alters the power as it is played out in human relationships.” Subsequently, others strategize and might reciprocate with a good of a lesser value.

At the end of the month, many run out of money, and if a neighbor chips in, they can make it. Therefore, the respondents exchange goods to make ends meet. The moral obligation to give and receive, which characterizes the reciprocal relation, produces a bond. The time interval, between gift and response, intensifies the bond. Megan [140], a 48 years-old single parent, experienced the work of time. She starts with her general idea on social relations: “I’m too honest. They take advantage of it. If you give something, that’s good, if not, you can drop dead. I experienced that. I withdrew from everybody. Everywhere in the street. I only say hello.” And she hands over an example: “My mother gave me some money. She [her neighbor] was in despair, so I went to the bank and gave it to her. It took three years before I got the entire sum of money back. She borrowed three thousand from me. If I lent money to somebody, I’d like to have it back within a week.” Megan’s transaction concerned an uncertain time horizon: she had to wait for years for the response, while she expected to get the money back within a week.

If money is borrowed, the benefactor can ask for it back, at any moment. The interval between donation and repayment is sometimes difficult to pinpoint. Some transactions involve a fuzzy interval, and to avoid a fuzzy interval – and thus uncertainty – people can opt for transactions with a clear time interval. A 32 years-old Turk [270] borrows moneys from his family, instead, of his friends, “Interviewer: if you borrow money from your family, do you always have to pay it back? Respondent: I do not have to pay it back to my parents, but to my brother or my sister I have to. Interviewer: but do you borrow from many different people? Respondent: no, not always. If I have to borrow a large amount of money, I ask my family and nobody else. Because I can pay it back to my family soon after.”
With reference to my friends, it is different. If they want the money back, they want it immediately. So, I do not ask them.” A 31 years-old Turkish man elucidates this process. The outcome of the transactions’ sequence is known beforehand and so that he has full information. “If I need something, I wait until I can buy it. But sometimes I cannot get by...I cannot buy groceries. Then I ask one of my brothers if he can lend me some. Interviewer: do you have to give it back? Respondent: yes, but only on my conditions. I do not have to pay it back within a certain amount of time.” From his viewpoint, he can trust his brothers who have a good reputation. Reputation helps him to manage the complexity of social life by singling out trustworthy people – in whose interest it is to meet promises: reputation also facilitates reliability of social surroundings by helping him to decide whom he can empower to act in his interest (cf. Misztal, 1996; p. 121).

These cases made clear that repayment is not always forthcoming, not even in the form of gratitude. In consequence of the time-interval between giving and receiving, the other partaker abused the situation. The respondents got disappointed, because the expectations did not come true, and as a result, bonds collapsed. For example, Megan initially trusts in future actions of others. However, her transactional experiences confirmed the supposition that others were able to take advantage of the situation. After that, Megan withdrew from everything. Her conclusion was that a transaction means giving much but finally receiving less. Because transactions involving social capital tend to be characterized by the possible violation of reciprocity expectations (cf. Portes, 1998), these can be violated only because a time interval between donation and response occurs. If an individual makes a donation, the recipient can decide to respond with a good of lesser value. The time interval enables the other to abuse the transaction, and the donator stays in the dark about the content of the response. Exchanges presuppose an improvisation and a constant uncertainty, which remains as to the outcome of the interaction until the whole sequence is completed (Bourdieu, 1990; p. 99). Moreover, trust is vital to understand social exchange, and they often only trust their family. Consequentially, people choose their family to exchange goods, and they instinctively turn to them (bonding ties) for help. Even so, due to of the transaction’s uncertainty, people in poverty probably make only slight use of their weak ties.

6.4.3. Risk assessment

“My experience: if you give something, that’s good. If not, you can drop dead”, Megan said. Having evaluated her past transactions, she concluded that she has to
be more careful in the future, consequently transforming her own values relationally. She and others do not want to be passive victims of bad transactions in the future. By drawing their own boundaries, they become more careful with whom they will be involved in transactions. In order to handle the uncertainty of reciprocal relations, they create their own “rules of engagement.” Therefore, individuals employ several practices to deal with uncertainty. First, some create standards; only if the mutual obligation is clear in advance will the transaction take place. Second, they become more careful with whom to associate; credibility is central. Only people they can rely on are part of their transactions. If people in poverty want to make use of their weak ties, they have to take a risk. However, if the transactions are risky, nothing will be exchanged.

To maintain their dignity and to avoid losses, they do not want to be involved in every transaction. They are careful. A 40 years-old Turkish woman [245] knows exactly what the general norm of reciprocity is; the gift is less than the response, or “a present is a hen and the response is a camel” (Bourdieu, 1977a; p. 198 n7). Interviewer: “do you ask help from family or friends? Respondent: No, I do chores for friends, so I can earn a little money. You do not get anything free these days. You know, when you ask for a nickel, they ask two nickels back.”

A 38 years-old couple [157], Edgar and Angelica, experienced that their expectations were disappointed. Because motives are unknown, the responses of others are often unpredictable, thus the outcome of lengthy chains of interactions are uncertain (Cheal, 1996; p. 91). Edgar and Angelica always supported their neighbor, but at the moment their income declined, their neighbor did not respond: “Well, I think it is difficult to accept something. We never really had to. To be clear, everybody came up to us…’can you lend me something’. You can hardly imagine. Our doors were always open. The entire neighborhood dropped in…if others had a problem. So, we were used to this situation…and then, you have to…[find support because their income dropped]…and that is terrible. Well, now it is the other way around. Our upstairs neighbor, I guarantee you, many times she borrowed money from us. She paid everything back on time. Moreover, at a certain moment, we were flat-busted. We did not have a nickel. And she came over, proudly. She won one thousand in the bingo. So, we looked at each other and said; ‘well, now, can you lend us a hundred?’ No, she could not! Well, we said to each other, now it is over. Never, never again! She will never receive a nickel from us! And be honest, do not say you just won the bingo. Go upstairs and
do not say anything, or lend me the hundred. It was not possible. We did so much for her...year after year. Having a hard time, we did not expect that. That is shitty."

Joshua [136], a 40 years-old man, has in the past been snitched on. He worked on the side and people in his neighborhood betrayed him. For that reason, he is more careful with whom he associates. Interviewer: “The manner in which people interact with you, has that been changed? Joshua: with some people, yah it has been changed. Interviewer: did you become more critical? Joshua: I’m not really suspicious, but with some people, I am more careful. Interviewer: how come? Joshua: Because of the cock-and-bull stories. Interviewer: Also because they snitched on you [people snitched on him because he worked on the side]? Respondent: Yah, that also, you have to be careful to whom you talk to. People envy each other.”

Transactions do change as a result of experiences. Alexis [329], a 41 years-old single parent received help from her friends, but only under their conditions. She evaluated her past transactions and concluded that in the future the transactions will be under her conditions. She wants control over her own social life. “I depend on my friends and acquaintances. I am trying to change that. My friends want to help me, but only on their terms. A friend said two weeks ago ‘I drive to your house to baby-sit. Then you can go shopping’. She has to baby-sit, that is quite an offer [ironically]. That is why I am still in touch with my paid babysitter. Then I have control over the situation. Otherwise, I am depending on the goodwill of my relations. And they are very busy.”

Thus, in case of the Turkish woman, she finally does some chores for her friends. These transactions are undoubtedly negotiated in advance, and therefore potential setbacks are excluded. Edgar and Angelica’s situation illustrate how an agent puts himself in the place of the other. The couple supposed that the neighbor was aware of a moral obligation. However, the other did not feel obliged. In the future, Edgar and Angelica are more careful with whom they deal with. Joshua’s case make clear that experiences do matter so that individuals do reconstruct their social environment. Alexis could chose between either depending on her friends’ goodwill or paying for services. She chooses the latter to have control over the situation.
The aforementioned illustrations made clear that the respondents constructed their own ways to go about getting scarce material goods. They know that nothing is free (and many times the response is more than the gift). The consequence is that transactions only occur if the interval between grant and repayment is unambiguous beforehand; they do not have dealings with all and sundry. When respondents evaluate their past transactions, they reconstruct “the relational contexts within which they are embedded, and in the process transform their own values” (Emirbayer, 1997; p. 309-310). But if people in poverty want to make use of their weak ties, transactions have to be done with people they hardly know. The danger is that people in poverty probably draw upon hard experience to withdraw from the promise of new situations.

6.5. Conclusion: The weakness of weak ties

According to Putnam, “The touchstone of social capital is the principle of generalized reciprocity – I’ll do this for you now, without expecting anything immediately in return and perhaps without even knowing you, confident that down the road you or someone else will return the favor” (Putnam, 2000; p. 134). In conclusion, I argue that this is not often the case.

The strength-of-weak ties hypothesis suggests that these ties are productive in being bridges to other networks and offer information about jobs. Using these weak ties, people in poverty can end their poverty spell, because they can obtain a job via information from their friends. This chapter focuses on how people in poverty, in general, dealt with their weak ties (and some strong ties), and tried to answer the question as to why these ties seem unproductive. Inductively, several themes emerged. First, honor – guiding the transactions – might prevent people from making use of their weak ties. Some cases illustrated that people in poverty do not want to exploit friends for their own benefit. These respondents prefer instead to optimize the quality of their social bonds. In addition, precisely optimizing the quality of the social relations hinders people in poverty to make use of their weak ties in search of a job. Second, people in poverty are rather self-sufficient, preferring to suffer through it, and stand on their own feet. Therefore, if people in poverty are (or want to be) self-sufficient, it hardly comes to mind to make use of their weak ties – it is outside their modus operandi. Third, because transactions are always reciprocal, it becomes difficult for people in poverty to make use of their weak ties. For, if people in poverty cannot offer anything, they
have a hard time requesting something. To make use of weak ties, they have to offer something in the first place, which they do not have. They exclude themselves from these reciprocal weak ties. Fourth, because people in poverty often experience gossip in their social networks, and because gossip is a powerful sanctioning mechanism, individuals might oppose to practice transactions. To avoid being the talk of the town, they choose to be independent. Consequently, they make less use of their weak ties. Fifth, trust is often absent during the transactions. If people in poverty want to make use of their weak ties, transactions have to be done with people they hardly know – because it concerns people outside their immediate social network. They have to take a risk, and if trust is absent, people might lose from the exchange. Moreover, because of this transaction’s uncertainty, people in poverty make hardly use of their weak ties and, as a consequence, nothing will be exchanged. All these arguments suggest that weak ties are not that solid as often suggested.

Two questions were central to this chapter. The first: why is the respondents’ social capital insufficient to get out of poverty? The answer: Portes argues that transactions involving social capital “tend to be characterized by unspecified obligations, uncertain time horizons, and the possible violation of reciprocity expectations” (Portes, 1998; p. 4). The second question: is boosting social capital among people in poverty an adequate policy intervention to lessen poverty? It seems that for poor people weak ties do not have a great deal of strength. Therefore, we have to rethink the strength of weak ties hypothesis; these weak ties might be powerful for people in high-quality positions, but for people in poverty they seem to be weak.

Nevertheless, if people in poverty do have sufficient social bridges to the labor market, it still offers no guarantee of getting a job. Despite their social capital, people in poverty still face many institutional barriers, conversion obstacles, the poverty trap (see chapter 3), have a troubled relationship with welfare officials (see chapter 4), and live in a stigmatized area (see chapter 5). These obstacles (experienced or real) make it difficult to enter the labor market, whether or not they have this social capital. If the market malfunctions, social capital is offside.

At last, compared to the other social fields, with reference to their social networks, people in poverty have relatively much space to manoeuvre: they can choose with whom they want to cooperate. Alternatively, humans use instruments to refine and reconstruct those portions of “reality” that they do not find satisfac-
tory (i.e. violation of reciprocity expectations). They very often exclude themselves from their own social networks. They are reflexive, that is, constantly evaluating the transactions’ desirability. They can decide to call it a day, stop trying and withdraw (cf. Bauman, 1990; p. 100).
Notes

101 Social capital is a very cheap way to solve many social problems: policy makers seek less costly, non-economic solutions to social problems (cf. Portes, 1998; p. 3).

102 Coleman (1990; p. 310) speaks literally about an insurance policy: “creating obligations by doing favors can constitute a kind of insurance policy for which premiums are paid in inexpensive currency and the benefit arrives as valuable currency. There may easily be a positive expected profit.”

103 According to Boggs (2001; p. 282) it is conceptually flawed and historically misleading and the explanatory framework rests upon a foundation of pseudo empiricism (2001; p. 290). Portes (1998; p. 19) points at a class bias and elitist stance in Putman’s thesis. Social capital is so stretched that “the heuristic value of the concept suffers, as it risks becoming synonymous with each and all things that are positive or desirable in social life” (Portes & Landolt, 2000; p. 535).

104 At the aggregate level, gentrification is defined as a simultaneous upward shift of the socio-economic status of the inhabitants of a neighbourhood and the physical improvement of its built environment. At the individual level, gentrification entails the improvement of a dwelling by a household with a higher social status than the occupants in its unimproved state (Smets & van Weesep, 1995; p. 353).

105 He continuously writes that the functioning of the so-called weak ties is bound to remain elusive: “We have a fairly good idea of how interpersonal ties affect life chances in some areas such as finding a job, raising capital to start small business, hiring and retaining workers, migrating or gaining basic subsistence (Granovetter, 1974; Light, 1974; Marks, 1989; Portes & Stepick, 1993), and how the structure of interorganizational ties affects processes of allocation and competition (White, 1981; Burt, 1992). We know much less about how the organizational ecology of a neighborhood, that is the demography, density, type, goals, and routine practices of the organizations that reside within a given locale – affects the lives of the residents and the struggle among them for various social goods and positions” (Wacquant, 1998; p. 28).

106 Bonding social ties are often constraining. For example, “family ties bind, but sometimes these bonds constrain rather than facilitate particular outcomes” (Rumbaut, 1977; p. 39). Certain conflicts arising from efforts to advance beyond one’s social support networks may loom (Dominguez & Watkins, 2003; p. 131).

107 Informal contacts with friends or relatives can effect the matching of workers to jobs by providing information and/or influence (Granovetter, 1974; Lin, 1999; Marsden & Hurlbert, 1988, in Mouw, 2003; p. 869).

108 Perhaps is important not to draw too sharp a distinction between bonding social ties and bridging links. It is true that people often choose their engagement in associations and other lose ties, whereas they do not choose their families. People tend to develop bridging ties on the basis of an existing interest of preference; they seek out others who share the same concerns, and may start joining associations that bring them together. Bonding ties, on the other hand, include some connections that are not entirely a matter of choice. Whether or not one decides to break with family members whose values and behavior seem offensive or damaging is at best a constrained choice, even in the most mobile and flexible social system. But is important not to overestimate the degree of choice in people’s bridging links, not to underestimate the degree of choice involved in bonding ties (cf. Field, 2003; p. 89).

109 Brisson and Usher (2005) demonstrate that participation, homeownership, and neighborhood stability are associated with bonding social capital. Additionally, significant interactions exist between individual and neighborhood income on bonding social capital.
The amount of social support is dissimilar for those living in poverty. Hogan et al. (1993) found that while unmarried mothers more often receive support from their parents than do their married peers, less than half of the single mothers receive significant amounts of such support and that parents in poverty are significantly less likely than persons with higher incomes to be involved in either the giving or the receiving of support (cf. Nelson, 2000; p. 292).

Again, this study is also criticized: “Better together is an uncritical commendation of community building as the key means for effecting social change” (Mowbray, 2005; p. 461).

For example Bourdieu wrote: “The (exploited) peasant treats his (exploiter) khammes as an associate, because that is the custom and because honor requires him to do so” (Bourdieu, 1977a; p. 196). And Baxter & Margavio (2000, p. 400) wrote “The fact and social grace required to maintain ‘face’ and uphold honor codes make unequal economic exchange appear in the acceptable form of reciprocal relations.”

“Social norms are generally unwritten, commonly understood formula for both determining what patterns of behavior are expected in a given social context and, for defining what forms of behavior are valued or socially approved” (Leonard & Onyx, 2003; p. 192).

Coleman (1990; p. 310) writes about this: “If the first individual can satisfy his need through self-sufficiency, or through aid from some official source without incurring an obligation, he will do so-and thus fail to add to the social capital outstanding in the community.”

In the words of Coleman (1990; p. 310), I observed a struggle between a people wanting to do a favor for another and the other not wanting to have the favor done for him or a struggle between a person attempting to repay a favor and his creditor attempting to prevent repayment.


Eriksen writes (1995; p. 182); “People keep relationships by remembering their obligations to give to another: in giving gifts I remember that I have a relationship with you.”

Bourdieu (1977a; p. 6) writes; “to abolish the interval is also to abolish strategy.”

Coleman (1990; p. 310) writes; “a person may attempt to relieve himself of an obligation at a time he chooses (that is, when repaying the favor costs him little), rather then when the donor is in need, because the call for his services may come at an inconvenient time.”

Blau (1986; p. 143) writes: “expectations of social rewards are based on the past social experience of individuals and on the reference standards they have acquired, partly as the result of the benefits they themselves have obtained in the past and partly as the result of learning what benefits others in comparable situations obtain.”
7. The informal economy: morality, social capital and markets

7.1. Introduction: The informal economy

The informal economy is the final analyzed field. Informal work, generally, includes people who operate their own small business in a cash-only or unregulated way or people who work for employers, but off the books (Losby et al., 2002; p. 3). Studying the informal economy is inevitable for multiple premises. First of all, if people in poverty are encouraged to pursue divergent and even oppositional life strategies (e.g. informal work), it can “set off self-reinforcing cycles of social involution not unlike that underlie ghettoisering in the US” (Wacquant, 1999; p. 1640). Second, when engaged in the informal economy, people in poverty become “disintegrated” from society and their distance to the labor market increases. For them it becomes difficult to live a “normal” life. Third, it can have serious consequences for society in general (e.g. dodging taxes), and for them in particular such as penalization. With reference to my research question; if people in poverty endurably work off the books, they become deficient in official work experience, thereby reducing their chances in the regular market. While accumulating cultural capital in the form of work experience, it becomes difficult to convert this illegitimate cultural capital into economic capital in the official labor market. Furthermore, working in the informal economy may reduce their financial poverty, but their social position (welfare dependency) will be prolonged.

My inquiry into the informal economy prompted these questions: How can we explain the respondents’ informal work activities? What kind of activities do they employ? What are their reasons? Generally, how can we elucidate their activities? First, I present three perspectives to explain some dimensions of the informal economy: 1) the moral economy of people in poverty, 2) the negative side of social capital and, 3) the functioning of markets and additional macro-economic perspectives. After that, I show which respondents participate in the informal economy, followed by a qualitative analysis of their motivations.
7.2. Three perspectives on the informal economy

Let me outline several perspectives on the informal economy. First, there is the notion that, within the economic structure of a society, informal work results from the malfunctioning of formal markets. Second, scholars explain the existence of the informal economy as an outcome of “negative social capital,” social capital that provides people in poverty the necessary bridges to illegal markets. The third perspective is the idea of the moral economy, an economy in which people try to optimize their social standing, avoid risks, and maintain their income. These three perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but all operate on a different level of analysis. However, as we shall see, the mixture of these three perspectives might help explain the existence of the informal economy.

7.2.1. The market perspective

The first perspective is the notion that the informal market depends heavily on the traits of formal markets. From conventional macro perspective, scholars such as Todaro (1969) argue that the informal economy can be grasped by considering the peripheries of the mainstream economy. For example, people may respond to the lack of economic opportunities in the formal economy by linking up with existing informal businesses or by inventing new activities in the informal economy. These informal economic activities may offer additional income in a low-wage labor market and can serve as an economic safeguard while a person is unemployed (Stepick, 1989; Morales 1997; Tienda & Rajijman, 2000). Informal work arrangements may also be a strategy imposed by the process of economic restructuring of big firms, which to reduce costs, amplify flexibility, and reallocate their production to subcontractors (Rajjman, 2001). They push workers out of the formal economy, encouraging the rise of informal work. The reasoning is simple; there exists a strong relationship between formal labor market exclusion and informal labor market inclusion: people in poverty work informally because they are excluded from the formal labor market.

Many scholars elaborate on these ideas and concentrate on who participates in the informal economy. The suggestion is that informal work is done first and foremost by people of low socioeconomic status and serves as a safety net for the poor (Pahl, 1984; Renooy, 1984; Ferman et al., 1987). It is seen as providing the poorest and most marginalized (people who do not have access to the formal sector) with opportunities to earn an income. Commitment in informal sector activi-
ties is, thus, an important survival strategy for them and their families (Berger & Buvinic, 1989). Duncan (1992) found that only those who are left out of even the poor jobs are likely to pursue informal work. He argued that formal and informal work are replacements for one another, that is, when people lose jobs in the formal economy, they turn to informal jobs to make ends meet. Analogously, others see informality as a practice of the very poor and of those who by ethnicity or immigration status cannot find a job in the formal labor market (Connolly, 1985). Jensen et al. (1995) found that the percentage of families engaging in any informal activity varied somewhat across income categories. Lower income families were more likely to participate in the informal economy. Other scholars question the relationship between socio-economic status and informal work (Portes & Sassen-Koob, 1987), arguing that many informal activities require human and physical capital that the poor lack.

Campell et al. (1993) reported that when families have access to formal income they are less likely to participate in the informal economy. This explanation is directly contradicted by research, primarily by British scholars, who found that those in a privileged position in the formal economy are most able to develop and sustain informal economic activities (Pahl & Wallace, 1985). Pahl and Wallace (ibid.) suggest that those households that have the assets, means, and ambition to engage in the formal economy will also be more likely to participate in the informal economy. They argue that this leads to economic polarization, that is, industries and prosperous households engage in both formal and informal work, while economically minor households have little access to either. The informal market is not easily accessible, even for the most disadvantaged. Accordingly, there is some evidence that individuals already in the formal economy have much better chance of engaging in the informal economy than do others (Pahl, 1984; Hoyman, 1987). Surveying the literature, it becomes notoriously difficult to find out who participates in the informal economy. Is there a connection between poverty and informal work activities, or do the affluent participate in the informal economy as well?

At last, authors addressed the notion that the informal economy functions as a springboard to the formal economy. People who are engaged in the informal economy improve opportunities to enter the formal economy (Rath, 1995; Meert et al., 1997; Bolt et al., 1998; Kloosterman & Van der Leun, 1998). During informal work activities, people develop skills and gain work experiences, maintain
social connections, generating opportunities to work in the formal labor market; they accumulate various forms of capital, and these forms of capital can be converted in the formal labor market.

Accordingly, this first perspective focuses merely on the economic prospects of people in poverty. The informal economy can be explained by responses to the lack of economic opportunities and as peripheries to the mainstream economy. Furthermore, it serves as a safety net for the poor, as an important survival strategy to make ends meet, and as a springboard to the formal economy. Though this perspective says much about the economic structure of any kind of society, it provides little information about the informal economy and the negative side of social capital. Some authors, however, do address the relationship between social capital and its “perverse effects.”

7.2.2. The negative social capital perspective

The second perspective is that people in poverty might be endowed with the wrong kind of social capital. Although theory and research suggest the positive effects of (bonding) social capital for residents of low-income neighborhood, scholars have also noted its possible negative effects (Briggs, 1998). They addressed this “dark side of social capital”; the kind of social capital that reinforces social inequality and supports antisocial behavior (cf. Field, 2003; p. 71; Portes, 1998). According to Field (2003; p. 83), people can exploit their social capital for purposes that are socially and economically perverse. He writes that, “a reasonable clear distinction can be drawn between productive social networks, which we might define as those that generate favorable outcomes both for members and the community at large, and perverse networks, which we could describe as those that have positive benefits for their members but include negative outcomes for the wider community” (ibid.). He refers to gang membership and other forms of crime, which have negative outcomes for the wider society. Several studies pointed at this direction. For example, first of all, one example of a negative outcome, related to bonding social capital, is when a gang member commits a crime to establish, to strengthen, his or her gang affiliation (Brisson & Usher, 2005; p. 645). A second example stems from Rubio (1996, in Richards & Roberts, 1998; p. 8). He has identified what he calls “perverse social capital,” among juvenile delinquents as well as the mafia in Colombia. The people under study are embed-
ded in social networks, and have connections, and these connections encourage oppositional life-strategies. These strategies, then, make it even more difficult to enter the formal labor market. The third example is a little closer to home. According to Kloosterman et al. (1999), many migrants in the Netherlands take up entrepreneurial activities. Lacking access to financial resources and, above all, lacking in educational qualifications, they are directed towards the lower end of the opportunity structure of urban economies. To survive in these competitive markets, many migrant entrepreneurs regress to informal economic activities that are strongly dependent on specific social networks – consisting mostly of co-ethnics – to sustain these activities on a more enduring basis. Acknowledging that these informal economic activities are an effect of few opportunities in the formal labor market, the authors show how social capital seems to play an important role.

Along these lines, scholars emphasize a relationship between negative social capital, social networks, and perverse effects. However, it is a little difficult to understand what the causal reasoning is of this negative social capital. Is it that people have negative social capital and thus work in the informal economy, or they work in the informal economy and thus have bad social capital?

7.2.3. The moral economy perspective

The third perspective is the idea of the moral economy of people in poverty, which scholars (cf. Engbersen & Staring, 2001) use to understand the existence of the informal economy. Researchers in contemporary social sciences drew attention to the notion of the moral economy as well (cf. De Swaan, 1989; p. 16; Sansone, 1992; p. 6; Booth, 1993, Coate & Ravallion, 1993; Booth, 1994; Lie, 1997). According to Sayer (2000), the moral economy perspective begins from the idea that there is, or at least ought to be, an ethical dimension to economic exchanges: it shows the ways in which markets and associated economic phenomena both depend on and influence moral/ethical sentiments, norms and behaviors. Economic activities of all kinds are influenced and structured by moral dispositions and norms, and these norms may be compromised, overridden, or reinforced by economic pressures. From the perspective of the moral economy, the existence of the informal economy is explained by risk averse behavior, the “safety first” principle, and the notion that people want to maintain their present-day income. Informal economy can better be understood if we take the moral context of people in poverty into consideration.
In the social sciences, the traditional notion of moral economy reflects the work of Polanyi (1957) and Thompson (1971). Polanyi’s empirical studies challenge many of the assumptions of neo-classical economic theory. A fine example of how this functions is sketched in the work of Scott: *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976). He studied the phenomenon of a poor, premarket people contesting the dictates of a much more modern economic order. He argues that, rather than with an eye to optimizing production or personal gain, South East Asian peasants approach the world with a “subsistence first” mentality. “Living close to the subsistence margin and subject to the vagaries of weather and the claims of outsiders, the peasant household has little scope for the profit maximization calculus of traditional neo-classical economy. Typically, the peasant cultivator seeks to avoid the failure that will ruin him rather than attempting a big, but risky, killing. In decision-making parlance, his behavior is risk-averse; he minimizes the subjective probability of maximum loss” (Scott, 1976; p. 4). According to him, special value tends to be attached to survival and maintenance of position as opposed to change and the improvement of position (Scott, 1976; p. 18). As Bourdieu puts it (1977a), there is a little conservatism in the peasants’ actions. Thus, what Scott shows is that the situation [poverty] of the peasants shapes their attitude [risk aversion, subsistence first], and central is the maintenance of position, and less the improvement of position.

Engbersen and Staring (2001) use this moral economy perspective to explain informal work activities. According to the authors, irregular work is done to maintain income and to complement curtailed benefits. It is often too risky to take up regular employment and, therefore, people in poverty, using the safety-first principle, want to maintain their present day income and do not really want to maximize utility. These people work informally, but only to a certain extent, their sense of morals limits the informal income and they withstand criminal behavior. Engbersen and Staring complement this moral economy perspective with other explanations. First, the welfare and unemployment benefit is insufficient to get by and, for that reason, people in poverty work informally. Second, taking up regular employment is a risky business, since people in poverty lose their regular safe benefit and other exemptions. Third, resentment, deprivation and the lack of state support encourage people in poverty to take up an irregular job. In summary, there seems to be a mixture of reasons to work in the informal economy.
The moral economy perspective provides a prism through which I can analyze the rationalities of people in poverty, and whether they are optimizing their income: to earn as much as possible, to receive a benefit combined with a full time job, or they try to maintain their present income. Again, as opposed to change and the improvement of position, special value tends to be attached to survival and maintenance of position.

In sum, all three perspectives deal with economy, in general. However, the first perspective explains the informal economy by focusing on the malfunctioning of the formal economy; the second negative social capital perspective explains the existence of informal economy by whether people in poverty possess this kind of social capital. These three perspectives will be used as starting points to explain the situation of the respondents. Step by step, I will try to grasp the informal economy activities of the respondents. First, I will give insight into who participates in the informal economy and what the activities are.

7.3. The respondents and the informal economy

According to the interviewers, talking with the respondents on informal labor was not easy. Many did not want to talk about it. Even when they wanted to talk about it, it was often difficult to gain full information. Information on informal earnings and job obtainment is oftentimes absent. Although I provide information on the prevalence of informal activities, these numbers should not to be too heavily relied upon, because the numbers might be higher because the respondents did not want to share full information, or the numbers might be lower because some like bragging about it. Nevertheless, in the period the interviews were conducted, about 47 of the 216 respondents were involved in informal economic activities. However, this is only during the research. At one particular time in their lives, about fifty percent of the respondents were engaged in a side job. Correspondingly, informal work is a common phenomenon. The next subsection provides insight into who does what.

More highly educated and younger respondents are more likely to be involved in the informal economy. The variety of activities is enormous. The most common activity is cleaning (N=6), especially they work as private housekeepers, though one respondent is a sports hall janitor, and some work for cleaning companies. Four men are in the DIY-business, and two women are child minders. Five work
informally as artists: in the music industry, selling their own paintings, or performing at concerts. Two respondents work as minor accountants, and three respondents do marketing research. One repairs bikes and sells them on the street, one woman sells home-made food at the market, one sells newspapers, one person sells lottery tickets, another runs an illegal video store, one works as a gardener, one as a hairdresser, and one in a snack bar. One woman teaches private Spanish lessons in exchange for cigarettes and coffee. Money is not always involved, for some swap goods and services that have economic value. (There is no information on informal activities of two persons). Practically all these activities are small-time jobs, which often generate an insignificant income. Hardly anyone works full time off the books. These informal activities are not bound to one particular sector, for example, sweat shops. The informal activities are not restricted to those who are formally employed. Compared to women, men are equally engaged in the informal economy.

Table 7.1 shows the relationship between the respondents’ social position and their involvement in the informal economy. The relationship is not significant, and all categories – single parents with children under five, the handicapped, the elderly, etc. – engage in the informal economy. Many respondents (N=15) who are engaged in the informal economy, are excluded from the labor market, such as the elderly and people who are tested medically unfit. In spite of this, they participate in the informal economy.

Table 7.1 Labor market position and informal work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>yes/no</th>
<th>OTW= obliged to work</th>
<th>NOTW= not obliged to work</th>
<th>total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subsidized workers and the elderly are the least likely to work in the informal economy. The working poor often combine (N=6) their formal with informal work. Two subsidized workers also work in the informal economy. Noteworthy is that 20% of the respondents who are tested medically unfit work informally. The
couples, the single parents with children over five, and the singles almost equally engage in the informal economy. Many of the respondents have no choice between formal and informal work to improve their income, simply because they cannot work in the formal economy. Every category of which is involved in the informal economy. Nevertheless, will there be a difference in ethnicity? Are migrant groups more informally active then native Dutch? Migration has often been associated with the rise of informal economies.

7.3.1. Immigrant networks and informal markets

In western societies, informal markets became synonymous with immigration. For example, studies conducted in New York City and Miami showed that almost all workers hired under informal work arrangements were immigrants (Portes & Sassen-Koob, 1987; Sassen-Koob, 1988; Portes et al., 1989). Similar results were found in other studies (Lozano, 1989; Dangler, 1994; Pessar, 1994; Leonard, 1998; Harney, 2006). Since the informal sector in the United States is feasibly most apparent in immigrant communities, there has been a propensity to explain its existence as an outcome of the influx of immigrants and their tendencies to replicate survival strategies emblematic of home countries. This led scholars to argue that the rise of an informal economy in the US is associated with immigration. However, there are many examples in the literature (most conducted in the 1980s) in which the informal economy can appear without extensive immigration and how they are present in low-immigrant communities/countries (Pahl & Dennett, 1981; Sabel, 1982; Renooy, 1984; Benton, 1990). Even so, oftentimes, there does seem to be a direct relationship between immigration and the rise of informal markets. Is this also the case for the research group? Are the informal activities restricted to former migrants? Especially the large number of articles on ethnicity, migration, and the informal economy suggest that there is a strong link between these three aspects. Table 7.2 shows the prevalence of informal work activities among the different ethnic groups (and thus among former migrants). Only those who engage in informal work activities are part of the analysis.
Table 7.2 Labor market position, ethnicity and informal work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dutch</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkish</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surinamese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antillean</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verdian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moroccans</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This table shows in view of their social position which ethnic groups engage in informal work activities. There are no standout ethnic groups within a certain social position that engage in the informal economy. The only remarkable aspect is that relatively many Turks engage in the informal economy while they are tested medically unfit. However, these numbers make it difficult to compare ethnic groups or groups with different social positions. Thus, concentrating on the numbers, there hardly is a relationship between the ethnic background and informal activities.

7.3.2. Relationship between social network and informal activities

Does a relationship exist between social capital and formal and informal labor market access? Observing the research group, more respondents work in the informal economy (N=47) than in the formal economy (N=44). Via multiple routes, they gained access to the formal labor market. In which way did they enter the formal labor market? Six found a job via the employment agencies, two via an ad, five via their social network, one is an entrepreneur, and four were able to change their voluntary work into regular work. Only five respondents were activated by the welfare agency. (I have no information on the others). Since there are no formal institutions offering access to the informal labor market, informal workers must have used their social connections to gain access. Although social connections fell short in providing access to the formal labor market, they were sufficient to give access to the informal labor market. What can we say about the
relationship between the kind of social connections and informal labor market activities? The next table shows this relationship.

Table 7.3 Nature of social network and informal work activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Network type, tend to be oriented towards</th>
<th>Informal work</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>26% (N=36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquaintances</td>
<td>27% (N=38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed network, acquaintances &amp; family</td>
<td>45% (N=64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social workers</td>
<td>2% (N=3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total (Significant p &lt; 0.05)</td>
<td>100% (N=141)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There seems to be a strong relationship between the kind of social network in which the respondents are embedded and whether they are active in the informal labor market. Those who are primarily embedded in a strong family ties network hardly work informally. Those who have a network of acquaintances have the tendency to work informally. Thus, social relations seem to matter. Unfortunately, I have little information on their social connections, and how they got the informal jobs.

Another difficulty is the causal reasoning. Do they have bad social capital and therefore work in the informal economy? Or is it precisely the other way around; do the respondents make a virtue out of necessity? To put it differently, are they excluded from the formal labor market, so they search for an informal job, use their social connections, and thereby come to these bad social bridges? Since this causal reasoning is almost impossible to decipher, the use of the social capital perspective is easier said than done. To fully grasp informal work activities, I probably need to consider the wider economic and structural aspects of a society. Hence, before I turn to the reasons why some work in the informal sector, I now focus on why most of the respondents do not work off the books.

### 7.3.3. Conditions to work informally

Most respondents do not work in the informal economy. Analyzing the transcriptions, it became clear that many respondents are either opposed to informal work, could not get access, did not have the right social connections, or faced the same obstacles as in the formal labor market. The first of two conditions I found for respondents to work in the informal economy is that they do not face barriers
working informally. Work, for example, has to be compatible with parenting, and
day care has to be available and flexible. If not, it becomes an obstacle to work,
both formally and informally.130 A 33 years-old Surinamese woman, [354],
mother of three, is asked whether she works off the books: “where do I find an
informal job? If I go back to work, I want a formal job. First, I have to find a
babysitter. If I work off the side, I have to find day care and pay for it. If I can
find and pay a child minder, I’d rather have a legal job.” For her, day care
[flexibility] is the decisive difficulty in taking up employment – whether it is
formal or informal. However, as we shall see, some single parents, because they
lack child support, work informally at home.

The second condition is that they do not mind the risks; it is after all illegal.
Though they receive a benefit, the respondents are under a constant surveillance
[see chapter Close Encounters of the Bureaucratic Kind]. Because they are more
monitored than the average working middle-class, the chance of being caught is
higher. Some respondents were caught by the welfare agency after working ille-
gally and ended up with severe debts. Mustafa [273] does not want to take the
risk of working on the side, and he does not have the appropriate social connec-
tions. He is asked what he thinks of working on the side: “it is like stealing. Sup-
pose I steal one hundred Euros from you, but afterwards I will get a fine of two
hundred Euros. I will end up with a loss. Do you understand? I will always lose,
after all. I believe in this principle. Maybe I can work on the side for a year, but I
will have a big chance of being caught. I will lose more than I ever earned.” In
these deliberations, risk assessment plays an important role. In addition, Irfan
[265] cannot and does not want to work on the side. He, a Turk of 57 years-old,
cannot work anymore because he has been tested medically unfit. He needs the
money, since he has to maintain the care of three children. Besides his moral con-
siderations, he is afraid of being caught and losing his disability benefit: “if I’ll be
catched, everything ends.” He does not work on the side, and his strategy is to
maintain his present-day income. This could be defined as a reproduction strat-
edy; a practice whereby he tends, unconsciously and consciously, to maintain his assets
and consequently to maintain his position in the class structure (cf. Bourdieu, 1984; p. 125 my emphasis). So he wants to play it safe, and wants to
keep what he already has.

Thus, not every respondent works off the books for several reasons. First of all,
many face barriers working in the informal economy: for single parents, the lack
of flexible day care is a major obstacle to work in the formal as well as in the informal economy. Second, not all dare to work in the informal economy. There are certain risks involved. This is in line with their moral standards. Some simply reject working off the books. Therefore, many sufficient conditions are involved to start working in the informal economy. It is not simply a matter of choice, but a constant deliberation between what is feasible, and what is still in line with their moral standards.

7.4. Grounds to informal work

In the next paragraphs, I describe why the respondents work in the informal economy. Analyzing the transcriptions, several themes emerged. These themes, elaborated in the next sections, begin with the common idea that informal work is a survival strategy. After that, I write about respondents, who have to deal with all the state regulations, see hardly any other option than to work informally. Subsequently, the risks of taking up regular employment will be described. According to the respondents, this is one of the main reasons why they work informally. Sometimes I relate these aspects to the subject of social capital.

7.4.1. Relationship between labor market exclusion and informal work

The informal economic activity within the urban inner city was sketched by archetypal ethnographic studies (cf. Stack, 1974; Lowenthal, 1975; Dow, 1977). For example, Ferman and Ferman’s (1973) paper recognized the informal economic exchange as a means of survival among the urban poor of American cities. This study served as a major breakthrough in the field. Many years later, hardly anything seems to be changed. For example, according to Wacquant (1999a; p. 127) those who are durably excluded from paid employment cannot readily rely on collective informal support, waiting for work that never comes. To carry on, they must resort to strategies of self-provisioning, shadow work, underground commerce and quasi-institutionalized hustling. These activities were part of survival strategies to get by in daily life. Informal work is nothing more than a way to survive, and results from (among other explanations) durable labor market exclusion.

Analyzing the transcriptions, three kinds of relationships appeared between informal work activities and labor market exclusion. First of all, because so many respondents are durably excluded from the labor market, the only option to improve their situation is to work on the side. Second, because of the enduring labor
market exclusion, many end up with severe debts. Because of these debts, they turn to informal work. Third, the respondents who are tested medically unfit often suffer from state retrenchments. They are sometimes retested and have to go back to the labor market. However, they fail to get a regular job since no employer wants to hire them. Having a hard time to make ends meet and being in a financially precarious situation, they work informally.

Respondents report that they have few options to improve their financial situation. For example, Andrew [160] says that he is excluded from the formal labor market, because he lacks cultural capital: “working on the side is the only solution to improve my situation [financially]. You have to keep in mind the risks.” And continues: “I think the government should promote working. Employees should earn more than people on welfare.” Melanie [346] said that if you want to get ahead in society, you should have more money: “you have to work informally.” Both Andrew and Melanie do not work on the side, but their verbatims show that they think it is often the only leeway to get by.

We know that one of the causes of enduring unemployment is unemployment itself; after being outside of the labor market for a period, the chance on reintegration becomes nil. Unlike the US, the biggest risk is not to become unemployed when holding a job, but to stay unemployed once a job is lost (Visser & Hemerijck, 1997; p. 36). Moreover, because financial resources run dry, the poor supplement their benefit with a minor illegal job. The amount of money earned is not substantial. For example, Joshua [136] a Dutch middle-aged man was unemployed for several years. For him, the only manner to make ends meet became to work informally: “Because there was not a regular job available, I worked as an illegal paperboy for several years. I earned some money on the side.” Somebody tipped off the welfare agency, and ever since, he has stopped doing this.

Many suffer from debts (N=135) and many experience state retrenchments. Therefore, they cannot get by, cannot get out of these debts, and see no options to improve financially in the future. Working on the side might be an alternative. For example, Cynthia [311] a single, Dutch woman of 46 years-old, did have some minor jobs. She quit her daytime job because she could not handle the pressure, and she had severe debts. Now she has lived on welfare for more than a decade, and has worked for several years as a prostitute. She did not work via an agent, but arranged her customers via ads. She started at age twenty-nine and
ended ten years later: “to earn money, working on the side is the ultimate solution. I did it, but now I’m too old. I stopped because I didn’t receive any responses from my ads, and one old regular customer died.” It started as a solution, and as time went by, her chances in the regular labor market faded away.

The number of people living on a disability benefit in the Netherlands (16 million people) is huge – about 932,000 in the year 2000. Because the costs became too high, they were (re)tested medically to see whether they were healthy enough to go back to the labor market. While unfit, these people were out of the labor market for many years, – losing cultural, social and economic capital. When they were tested medically fit, the chance that they could get a regular job is low. Employers do not want to hire a person formerly living on a disability benefit. For example, after Melanie’s [346] divorce, she received a disability benefit. However, after a couple of years, an institution conducted a medical check, and she was tested medically fit. After that, she officially became available for the regular labor market. For that reason, ever since, she receives a less profitable welfare benefit, and therefore her income declined. She was very disturbed. She subsequently complements the benefit with informal work. She baby-sits off the side: “With this money, I buy groceries. I spent almost the entire welfare benefit on rent.” The same occurred to Nicole [141]. She is a former nurse of 40 years-old who faced many difficulties in the labor market, her health, and her relationship. Everything came together at one moment; her relationship crashed, she broke her arm and became handicapped, and finally she was not able to work. She received a disability benefit, and after a couple of years, she was re-tested, and proved medically fit. Then she had to find work, but each time she applied for a job, she was refused. Along with the market exclusion, she could not work in her old profession (as a nurse), because her qualifications were obsolete. She asked the employment agency if she could get some job training. The employment agency refused her request: “after that, I said, well, I never apply for a job. Over and out. I took a job in domestic work for once a week, off the books. I do not like people who are working on the side all week. That’s out the line.” She informally works to get by, so she “could live normally.”

In only one case, the informal economy was a springboard to the formal labor market. Miguel [203] is a Cape Verdian man, and he lives with his three children and his eighty years-old mother in Rotterdam. In 1958, at time he was 20 years-old, he went from Cape Verde to Angola and in 1975 via Portugal to the Nether-
lands. There, he found a job in the kitchen of the Hilton hotel. “I started to work in the Hilton, illegally. Co-workers helped me to become legal. They helped me to send letters to the ministry. I worked a lot, and therefore I could stay.” After twelve years of working, he got a stroke and ever since he is tested medically unfit. “If I were healthy, I would be still working in the Hilton.” Accordingly, his informal job (and the related social capital) enabled him to become a legal citizen, and (concomitantly) he was able to go from the informal labor market to the formal labor market.

Thus, there seems to be a relationship between labor market exclusion and informal work activities. After some time outside the labor market, the respondents employ these activities. According to them, their only option to compensate their income loss is to work informally. In addition, as time went by, their distance to the labor market expands and their chance to get a job in the future lessens. Social capital is not always involved; for Cynthia used ads to reach for her customers. One example showed that the informal labor market could be a springboard to the formal labor market. However, I might assume that the others did use their social capital – I have no information on their social connections.

7.4.2. State regulations, risk aversion, flexibility and reciprocity expectations

Authors like Gutmann (1977, in Henry, 1991; p. 6) addressed the relationship between state regulations and informal work. The increasing transformation of market economies into mixed economies involving state intervention and a considerable redistributive economy has been seen as an added stimulus for the emergence of informal economic exchange. It is argued, for example, that the development of centralized government and state taxation policy has played a significant role in generating informal economic activity. Gutmann argued that the redistributive economy and the welfare state, increasing employment protection legislation are actually creating the grounds for capitalist employers to go outside the system, employ workers off the books, and thereby facilitate the irregular economy (this is something else than the manner in which welfare is distributed via bureaucracies).

Some empirical results point in this direction. For example, Jensen et al. (1995)\textsuperscript{134} found that both economic and non-economic reasons were important for participation. They show the flexibility that goes with informal jobs and that the benefits will not be curtailed if individuals work off the books. State regulations seem to
play a decisive role in the decision to work informally. From this perspective, the state (and its legislation) unintendedly creates informal markets. Earlier I described the manner in which people in poverty have to deal with the state and its regulations (see especially chapter 3 & 4). The state has developed many rules, laws, and regulations pertaining to welfare beneficiaries. The central concern is that all these laws and regulations often make it difficult (or rather diminish the chance of escaping welfare) taking up employment. The regulations, subsidies, and exemptions make it complicated to fully know their future income after accepting a job. People are often entitled to rental subsidy (distributed via the ministry of housing), but as soon as they go back to work, they might partly lose them. However, if they choose to work in the informal economy, they will not lose either their benefits or their additional subsidies. Avoiding the risk of losing income, it can be safe to work in the informal economy while receiving a benefit. In the next subsections, I describe how the respondents deal with the risks of taking up regular employment, the lost subsidies, the day care flexibility, and the reciprocity expectations in the informal labor market.

We saw that receiving a benefit is accompanied with difficulties: recipients of welfare are supervised and checked for eligibility. However, formal employment can also bring about risks. During the first two months, an employer can fire a fresh employee without consequences. But the idea of being fired is not the problem. The problem is that – after being fired – it often takes months before the state deposits the new benefit. Because s/he misses a regular income after being fired, s/he might face some financial trouble. And they are already low on their dough. Therefore, it is often safer to merge a welfare benefit with regular employment. If one of the two incomes slips away, they can always rely on either one. For example, a Surinamese single mother of three, 27 years-old [148], works formally while at the same time she receives a benefit. She did not inform the welfare agency during the first three months of her job – her probation time: “what do I care, nobody lives by the rules, why should I? I was on (job) probation for two months. If I received a contract immediately, I would have informed the welfare agency. Suppose I didn’t get the job, do you know through how much trouble I have to go to get the benefit again?” Because she committed fraud (which the officials noticed), she ended up with debts: “that’s part of my life, and I have to learn to deal with it.” Although she did not work informally, what she did was illegitimate; she obtained a benefit while she worked.
Caitlin [319], single parent of two, 49 years-old, practices a similar strategy. She does domestic work on the side and explains: “I work on the side, otherwise, I will not get by. You should not work at some office because others will notice. For that reason, every week, I visit a friend to ‘drink coffee’. I can work on the side every afternoon, so I can make a lot of money. That is something I resent. I do it, so I can visit the zoo with my children.” She works informally to pass, to get by, and only to a certain extent. However, she starts to work part-time formally within a couple of weeks (after the interview), and her income will be supplemented by the welfare agency to the objective minimum income. She also keeps her informal job. She can work full-time, but then she will receive as much as her informal job, plus her formal part-time job. Nevertheless, she starts to work part-time, informal and she receives partly a welfare benefit, so she obtains money from the state, the formal, and the informal labor market (three fields). If she starts working full-time and she will fail in her new job, she will face some difficulties to go back to the old (safe) situation of informal work and welfare. However, if she combines all three earnings, and one of the incomes slips away, she still has two other resources to count on. For her, what she does now is the safest way to deal with her precarious situation.

To a certain extent, beneficiaries are allowed to work. However, if they work many hours, they might lose their rental subsidy (distributed via the ministry of housing). Consequentially, if they work many hours they lose subsidies, and if they work few hours they are entitled to full rental subsidy. For people in poverty, this threshold determines the amount of legal working hours. For example, an Antillean married man, 44 years-old, [107] works in the music industry, while at the same time receiving a benefit. If, during one month, he works many hours, he might lose his rental subsidy. If this is the case, although he does not like to work informally, the exceeding working hours are off the books. He does this to be sure of some income. In this situation, formal and informal work operate as a continuum and the dichotomy between formal and informal work can be questioned (cf. Harding & Jenkins, 1989). People are constantly moving in a gray area. They are neither fully working of the books, nor are they constantly working legally. They move between the formal and informal field[35], and this movement is partly determined by legislation.

For single parents, one of the chief constraints on employment take up is probably the lack of flexible day care for their children. Therefore, sometimes, women are
forced into the informal sector because the formal sector fails to accommodate their household responsibilities (Moser, 1984; Beneria & Roldan, 1987). Scholars argue that women choose informal sector employment because of its compatibility with their household work (cf. Berger & Buvinic, 1989; Dignard & Havet, 1995). They contend that the informal sector is better suited to allowing women to merge household work with paid work because many informal sector activities can be undertaken from the home. The next case shows how public policy fails to accommodate the situation of Jasmine. She could get a regular job via the employment agency, but the welfare agency refuses to provide day care for her children. She reacted by gaining information from her social connections on working for adult chat lines (via telephone). She worked for two years, at home, for this company illegally to get by. She could finally pay all the bills. She had to quit because the company was invaded, and later on, she was investigated by the welfare agency. Besides feeling undermined by the state, the central reason for working on the side is the flexibility that goes with black work; she did not have to arrange day care. For her, the problem of child support was solved, and she could combine her illegal work with household responsibilities.

If welfare beneficiaries take up employment, they might lose tax exemptions, rental subsidies, and partly their health care compensation (since distributed via other institutions, the welfare office and its officials have nothing to do with these exemptions and subsidies). Because these subsidies change, their new regular (formal) income is difficult to know beforehand. Nevertheless, if they keep on living from a benefit and work informally, they know exactly what their monthly income will be. The respondents prefer the safety of informal jobs, over the risk of a formal job. Shannon elucidates this: “people, who took up employment, received less income from employment. There is no incentive to work. At least not in my situation. I will receive less rental subsidy. I understand it, working on the side. How they do it, I do not know.” In the next subsection, I give examples of how this process operates.

Amber, a Dutch, 43 years-old mother of two, did some work on the side to get by: “I really didn’t know how I could get out of this mess. I started to work for a friend, in her shop, as a cleaner for six weeks. After that, I worked off the side via ads in the local newspaper.” Therefore, her social network provided illegal jobs. In these social networks, the expectations between the two parties are crystal
clear; earnings and tasks are negotiated in advance. However, her social network ran dry, so she had to search for a new market – via ads – to sell her qualities.

Sonya, a Turkish woman [245], said [see chapter Bonds in everyday life: The weakness of weak ties] that if you ask for a nickel, others will ask two nickels back. “These days, nothing is for free,” she says. To get by, she does some chores for her Turkish friends, and teaches in handicraft and painting. She did not say anything about these illegal activities to the welfare agency. She earned about fifty Euros a month: “in my situation, it is normal to earn a little off the side.” She rejects drug selling and other criminal activities, but understands those who earn a little off the books. She draws a boundary between criminal behavior and her petty “wrongdoing.” Her social network, although low on trust, provides a consumption market of her homemade products.

Kelsey [212], a Cape Verdian woman, earns a little money by selling homemade food at a Cape Verdian association: “in the weekends, I earn a little off the books by selling food. I save money so I can buy train and bus tickets. Traveling illegally on public transport, I feel embarrassed. I want my kids to stay out of trouble, so they have to buy bus tickets. And receiving only a welfare benefit, I’ll get in trouble.” She uses this money to pass, to get by, and to keep her children from getting into trouble.

Elizabeth [133] is a 26 years-old single parent of one, who works on the side, while living on welfare. She did some domestic chores: “my superiors went to their work. I was in their house for three hours. Money was already on the cabinet. I knew exactly what to do.” What she had to do and what she received was exactly known beforehand. There were no surprising changes, nor difficult regulations. That is why the reciprocal relation with her informal employer is more obvious than the reciprocal relationship with her “formal employer” – mediated by all the state regulations.

Kayla’s husband [166] worked informally. Most of the time he did chores for family, friends, and acquaintances: “they call you, and you get some money to do a job.” He earned up to 50 Euros a day: “Cash, that’s a lot of money.” Her husband is formally employed now and, according to him, in this situation of employment he is unable to work informally.
Hence, first, for people in poverty, there is a big difference in working in the formal labor market compared to the informal labor market. The difference is that in the informal markets they know exactly what they will earn. The respondents have a strong sense of reciprocity, they want to work, and want to gain from the exchange, but also want to have full information on the barter. In this manner, the outcome of the exchanges within the informal economy are known beforehand. However, because of the tax regulations and exemptions, the outcome of the exchange in the formal economy is often uncertain. This transparency is – due to all the state regulations – missing in the formal market, which causes people in poverty to opt for informal work. Second, other cases made clear that people in poverty attempt to extract income from multiple fields: the formal labor market, the state, and the informal labor market. They do this, not so much to maximize their income, but to be ensured of some income. If one income ceases to exist, at any time they are secured from other income. Third, it also became clear that informal work is done because policy often fails to accommodate flexible day care; women combine household responsibilities with informal homework.

7.5. Conclusion

First, the respondents, despite their poverty status, have access to the informal economy. They have social and cultural capital, which provide the possibility to access the informal labor market. Second, formal and informal activities are not mutually exclusive, since six respondents combine their formal with informal work. However, the majority of the informal workers do not have a regular job. Third, informal work is not restricted to particular (ethnic) groups. Fourth, there exists a patchwork of different activities: from cleaning big companies’ offices to small time entrepreneurial activities. Thus, they have resources to employ informal activities, have access, and social connections. And sometimes, the informal labor market is a facilitator to work in the formal labor market.

As for the conditions under which informal work can take place, first of all, there must be a market in which people operate. Without connections they cannot find illegal work, without a market they have nothing to exchange, and without qualifications, they cannot do anything. The second condition: compared to the formal labor market, they face the same obstacles as in the informal market. The inflexibility of day care is one of the impediments why people cannot work informally. Third, when some respondents express their ideas on informal labor, they say that
they do not have the courage to do it, or they think it is just not the right thing to do. If they do it, they consider the risks involved and justify it by saying that they do not informally work full-time.

I outlined several central reasons why these respondents work in the informal economy. First, they have to survive. People in poverty often have to deal with state retrenchments, have few options to enter the regular labor market, and therefore work off the books. In order to survive, they often need income from three different fields: from the formal labor market, the state, and the informal labor market. Second, they face many state regulations, and these regulations cause them to choose the relatively safe informal income above an insecure formal income. If they take up regular employment, they often do not receive as much income as their benefit. Third, and this is the consequence of the state regulations, reciprocity expectations are clear in the informal economy but opaque in the formal economy. In line with the second argument, they often do not know what their income will be in the formal labor market, but they do know what their income is in the informal labor market – because informal income does not interfere with all the state regulations. There is a mixture of reasons why the informal market exists, and these reasons are not mutually exclusive. In the first place, the informal economy can best be explained by obstacles to enter the formal labor market, and secondly by the effects of the state regulations and subsidies. The final consequence is that people in poverty develop their modern version of the moral economy. They try to preserve their income, are risk averse, while attempting to maintain their social position. Because they try to maintain their position, this strategy contributes to the perpetuation (instead of improvement) of their situation.

This chapter drew attention to the existence of the informal labor market. The informal labor market is the effect of the (conflicting) relationship between the state (and its regulations) and the formal labor market. The changes in subsidies, contradictory regulations, and the lack of state support (e.g. for flexible day care), cause people in poverty to work informally. Furthermore, if we take all the constraints of the other fields into consideration (the labor market, the state bureaucracy), informal work seems to be the most reasonable choice to get by in daily life.
Furthermore, their distance to the regular labor market is increased, resulting in fewer chances for upward mobility; they did accumulate cultural capital, but they cannot add this work experience to their résumé. In spite of everything, it is difficult to convert this illegitimate cultural capital into economic capital in the official labor market. At last, because of their resourcefulness (i.e. informal work) it can be questioned as to whether it is useful to change the height of the benefits (as an incentive to go from welfare to work). After all, lowering the benefits results, perhaps, in more informal work activities.
Notes

121 See also the literature overview of Losby et al. (2002).

122 Wilson (1987, 1996) generally known as a structuralist, argues that, though the lack of jobs was the ultimate cause behind the inner-city destitution, cultural and behavioral patterns perpetuate the conditions of the poor (Small & Newman, 2001; p. 35). One of these seemingly cultural and behavioral patterns is working on the side or off the books in the informal labor market.

123 For example, Portes (1998; p. 15) identified at least four negative consequences of social capital: exclusion of outsiders, excess claims on group members, restrictions on individual freedoms, and downward leveling norms. However, there is a strong tendency to link social capital with the last aspect mentioned: social capital contributes to inequality by exerting a leveling-down effect on people’s aspirations (Ledeneva, 1998; Harper, 2001; cited in Field, 2003, p. 80). Portes suggest that when group solidarity is cemented by a shared experience of adversity and opposition to mainstream society, then individual members will be discouraged from trying to leave and join “the enemy.”

124 Another example might be the work of Banfield. This American anthropologist used the term “amoral familism” to explain the behavior of peasants in southern Italy, which he saw as the result of strategies aimed solely at improving the immediate family’s own short term position. While this might serve the family well, it undermined all attempts at securing wider cooperation (Banfield, 1958, cited in Field, 2003; p. 87).

125 There is a clear patron-client relationship visible in the work of Scott. In his view the subsistence ethic shapes peasants’ attitudes towards and responses to the demands of supra-village elite groups.

126 There is not only a material exchange, there is also a relevant symbolic dimension. He writes: “To fall below this level is not only to risk starvation; it is to suffer a profound loss of standing within the community and perhaps to fall into a permanent situation of dependence” (Scott, 1976; p. 9).

127 However, Scott warns to sketch a dichotomy between swashbuckling capitalist risk-taking on the one hand and immovable peasant conservatism on the other (Scott, 1976; p. 25).

128 I am fully aware that their analysis is based on the “Landscape of Poverty”-project.

129 One Surinamese woman hardly understood the question on informal work, [361]: “I do not understand the concept. We are not familiar with side jobs in Suriname.” She is unfamiliar with the informal economy, because the dichotomy formal-informal economy is not vividly present in her home country.

130 See for example Vinay (1985). She showed how women may begin in formal employment but move into informal work when children are born, returning to formal work when children are older.

131 Ferman and Ferman argued that capitalism generate its own historically specific types of informal or irregular economies and that the very origins of irregular economies, “lie in structural conditions and processes in the larger society, and cannot be divorced from them” (cf. Henry, 1991; p. 3).

132 He writes: “Nowadays, individuals durably excluded from paid employment in neighborhoods of regulation cannot readily rely on collective informal support while they wait for later work which, moreover, may never come. To survive, they must resort to individual strategies of ‘self-provisioning’, ‘shadow work’, underground commerce and quasi-institutionalized ‘hustling’” (Wacquant, 1996; p. 127).

133 In the statistical database, these numbers are hardly available.
The two reasons of greatest importance were that informal activities were a way to help out neighbors and that they constituted a way to survive. While low-income participants were more likely to be motivated by economic concerns, there were more similarities than differences between the poor and the non-poor respondents. The authors highlighted several self-reported reasons for engaging in informal work: to help out neighbors, because you have to survive, lets you work at home, not enough good jobs around, you can set your own hours, you can be your own boss, because income is not taxed, no transportation worries, and regular job would cut your benefit. Harding and Jenkins write: “Even the most formal contexts are comprehensively penetrated by, and implicated in informal social relationships” (Harding & Jenkins, 1989; p. 175).

Nelson (1999) explored gender differences in three varieties of economic activities that supplement regular employment and housework. Gender differences were found in the content of these activities, their location, the time devoted to them, the degree to which they were delineated from other activities, and the opportunities they provided for sociability.

A study of street traders in Columbia found that the majority preferred informal self-employment to formal wage employment (Nelson, 1988 in: Leonard, 2000: p. 1076). The reason cited was because most traders felt they could achieve greater economic security engaging in street vending than in formal employment. This was because formal employment tended to be sporadic and short-term.

The respondents do want to work, and they are not low on work ethic, but simply they want to work to get something in return. This norm is so basic in social life that we can label them Homo Reciprocus (cf. Becker, 1956)

Surveying the literature, many authors have different perspectives on the informal economy. However, I follow the line of Portes, Castells, and Benton (1989). They maintain that the informal economy is widespread, irrespective of the level of a country’s development, and apart from the existence of immigrant labor. I also reaffirm that the informal economy “has served as a crucial survival strategy for the poor, as a significant provider of jobs to the unemployed, as a training ground for entrepreneurs, as a source of new businesses, and as part of a cost reducing strategy for modern businesses” (Gerber, 1999; p. 1).
8. Persistent poverty in the Netherlands: summary and conclusion

This study is about poverty in the Netherlands during the late 1990s. I made use of the “Landscapes of Poverty”-project database (1997-1999). In this study, I analytically divided society into various fields, i.e. the neighborhood, the labor market, the state bureaucracy, the social networks, and the informal labor market. Each field can be an opportunity structure. For people in poverty, a field might provide resources for everyday survival, helping them to move upwardly. The best examples are the field of education and the labor market. However, fields can also constrain people in poverty from escaping their position. If people in poverty are excluded or they are not able to obtain resources from a particular field, it prevents them from pursuing their ambitions. It was this study’s main concern to disentangle whether these fields enable or constrain people in poverty to change their position. I tried to explain why poverty is perpetuated. To grasp the structure of the fields, I focused on the manner in which people cooperate, the symbolic and material struggles, and the unintended consequences of their actions. Furthermore, I illustrated the relationships between the fields and especially the effects of these relationships. In this concluding chapter, I draw together the chapters’ central arguments; I then summarize the symbolic and material struggles within each field, followed by the interrelation between the fields (and its effects).

8.1. The conclusion for each field

8.1.1. The labor market

In chapter 3, I explored the attempts of people in poverty, using multiple forms of capital, to increase their chances in the labor market. This chapter developed the concept of the forms of capital as the basis of a model of labor market incorporation. Inductively, during the transcription analysis, several themes emerged. First, to strengthen their position in the labor market, poor people have to have cultural capital (often in the form of diplomas). Nevertheless, to invest in cultural capital,
they have to have financial resources. The respondents faced difficulties investing in cultural capital, simply because they lack these financial resources. Second, due also to institutional barriers, investments in cultural capital were often difficult to make. People do want to invest in cultural capital, but they are often not supported by the state. They also face the contradictions of the state. That is, the way state benefits have contradictory incentives. They have to be available for the labor market and are therefore not allowed to attend courses (thereby investing in cultural capital). However, to increase their chances in the labor market, they need to have sufficient cultural capital. Third, if investments in cultural capital are made, they do not always seem to have a pay off. The job they acquire offered little financial progress. If people in poverty convert their cultural capital in the labor market, they hardly obtain more financial capital than a welfare benefit. Fourth, a strong relationship between social, cultural and economic capital reveals that the loss of one form of capital often means the loss of another. For example, the loss of financial capital resulted in a decline in social capital. The lack of social capital again makes it difficult to gain access to the labor market and thus to gain economic capital. In addition, the loss of financial capital resulted in few opportunities to invest in cultural capital. Furthermore, this cultural capital is necessary in order to enter the labor market and to access critical social networks. Eventually, people in poverty faced a vicious cycle of disintegration. Fifth, this chapter showed that if people in poverty want to maintain a position in the labor market, they have to have all three forms of capital. They need to have sufficient cultural capital to overcome the poverty trap, enough social capital to provide for flexible day care, and economic capital to, e.g., pay for flexible day care and additional investments in cultural capital to strengthen their labor market position. The data showed that the respondents oftentimes are short of one of the forms of capital. When respondents plan to enter the labor market, they tried to strengthen one of their forms of capital, but fail because of institutional barriers, the contradictions of the state, or their bad position (poverty, and thus few economic resources). Though it seems that it is all about economic gain, getting ahead, investments, conversion, and gaining more money, the symbolic aspects were found also to be very compelling. People in poverty can get a subsidized job, which might offer an escape out of poverty in the long run, but these jobs suffer from deplorable connotations, and are often stigmatizing. Because these jobs do not have much of an economic pay-off and are stigmatizing, there was a strong disincentive from getting such a job. Without doubt, what we saw is a connection between symbolic aspects (negative connotations), and economic aspects (hardly
any financial improvement). In this way, labor market reintegration is not as straightforward as it may seem. The respondents face many barriers, both economic and symbolic, to improve their position.

8.1.2. The bureaucracy

In chapter 4, I explored how people in poverty experience the relationship with welfare officials and how they react to the quality of the relationship. Because the bureaucratic encounters are largely about symbolic classifications (to distinguish between the deserving and undeserving poor), the transcriptions were analyzed for how the respondents dealt with these classifications. First of all, the respondents experienced the welfare officials’ informal classifications. According to the respondents, the welfare officials are condescending, make pessimistic distinctions, are unfriendly, and not willing to help them. Second, the welfare office employed several formal classifications; one of them is the distance to the labor market taxonomy. These formal classifications are experienced as stigmatizing, incorrect, and often lead to indignation. Third, the welfare office controls and oversees whether the respondents are entitled to benefits. These controlling mechanisms, both formal and informal practices, are again often experienced as negatively. Because respondents, from their viewpoint, are incorrectly classified they react to these practices and symbolic classifications: sometimes as cunning, prudent, provocative; alternatively, often as passive, avoiding communication, even refusing to take up welfare. However, they are often obstinate, and thus reaffirm the image of the undeserving poor. In this fashion, the classifications and the respondents’ self-image seem to interact (a relational difference that is unproductive) and unintentionally contributes to welfare dependency.

8.1.3. The neighborhood

In chapter 5, I explored how place might affect the life chances of people in poverty and how they deal with their social environment. Assuming that the neighborhoods under study are stigmatized, the respondents react to this bad reputation. To understand the mechanisms behind neighborhood reputation and stigma, the “boundary work approach” is used. That is, analyzing the transcriptions, I looked at who the respondents defined as a morally worthy or unworthy person in the neighborhood. Doing this, the internal differentiation of the neighborhood can be observed and, consequentially, knowledge is produced as to whether the neighborhood is a fruitful ground for urban dwellers to create enduring social ties. This chapter distinguished three manners dealing with the
neighborhood stigma: first of all, the respondents distance themselves from those who undeservingly profit from social assistance programs. The distinction is based on the distribution of economic resources – often by the state. Second, respondents make distinctions based on life-style. They blame urban dwellers who make a mess of the neighborhood and are impure, noisy, and untidy. The distinction they make is based on others’ behavior. The third manner to deal with neighborhood stigma is to understand others’ position and to take up a positive connotation of the neighborhood. They show their sympathy for others and thereby try to neutralize a discrediting mark. Two remarkable points can be made. First of all, almost all ethnic groups practice similar strategies of distancing. There are hardly any differences between the native Dutch and migrants. Second, there are hardly any differences between the neighborhoods. Within all three neighborhoods, these strategies are practiced – although in the Bijlmermeer “sympathizing with others” is more often practiced. Hence, we need to put the neighborhood in perspective. It does not really seem to matter where the respondents live: they always distance themselves from others, and blame others for their own misery. Perhaps as long as their position does not change, their viewpoint will not change accordingly. Again, we saw a firm tie between symbolic and economic aspects. Many respondents feel economically underprivileged, and think they have to compete with others in the neighborhood. To gain their self-worth, these respondents symbolically distance themselves from others by referring to their undisciplined behavior. Consequently, the neighborhood offers few social resources. People in poverty have few productive bonds within the neighborhood, and few bonds for social support and / or social advantage. To conclude, the neighborhood is not a fruitful ground to move upwardly, but a symbolic space which fortifies the sense of being underprivileged.

8.1.4. The social networks

In chapter 6, I explored the productiveness of the so-called weak ties (less intimate bonds) of people in poverty. Scholars argue that these ties are productive, even necessary to change one’s opportunity structure. People in poverty can use these ties to find job information outside their immediate social network, consequently, ending their underprivileged position. The respondents informed the interviewers that they possess these weak ties. However, why are they still in their underprivileged position? To answer this question, I observed how the respondents dealt with their social ties, what has been exchanged, and how these exchanges are channeled. First of all, honor and status are decisive concepts to un-
derstand the exchange within the urban environment. Because these respondents live in poverty, they are constantly reminded of their low status during these exchanges. They either cannot give back what has been given, alternatively, when given goods, this reminds them of being poor. In order to avoid being labeled as helpless, they avoid receiving goods. Second, an important norm is being self-sufficient. Many respondents so want to be self-sufficient. They try to optimize their social standing instead of gaining as much as possible. Third, community enforcement (in the form of gossip) is one central reason why the respondents do not want to exchange goods. Because they cannot always give back what has been given, they might become the talk of the town. Fourth, past experiences mold future transactions. Many respondents exchanged goods and services in the past. However, because their expectations were disappointed, they lost from the exchange, so that their social capital disintegrated. The result is that they have become more careful with whom to cooperate. They will not have dealings with all and sundry; hence trust is often absent in the urban environment. This suggests that even when the poor are provided with more weak ties via social mixing in the neighborhood, they still would like to maintain their honor, avoid being reminded of their poverty position, prefer to be self-sufficient, do not want to be the gossiped about, and are reluctant to trust just everyone. This is also why these weak ties are not very productive. It hardly comes to mind to make use of their weak ties to find a job. Here again, we see the connection between economic and symbolic aspects, for respondents do not want to gain the maximum amount of financial resources, but rather optimize their symbolic universe.

8.1.5. The informal labor market

In chapter 7, I explored the informal work activities of people in poverty, whether they are related to ethnic communities and network types, and what the conditions are to work in the informal economy. I outlined several self-reported reasons why they work in the informal economy. First, their regular income is often too low and therefore they work off the books. The respondents suffer from debts, state retrenchments, and are durably excluded from the regular labor market. Their financial resources ran dry and they are often rejected for regular employment. They have few options to maintain their income. Their only option is to work in the informal labor market. Second, state regulations make it difficult to take up regular employment. Regular employment brings about risks, because people in poverty can lose their new job during the first couple of months. After being fired, it takes months before the new benefit is deposited. They run the risk
of ending up with severe debts. It is safer to merge an irregular income with a benefit.

In addition, informal work is often more compatible with parenting. Because day care is not flexible, expensive or not available, some single parents prefer to work informally at home. Third, in line with the last finding, the reciprocity expectations are more articulated in the informal economy, and less in the formal economy. When welfare clients take up regular employment, they might lose part of their tax exemptions, health care compensation and rental subsidies. They do not know what their future (regular) income will be. However, if they take up an irregular job, they do not lose all these subsidies, and they know exactly what their future income will be. It is safer to take up an odd job; they know what their income will be in the informal labor market, and this information is not available to them in the regular economy. Informal work is merely the result of the failure of other markets, contradictory state regulations, unpredictable changes in subsidies, and risk adverse behavior. Moreover, if we take all the constraints of the other fields into consideration, informal work seems to be the most reasonable option to get by in daily life.

8.2. The symbolic and economic struggle

In almost every field, the material struggle was juxtaposed with the symbolic struggle. In the labor market, people in poverty tried to get a job in order to improve their situation financially. However, this was not the only condition they tried to improve. They also wanted to improve their status in the labor market. For example, the subsidized jobs, which were often the only option to enter the labor market, suffered from deplorable connotations, and were often experienced as stigmatizing. If the respondents take these jobs, they lose status; the symbolic dimension in the labor market is often just as important as by the financial dimension. Negotiation with officials during the bureaucratic encounters in the welfare office, people in poverty can obtain benefits and other services. This negotiation is nothing less than a material struggle. To obtain these benefits, they must present themselves as deserving, which is nothing less than a symbolic classification. The client must present himself as deserving, but the welfare official can always reject her or him as undeserving for social assistance. For the beneficiary, this has severe economic consequences. In the neighborhood, there seems to be a competition between urban dwellers. The respondents feel economically deprived with
reference to other urban dwellers. They see others as securing scarce resources more easily and as others deteriorating the neighborhood. Consequentially, the respondents symbolically distance themselves from those who seem to be welfare frauds and make a mess out of the neighborhood. They distance themselves to regain their self-worth, and to avoid being labeled as good-for-nothings. The economic competition is often symbolically negotiated. For, during the transactions in the social networks, it was clear that maintenance of social status, trust, and honor are more important than financial profit. And although people in poverty have few economic resources, they still want to overcome the symbolic disparagement. In the informal labor market, people in poverty seem to be more appreciated than in the formal labor market. They know what their future income will be, have direct contact with their employers, can decide what they will do, and therefore can maintain their honor and optimize both the symbolic dimension and the economic dimension. Consequently, my analysis shows that to understand the life-world of people in poverty, the symbolic dimension needs to be acknowledged together with the economic. Hence, the symbolic struggle has often consequences for the duration of their poverty spell and the social exclusion from various fields; due to this, people refuse to take up additional welfare, do not build up fruitful bonds in the neighborhood and hardly benefit from their friendships, lowering the chance of escaping their impoverished position.

8.3. The unintended consequences of social action

In each field, people cooperated with each other. The choices, interferences, and actions of people often had unbeneficial consequences. Short-term decisions have long-term consequences. For example, if people in poverty opt for subsidized jobs, they lose their status in the short term, but they might well consolidate their position in the labor market in the long run. Except for the subsidized workers, many respondents usually did not want a subsidized job, consequentially reducing their prospects in the labor market. During the bureaucratic encounters, the state categorizes people in poverty, and people in poverty react to these classifications in such ways, that they might harm themselves economically. They avoided going to the welfare office, thereby forfeiting any additional welfare. Or they reacted negatively to the manner in which they were treated, for by being annoyed, thereby reducing the chance that they will be chosen for job training. These reactions have consequences for the duration of their poverty spell. In the neighborhood, it was quite common to shift off the neighborhood stigma by blaming oth-
ers. However, by doing this, they reduced the opportunity to build up fruitful so-
cial connections. They even harmed the neighborhood’s reputation reaffirming
the neighborhood stigma. The neighborhood image might have consequences for
whether they are able to take up employment, for employers do not want people
from the wrong side of the tracks. During the transactions in their social net-
works, people in poverty optimized their social standing. Due to the fact that each
time they ask their friends if they have information for job opportunities, they are
reminded of their poverty status; they might opt not to use their social ties to get
ahead. Again, the consequence of this behavior is that they will not profit from
the exchange and in the long run may never find a job via their social ties. Fi-
nally, people in poverty might opt to work in the informal labor market, a legiti-
mate decision if they want enough money to get by. However, in the long run,
they do not build up any formal work experience and, unintendedly, expand their
distance to the labor market. All these decisions depend heavily on the structure
of the particular field, their future prospects, and their significant others. These
decisions often come about relationally, and these decisions are understandable
because people in poverty have little space to maneuver. However, after a while,
the consequences of these decisions might be counterproductive and might pro-
long their poverty spells.

8.4. The interrelation of the fields

All fields were relevant in understanding poverty. Most of the time, these fields
were treated independently, but there are relationships between them. The exis-
tence and perpetuation of poverty might be the product of the poor interrelation
between the different fields. If the educational system is poorly connected with
the labor market, youngster will have a hard time to find a job. When the em-
ployment agency does not function properly (failing to connect with the labor
market), the unemployed will face the difficulties of getting a job. Thus, poor
connections between fields may have consequences for people in poverty: their
poverty spell might be prolonged.

First, there is a relationship between the labor market and the welfare bureaucracy
(which has certain consequences). In both chapter 3 and chapter 4, this interrela-
tion became visible. For people in poverty, this bureaucracy is the entrance
through which the labor market must be accessed. The welfare officials should
support the respondents’ efforts to get a job, but often the relationship between
officials and recipients is a barrier to the labor market. The effect of the deficient connection between the welfare bureaucracy and the labor market is that the unemployment duration may be prolonged. In chapter 3, we saw that people in poverty have a hard time investing in cultural capital because they are restricted to welfare regulations. Because they cannot invest in their cultural capital, they have difficulties entering the labor market. In part, this is because these contradictory incentives of the state have severe consequences for people in poverty.

Second, there is a relationship between the formal and the informal labor market. The informal labor market might be the result of the formal labor market malfunctioning. If the formal labor market is easily accessible, and work offers an economic and symbolic pay-off, individuals do not need to work off the books. It became evident that the informal labor market offered more security, economic gain, and flexibility than the formal labor market. This comes on top of the relationship between the state and the informal labor market. Due to many state regulations, tax exemptions, rules, difficult labor market reentry, income insecurity, and welfare retrenchments, people in poverty would rather work in the informal economy. Poor relationships between various fields create an informal market. People in poverty become trapped in a vicious cycle, and this is driven by state regulations.

Third, there is a (weak) relationship between the state and the neighborhood. According to many respondents, the state and its bureaucracies (the housing associations, the welfare office) distribute scarce resources wrongly, discriminate among the urban dwellers, and are responsible for what is happening in the neighborhood. People in poverty experience a disproportionately greater distribution of social problems in the neighborhood. These experiences fortify resentment and reaffirm their poor position. The respondents blamed not only other urban dwellers, but also the institutions for the neighborhood deterioration. Fourth, the social networks and the informal labor market are weakly connected. Since there are no formal institutions, the informal labor market must be accessed via social connections. The respondents’ informal ties are vital in accessing the informal labor market. However, as argued in chapter 7, informal activities are the result of other processes, that is the mixture of the state and formal labor market malfunctioning engendering the informal labor market. Fifth, there is a relationship between social networks and the labor market. Social networks and the labor market are connected in such way that exclusion from the labor market often results in fewer
social ties. But then again, exclusion from the labor market affects all fields; people in poverty have to go to the welfare office, feel stigmatized in the neighborhood, have fewer social connections, and have to look for an informal job. Along these lines, we saw that the primary fields are in some way connected and that the social exclusion from one field often results in the social exclusion from other fields. The poor relationships between the different fields, correspondingly, shed light on how poverty is perpetuated. People in poverty often face a vicious circle of poverty, in which the exclusion from one field results in the exclusion from other fields, so that everything seems inevitably to fall apart.

8.5. Persistent poverty in the Netherlands

Beginning with the concept of social exclusion, I tried to illustrate why people in poverty did not profit from the booming economy during the second half of the 1990s. The answer is as follows. The structure of the field itself, i.e. how people cooperated, how people collaborated with each other; how people in poverty dealt with the welfare officials, the urban dwellers, their friends; how they dealt with the conflicting incentive structures of the state, how they met head on with labor market demands and state regulations; how they struggled to get by with their resources; tried to maintain or to improve their position, the conversion obstacles, their material and symbolic struggles and the unintended consequences of social action, determined whether the particular field was enabling or constraining. Most of the time, the particular field constrained people in poverty from escaping their position. They were not able to profit from a particular field. Even so, people in poverty were incapable securing sufficient resources from the various fields to get and stay of poverty. From this viewpoint, poverty is the product of enduring exclusion from the primary interrelated fields, resulting in cumulative disadvantage among those it concerns.
9. Epilogue: poverty in contemporary context

9.1. Introduction: persistent poverty, fewer beneficiaries, more working poor

The data used is relatively old. At the moment this book will be published, the first interview will have started ten years ago. In Dutch society, quite a few things have been changed. The public discovery of the so-called “foodbanks” (private initiatives – often churches and political parties – unreservedly providing the poor with supplies) made the impression that the government fell short in providing assistance for people in poverty (to figure out why people use foodbanks instead of governmental assistance, see page 97). After this discovery, public poverty debates began. These debates were centered on the question of whether poverty is due to individual shortcomings or the structure of Dutch society. Right-wing politicians emphasized individual responsibilities and even denied the existence of poverty. Left wing politicians blamed the state retrenchments for the existence of poverty, and used the existence of the foodbanks as an exemplar for governmental deficiencies. In the mid 1980s and the 1990s, similar standpoints could be observed between the right and the left (cf. Gabriëls, 2001). It seems that the debate about whether poverty is due to individual shortcomings or the structure of society is as old as Methuselah. But there are other developments. The appearance of the politician Pim Fortuyn made space for a harsh kind of thinking towards immigrants. The murder of Fortuyn (in 2002) and the filmmaker Theo van Gogh (in 2004) reinforced the severe line of contemporary thinking towards ethnic groups. This came on top of a stagnating economy since 9/11 and new state retrenchments since then. In 2004, a new welfare law was introduced that made it difficult to stay enduringly on welfare.

In this dissertation, I wanted to show that it is not about individual shortcomings, nor it is about the structure of society. Rather, it is about the way in which people are embedded in the various fields, and how these fields constrain people from (or enable to) pursuing their ambitions – whether their maintenance of their position or the desire for upward mobility. It is about the relationship between individuals’ position vis-à-vis the field in which they are embedded, and the relationships be-
tween people in general. Poverty is the sum of all exclusion processes. This exclusion ranges from fatalistic self-exclusion to competition between people in the labor market. Accordingly, in this dissertation I wanted to make clear that there exists a perspective between the individual and the structural causes of poverty. In this epilogue, I want to answer the question as to whether the research findings can be applied to the contemporary context. First, I will start with some recent developments on poverty. After that, I will use some of my own interviews to show what happens on ground level.

9.2. The number of people on welfare, poverty, and among the working poor

As for recent poverty trends, although the amount of people on welfare declined, the number of low-income people is quite steady. This may be explained by the rising number of working poor. I will start with the introduction of the new welfare law.

In 2004, a new welfare law was introduced. The bedrock of this law is the belief that people should work instead of living on welfare. Citizens are now given more responsibilities, the municipalities are given (sufficient) techniques to guide the unemployed back to the labor market, and the guidelines are designed in such way that the municipalities have more means to realize their goals – less people on welfare. Although work is considered central, the general task of the government is nonetheless to provide sufficient income for all Dutch citizens.

Before 2004, the national government was financially responsible for people on welfare, while the municipalities were responsible for labor market integration. The municipalities hardly experienced any incentive to guide the unemployed back to the labor market, because the national government paid for people on welfare anyway. After 2004, however, the municipalities became financially responsible for the welfare scheme and, thus, practically responsible for the labor market integration. Therefore, a strong incentive was created. Moreover, because the municipalities were given more space to implement policy techniques, they executed “work-first” approaches, prevented people from taking up welfare, and made use of more employment agencies.

During 1998-2002, the economy was prosperous. In the year 2002, the economy declined and the number of unemployed grew. In 2004, the new Dutch law on welfare was introduced and, ever since, the number of people on welfare has de-
clined. In addition, since approximately 2006, the economy is rising again, which also results in fewer people on welfare. Consequently, during the period 1998-2002, the number of people on welfare declined from 412,000 to 341,000\textsuperscript{142}. After the year 2002, the number again increased, nevertheless after 2004, the amount of welfare beneficiaries decreased again to approximately 355,000 in the year 2005.

Although the amount of people on welfare has declined, poverty rates are steady or even rising (many low-income groups do not live on welfare but work, and welfare is not often the same as poverty). Since 2002, the number of low-income households has increased, from 580,000 in 2002 to 680,000 in 2005, corresponding to roughly 8.8\% and then 10.5\% of all Dutch households. From 2001 to 2004, the number of people reporting difficulties in getting by increased from 8\% to 13\% (SCP, 2005). The year 2002 counted the most number of people in poverty since 1985. The increase of poverty is due to the loss of spending capacity, and hardly reflects labor market developments (ibid). Although the total number of welfare beneficiaries declines, the proportion of people in poverty is severe.

In all probability, due to the legislative reforms, the number of working poor in the Netherlands has significantly increased. In 2003, about 4.7\% of all Dutch households belonged to the category of the working poor. Their income is hardly more than an average welfare benefit – according to the numbers of the CBS. In 2001, the number of working poor declined, but the next two years showed an enormous increase up to 203,000. It may be hypothesized that the new welfare law caused the rise of the number of working poor.

Even up to now, numerous people (more than four years) have to live enduringly from a low income. According to the monitor of the welfare agencies, approximately 40\% of all people living on welfare are not able to go back to work\textsuperscript{143}. Furthermore, the SCP (2005; p. 36) reports that the number of low-income groups (living in poverty for more than four years) hardly changed over the past years. In 2003, 224,000 households had to live enduringly from a low-income. Compared to the year 2000, that is a decline of only a few thousands, and compared to the mid 1990s, it is a decline of only 25,000 households. So, there still exists a group of long-term poor. These numbers stress the notion that persistent poverty is even now common in the Netherlands.
Furthermore, scholars started to question the effects of the new welfare law. In June 2006, Godfried Engbersen criticized this new law. According to him, firstly, the unintended effect of the new law is that only the best beneficiaries are going from welfare to work – this process is called *creaming*, that is, serving individuals who are most employable at the expense of those most in need (Anderson et al., 1993; p. 613). This effect obscures that there exists a group living enduringly on welfare. Secondly, the new law is also introduced to keep citizens out of the welfare system. Unintendedly, maybe, this exclusion results in rising criminality among those who cannot rely on paid work – especially among youngsters. This needs empirical investigation.

In sum, so far in this new century, the number of people on welfare has declined, the number of people in poverty is quite steady, and the category of the working poor increased. Therefore it seems that more people work, having gone from welfare to work, but still could not escape their poor position. In the future, it would be interesting to study whether this group of working poor indeed went from welfare to work due to the new welfare law, and how they experience this transition. Furthermore, the number of people on welfare did not disappear all of a sudden and, still, many people have to live on welfare. And if the new law excludes people from taking up welfare, this might have severe unintended effects. Thus, the new welfare law seems to have the effect of reducing the number of beneficiaries while raising the number of working poor, but maintaining steady poverty rates. This is confirmed by statistical research (cf. Snel et al., 2007), showing that as a result of social security reforms beneficiaries were pushed into the labor market so that they earned their own income. Finally, this resulted in more “in-work poverty.” The authors concluded that labor market participation not always implies an escape from financial poverty. Nonetheless, it becomes substantial to study these effects on ground level.

**9.3. Poverty on ground level**

The respondents were interviewed at one particular moment in their life. This study aimed to show how poverty is perpetuated, but I cannot show what happened after a while – only with the help of few interviews collected in 2004. Therefore, I wish to commend on how some respondents in 2004 dealt with the neighborhood and the state, with reference to whether and how they could escape their position. I will make use of my own interviews, giving some more details
about them. Although I will use interviews of only nine individuals, I am able to say something about the 2004 situation.

With reference to the nine respondents, four [122, 151, 154, 162] went from welfare to work. They escaped their welfare dependency. One [154] was able to go back to work because her children were getting older and she did not have the problem of organizing day care any longer. Two respondents [122, 151] could access the labor market via a labor market reintegration trajectory. One respondent found a job after a long time being unemployed [162]. These respondents did not go from rags to riches, and even not all of them received more income. The social position of five respondents did not change: one woman [112] was already a working poor and her situation did not change. One man [129] is severely handicapped, and is not able to go back to work. Two are tested medically unfit [134, 171] and one woman refuses to take up a subsidized job [169]. In the next section, I sketch some cases and in the conclusion, I will relate these cases to the different fields.

The first time Nancy [134] was interviewed, she was just fired. The interviewers helped her with the consequences of her lay-off. She now receives a disability benefit and her income is a little more than an average welfare benefit. She worked almost thirty years in a cafeteria. She is a 58 years-old Dutch woman living alone in her Amsterdam-Noord apartment. Her ex-husband was an alcoholic and she left him years ago, but she is still in touch with her two children. Her house is spick and span, although she says that everything she owns is “from the good old days.” I asked her what comes to mind when she thinks about the last seven years since the last interview. “I found comfort in my situation. I do not have any choice what to do, so I live by the day. I put my money in my wallet, and after a while, it is empty. For people like us, what has been changed is that my social life disappeared. The government does not subsidize the community centers any longer. I cannot pay for my hobbies. I like painting and drawing, but everything is too expensive. I have to stay at home, and this is my prison. What you see is old stuff.”

Her income did not change and she does not see any prospects to get a job. The only option is to cut down expenses. “My health is bad, therefore, I cannot get a side job, I do not buy any fruit, I make my own clothing again, and I buy inferior groceries at the market.” According to her, she does have a nice apartment, so
she does not want to move out. She contemplates on her past position. “I cannot move upwardly, which I accepted long time ago.” She does not like what she sees in her environment; it fuels her resentment, and the feeling that she has been left aside, abandoned by the state.

I ask her whether the neighborhood has been changed. “There used to live many elderly, and they disappear one by one. After that, you see the first headscarf (Muslims) in the neighborhood. Nice people, but that’s the beginning. Everywhere you look, you see houses for sale. This neighborhood is a nice, neat neighborhood. There is no dirt in the street and everybody is keeping it clean. The first headscarves are coming. I am used to them; among them, there are kind and unkind people. Just like the Dutch. Because all my life I live at the bottom of society, I know them. I have been dealing with them for twenty five years.” For her, the headscarves in the neighborhood are symbols for wider political and economic processes, which fueled her resentment and opposition towards the government. She continues.

“The “profiteers”... the people from abroad. We all pay for them. My children have to buy a house, but they are less well off than the profiteers. If they have sincere troubles, I do not mind to share, but there are many profiteers who think that they are allowed to do everything. Why do they have to demand for all these things? We wiped the floor. They do not wipe the floor, and the floor needs to be wiped urgently! The government should take money from the profiteers and not from us.” I ask her what the social position is of the newcomers. “They are not the weak of society. They can drive a car, and each year they go back to their country. The migrants who worked in the 1960s and the 1970s, they are entitled to it. But not the newly arrived migrants, they only want money and do not want to work for it. They can work. And the community centre is turned into a mosque.”

Hence, first of all, she totally accepted her situation, and sees hardly any prospects to improve her situation. She only can retrench on her expenditures. She saw the neighborhood changing, and the profiteers from abroad fueled her resentment. She lost her hobby club and the witnessed the closure of her community centre. In the end, people grew apart, and she lost finally everything she ever had. Furthermore, she draws a boundary between kind and unkind people, working class people and the profiteers, people like her and the upper class.
Searching for some of the old respondents, I found one in Purmerend. Diyanat [162] is a Turk of 47 years-old. He used to be an entrepreneur, but somehow his company went down. During the first interview, he had already been unemployed for several years. At that time, he did not see any prospect finding a job. However, in 1999 he went to an employment agency and got a job as an operator; his wife had started as a cleaner. He wanted to move out of Amsterdam-Noord, because of the rising criminality. These two jobs enabled them to buy a house in Purmerend, where his brother also lived. His house is very neat, and the neighborhood in which he lives is probably the most average of the Netherlands. In the Netherlands, it is becoming more difficult to find a job, he thinks. After 9/11, people began acting differently – his wife wears a headscarf – towards migrants. He says that it is very peculiar because he lives in the Netherlands for thirty years, and all of a sudden people start to behave differently. He does not seem to understand why he is an object of discussion, when he worked almost each and every year of the past decades. “They brought us in, and now they do not need as any longer.” He is a working poor, and he also feels left behind so that he suffers from resentment. “In the Netherlands, there is poverty, and in such situation, migrants should not come to the Netherlands. The government must take care of its citizens.”

Tyler [122] is a 57 years-old man living in Amsterdam-Noord together with his wife. During the first interview, he did not have a regular job. He did have many small time jobs, but when he was thirty years old, he was tested medically unfit as the result of rheumatism. Ever since, he has not been able to escape his position. When I visited him in the summer of 2004, he did have a job. “The biggest change: we both work.” He is very busy within the various voluntary organizations. He is a receptionist at an elderly home, and he got the job via his wife. He has already worked there for three years. He has to work for two more years, and then he will retire. He is not afraid of losing his job. “They cannot live without me, and somebody has to do the job. I am happy that I do not live on welfare anymore. I do not have to show my personal information any longer. If I lose my job, I’d rather steal, than living on welfare.” He began working before the new 2004 welfare law was introduced. I ask him whether he thinks the neighborhood has changed. “At the moment people move out of the neighborhood, the rent of these houses doubles. That is much too high. It used to be a social housing association, now it is an antisocial housing association. It used to be a working class
neighborhood. Everybody knew everybody. The newcomers, you do not get in touch with them. The newcomers are often young, double income. I think it is getting worse, you cannot rely on each other.” In other chapters I wrote about the negative image of the neighborhood to which Tyler also refers. “Since the existence of this neighborhood, it has a negative mark. In the 1960s and 1970s, a couple of antisocial people arrived in this neighborhood. There were not many of them, so they did not bother us.” He makes a clear distinction between the Floradorp and the Bloemenbuurt – two different neighborhoods. He lives in Floradorp. “In the papers, if something bad happens, they write about Floradorp, while it is often about the Bloemenbuurt. Then, we get a bad name. When somebody has been robbed in the Bloemenbuurt, the papers report a robbery in the Floradorp. Floradorp is just a small piece of the entire district.” His wife: “my colleagues make fun of my neighborhood, the say, ooh, you live in that scandalous neighborhood.”

Christina [154] managed to get and to stay out of poverty. After her divorce, she was a single parent on welfare with two children. She is relatively highly educated, and is doing everything to support her children to be able to go to college. One of her children is going to the gymnasium, and wants to go to college. I visited her in the summer of 2004 and asked how she is doing. “I am fine. I work. I used to do voluntary work at a school. The director of the school asked if I would like to work at his school. I replied that it is OK, and I accepted the job.” Three years after the first interview, she got the job. She was a little afraid to go back to work, but it did not bother her accepting a subsidized job. “They did not support me to look for another job. The job was simply a stepping-stone to get another one. It was good for the school, and it was good for me. I thought I would gain more money compared to a welfare benefit. But I lost tax remittents and finally I received as much as a welfare benefit. That was very peculiar. It is not very motivating.” After her school job, she worked in a kindergarten and then she got a job in nursing. Her kids were older, and they could take care of themselves. Her old diploma still had value in the labor market. “Receiving less money is weird. But I do not blame the school or myself, but the system. My motivation was to get ahead. Having a job, it is easier to apply for another one.”

I asked her why she was able to get out of poverty. “Well, I always believed in myself. And I have quite a few diplomas. That’s why I got out. I always thought, there comes the time that I get out of this mess. However, I went to the welfare
office and said that I have a job. They said, well that’s not so simple. They said, we have to investigate whether you have a job. They had to close my file. I also had to wait for three months before I could receive my alimony from my ex-husband. (Welfare clients do not receive alimony, because this is stopped by the welfare office). I said to them, you should be delighted that I get out of welfare, but no, they had to investigate everything all over again. I will never go to the welfare office again.” According to her, education and day care for children are the most important elements to get out of poverty. She never had any troubles with the welfare officials in the old days and she does not have any experiences with the new welfare law. Furthermore, she hates how people in poverty are talked about in the media. “Each time they talk about poverty in the media, they interview a long-haired grimy antisocial woman, smoking a cigarette, saying ‘fuck you all’. And I should belong to these people. I hate that. I think I have never been antisocial. That label is not applicable to everyone.”

In terms of how welfare is organized now, problems still exists. One woman told me that since she started working, she lost her rental subsidies so that she receives less income. Moreover: “if you start working, you do not receive any income during the first two months.” She also says that the day care arrangements have not improved. However, as a result of the new welfare law, she was able to take a course. Another woman, in spite of everything, does not want a subsidized job, simply because these jobs are stigmatizing: “do not offer me such a foolish job.”

From the previous examples, I can conclude the following. First of all, people in poverty still draw boundaries between themselves and other urban dwellers. Nancy made a clear distinction between people who deserve governmental assistance and those who do not; the hard working class and the profiteers. The hard line thinking towards others – especially towards migrants, still exists. It seems that the social distance between people did not change and that differences are cultivated. Second, these respondents seem to suffer from some sort of deprivation. They lost their community centre, their hobby club, their cozy neighborhood, did not make any financial progress, still felt stigmatized, and faced institutional barriers and a contradictory incentive structure. These experiences are consistent with those in earlier chapters. Third, the respondents still face the consequences of the poverty trap. They do not gain more money after accepting a job. Instead, they lost their rental subsidies, their remittents, and day care arrange-
ments have not been improved so that single parents face the difficulties of combining work with parenting. Working still does not pay off. Fourth, even now people in poverty face an unsupportive welfare system. During the first months of work, they do not receive an income, they have to be investigated as to whether they really have a job, and their dossiers need to be closed. All of which is felt as demoralizing. There are indications that the relationship between officials and clients has not been improved.

9.4. Conclusion

What I described in previous chapters are common human activities for people in poverty: drawing boundaries, developing strained relationships with officials under difficult circumstances, avoiding social interactions because of poverty, searching for an alternative income, seeking child care, living in a stigmatized neighborhood, feeling resentment over the wrong people, being classed as “undeserving poor,” etc. These mechanisms are probably still applicable to the contemporary situation – although we have to take into account some changes in the welfare system together with the growing class of working poor. These mechanisms will probably always be there, unless the entire welfare system, the neighborhoods, the manner in which people think and talk about poverty, and the way in which poverty is discussed in the media, will be changed.
140 For “Foodbanks,” see for example, Laws (1988), Lipsky and Smith (1989), and Humphries (1998).
141 See for example articles in Het Parool, April 5, 2006; Trouw, March 25, 2006; NRC Handelsblad, March 6, 2006; Vrij Nederland, April 22, 2006.
143 See NRC, NEXT, Thursday July 12, 2007.
### 10. Appendix

**Appendix A**

Table 10.1 Overview of the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nr.</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Social position</th>
<th>Poverty duration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
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<td>10 years &gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>102</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>3-5 years</td>
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<td>Other</td>
<td>Single parent kids under five, not obliged to work</td>
<td>&lt; 1 year</td>
</tr>
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<td>104</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Single parent kids under five, not obliged to work</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>106</td>
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<td>Medically unfit: full and partly, handicapped</td>
<td>1-3 years</td>
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<td>107</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Antillean</td>
<td>Subsidized job, trainee, job training</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Working poor, part-timers, entrepreneur</td>
<td>7-10 years</td>
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<td>1-3 years</td>
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<td>7-10 years</td>
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Summary in Dutch

Gedurende de jaren negentig is het aantal arme huishoudens stabiel gebleven. Een aanzienlijk deel van de Nederlandse samenleving leefde in relatieve armoede, ondanks de banengroei aan het einde van de jaren negentig. Het verband tussen hardnekkige armoede en de opleving van de economie is in deze studie op sociologische wijze uitgewerkt. Hoe kan het dat het aantal armen stabiel gebleven is (met name het aantal duurzame armen), ondanks de opleving van de economie?

Aan de hand van empirisch onderzoek dat verzameld is tijdens het Landschappen van armoede project (1997-1999) zal deze vraag worden beantwoord. Meer dan tweehonderd interviews vormen de basis van dit onderzoek. Het inkomen van de respondenten lag rond het beleidsmatig minimum en de meerderheid van de respondenten was langdurig arm.

Deze studie is opgedeeld in verschillende velden. De bestudeerde velden zijn de arbeidsmarkt, uitkeringsinstanties, de buurt, de sociale netwerken en de informele economie. De wijze waarop mensen met elkaar omgaan, de relaties tussen velden en de bronnen die verworven kunnen worden binnen het veld staan centraal. Deze aspecten kunnen ook inzicht geven in het antwoord op de vraag waarom mensen worden uitgesloten van een bepaald veld. Met andere woorden: de processen, mechanismen en relaties binnen deze velden bieden een verklaring voor het voortbestaan van armoede. Binnen de velden bakkeleien mensen met zowel materiële tekorten (weinig geld, producten, goederen) als met symbolische kwesties (stigma, schaamte, een gebrek aan eigenwaarde). Om het handelen van mensen goed te kunnen begrijpen worden deze twee elementen in de analyses betrokken.

Ieder veld kreeg aparte aandacht. Bovendien werd aandacht besteed aan de relaties tussen de verschillende velden. Deze aanpak kent voordelen. In het algemeen wordt de aanwezigheid van armoede enerzijds verklaard vanuit de individuele tekortkomingen, anderzijds wordt gewezen op de aanwezigheid van een ongelijke verdeling van levenskansen, een algemeen verhoogd risico op armoede en een toename van ongelijkheid in westerse samenlevingen. Sociologische studies schenken beduidend minder aandacht aan de processen, mechanismen, interacties.
en sociale relaties tussen individuen binnen verschillende velden die bijdragen tot het in stand houden van sociale ongelijkheid. Dit is een reden voor het gegeven dat deze studie middels de analyse van relaties tussen velden en individuen tot een alternatieve verklaring voor het voortbestaan van duurzame ongelijkheid tracht te komen. Ik zal nu de bevindingen per levensterrein aangeven.

*De arbeidsmarkt*

Het eerste geanalyseerde veld is de arbeidsmarkt. Langdurig werklozen hebben moeite om de arbeidsmarkt te betreden. De vraag die opkomt, is welke strategieën langdurig werklozen ontwikkelen om toegang te krijgen tot de arbeidsmarkt. Om dit inzichtelijk te maken is gebruik gemaakt van het ‘drie kapitaalvormen model’. De drie voornaamste vormen van kapitaal – sociaal (connecties), economisch (geld) en cultureel (diploma’s) – kunnen worden ingezet om kansen op de arbeidsmarkt te doen vergroten. Met financieel kapitaal kunnen mensen investeren in cultureel kapitaal en cultureel kapitaal is de sleutel tot de arbeidsmarkt. Met financieel kapitaal hebben mensen tevens toegang tot netwerken – sociaal kapitaal – en met dit sociaal kapitaal kunnen mensen (via bijvoorbeeld kennis) een baan bemachtigen.

renderen. In de vierde plaats laat ik zien dat er een sterke relatie bestaat tussen sociaal en economisch kapitaal en dat een reductie van het één veelal het verlies van het ander betekent. De vicieuze cirkel waar mensen in zitten – geen financieel en geen sociaal kapitaal, en daarom minder kans op een baan – wordt niet of nauwelijks doorbroken. Verder blijkt dat juist arme huishoudens over alle drie de kapitaalvormen moeten beschikken om een baan te behouden. Dit geldt voornamelijk voor alleenstaande ouders: zij hebben sociaal kapitaal nodig voor goedkope en flexibele kinderopvang; financieel kapitaal om deze opvang te betalen, en voldoende cultureel kapitaal om een “goed” betaalde baan te krijgen.

De ene kapitaalvorm kan overigens ook de andere compenseren. Veelal ontbreekt een van deze kapitaalvormen en wordt het moeilijk om een positie op de arbeidsmarkt te veroveren. Dit hoofdstuk laat zien dat langdurig werklozen wel degelijk trachten de arbeidsmarkt te betreden. Zij hebben echter te maken met een aantal institutionele tegenstellingen, een financieel precaire basis en een vicieuze cirkel waarin het verlies van de ene kapitaalvorm vaak het verlies van een andere kapitaalvorm betekent. Hebben zij eenmaal een baan bemachtigd, dan blijkt conversie van kapitaal weinig te renderen.

De bijstandsbureaucratie
Het bureaucratische veld (of meer specifiek: de Sociale Dienst) is het tweede veld dat centraal staat. Arme huishoudens zijn veelal financieel afhankelijk van de staat en bouwen om deze reden een langdurige relatie op met de overheid in het algemeen en met uitkeringsambtenaren in het bijzonder. Juist deze relatie tussen overheid en bijstandsaanhouders staat centraal en de vraag is hoe deze relatie bijdraagt aan de bestendiging van armoede. Om dit inzichtelijk te maken, is geanalyseerd welke procedures de respondenten doorlopen en wat hun ervaringen zijn met de uitkeringsambtenaren. In de eerste plaats is gebleken dat de respondenten van mening zijn dat zij door uitkeringsambtenaren worden benaderd als onrechtmatige ontvangers van een uitkering. Zij vinden dat zij gestigmatiseerd worden als zogenaamde undeserving poor en dat zij moeten aantonen dat zij wel degelijk recht op een uitkering hebben. In de tweede plaats worden de respondenten formeel geclassificeerd. De afstand tot de arbeidsmarkt bestaat bijvoorbeeld uit een vierdelige classificatie, variërend van ‘direct beschikbaar voor de arbeidsmarkt’ tot ‘niet geschikt voor reintegratie’. Vervolgens worden de respondenten geconfronteerd met de tegenstelling tussen hoe zij hun situatie inschatten en hoe de staat hen classificeert. Deze tegenstelling leidt tot spanningen. Ten
derde worden de respondenten voortdurend gecontroleerd of zij rechtmatig een uitkering ontvangen. Deze controles beïnvloeden de vertrouwensrelatie met de overheid negatief.

Deze drie procedures hebben ingrijpende gevolgen voor de relaties en interacties tussen uitkeringsambtenaren en de respondenten. Door de gespannen relatie reageren de respondenten contraproductief. Zij vermijden de bureaucratie, gaan een discussie aan met uitkeringsambtenaren, frauderen, worden passief, maken geen gebruik van bijzondere bijstand, of relateren hun positie ten opzichte van de uitkeringsambtenaar. Deze reacties, als gevolg van de gespannen relatie, maken het aannemelijk dat zij hun kansen reduceren om voor omscholingstrajecnten in aanmerking te komen, terwijl juist deze omscholingstrajecnten hun kansen op de arbeidsmarkt vergroten. De kans dat zij uiteindelijk hun afhankelijke positie beëindigen wordt kleiner. Dit hoofdstuk maakt inzichtelijk dat langdurig werklozen een proces doormaken, waarbij zij een duurzame, maar onvruchtbare relatie opbouwen met de staat. Deze gespannen relatie staat een positieverbetering in de weg.

De buurt
Het derde geanalyseerde veld is “de buurt.” De vraag is of de buurt de stijgingskansen negatief beïnvloedt en een effect kan hebben op de bestendiging van armoede. Een buurt kan op zichzelf geen effect hebben, buurtbewoners wel. Daarom biedt dit hoofdstuk inzicht in de wijze waarop de respondenten omgaan met hun buurtbewoners en staat de vraag centraal of de buurtbewoners verbindingen via bewoners kunnen leggen naar andere velden. Om begrijpelijk te maken hoe de respondenten omgaan met hun buurtbewoners, is geanalyseerd wie zij verantwoordelijk houden voor de (negatieve) status van hun buurt. Dit analytisch kader biedt de mogelijkheid om de interne differentiatie van de buurt te verdiepden en om te analyseren of de bewoners vruchtbare sociale relaties bezitten.

De respondenten hanteren drie manieren om de negatieve status van hun buurt te neutraliseren. In de eerste plaats wijzen zij anderen aan die tot de undeserving poor behoren en die de buurt de status geven van ‘uitkeringsbuurt’. Deze zogenaamde undeserving poor geven hun buurt een slechte naam en dragen bij aan de beeldvorming van werkschuwe werklozen. Respondenten die deze strategie hanteren, voelen zich dikwijls achtergesteld. In de tweede plaats wijzen de respondenten op buurtbewoners die de buurt doen verloeren. Deze verloedering is

Sociale netwerken


Opmerkelijk is dat de respondenten deze zwakke bindingen niet of nauwelijks aanspreken. In de eerste plaats willen zij niet voortdurend geconfronteerd worden met hun situatie (de arme positie). Daarom doen zij weinig met hun zwakke bindingen. Bij veel respondenten speelt eergevoel een rol en zij optimaliseren hun sociale status in plaats van geldelijk te profiteren van sociale connecties. In de tweede plaats blijkt dat sociale investeringen – het onderhouden van sociale con-

Uit de analyses blijkt dat de kracht van zwakke bindingen bijgesteld moet worden. Voor werklozen zijn zwakke bindingen juist zwak. De transacties binnen de netwerken worden gekenmerkt door een relatief lage vertrouwensgraad, het behouden van de eer, het maken van keuzes met wie een transactie aan te gaan en het vermijden van verwachtingen waar men niet aan kan voldoen. Hiermee heb ik een verklaring gegeven voor de vraag waarom de respondenten wel die krachtige zwakke bindingen hebben, maar desondanks niet optimaal gebruik kunnen maken van deze bindingen om uit hun positie te ontsnappen.

Informele economie
Het laatste veld dat bestudeerd is, is de “informele economie.” Informele activiteiten kunnen bijdragen aan het voortbestaan van ongelijkheid. Zij die deelnemen aan deze activiteiten reduceren de kans dat zij op de reguliere arbeidsmarkt kunnen werken. De vraag is echter hoe we de informele economische activiteiten kunnen verklaren. Dit hoofdstuk maakt inzichtelijk dat informeel werken in de eerste plaats een overlevingsstrategie is. De kansen op de reguliere arbeidsmarkt zijn voor de respondenten nagenoeg afwezig en een uitkering biedt onvoldoende middelen om rond te komen. Met andere woorden, werken in de informele economie is het logische gevolg van de uitsluitingsprocessen in de eerder genoemde velden. In de tweede plaats blijkt dat de statelijke regelingen het werken in de formele economie ontmoeidigen en juist onbedoeld het werken in de informele economie bemoedigen. Volgens de respondenten schiet de overheid bijvoorbeeld tekort in het organiseren van flexibele kinderopvang, met als gevolg dat informeel
thuiswerken een alternatief kan zijn. In de derde plaats blijkt dat, als de respon- denten overwegen om informeel dan wel formeel te werken, het toekomstig verdiende loon de doorslag kan geven. Als werklozen een baan accepteren verande ren allerlei inkomensafhankelijke regelingen (zoals de huursubsidie). Hierdoor wordt het toekomstig verdiende loon op de formele arbeidsmarkt moeilijk in te schatten. Als zij gaan werken in de informele economie (in combinatie met een uitkering), weten zij precies wat zij in de toekomst gaan verdienen. Dit is zo, omdat de inkomensafhankelijke regelingen onveranderd blijven. Met andere woor den: de schaduw economie biedt meer transparantie dan de formele economie.

De verschillende velden zijn uiteraard sterk met elkaar verweven. Informele activiteiten kunnen niet begrepen worden zonder de uitsluitingprocessen van andere velden – de staat en de arbeidsmarkt – in de analyse te betrekken. Overheidsinstan tiesties zoals de Sociale Dienst vormen – zoals beschreven in een van de hoofd stukken – eerder een belemmering om aan het werk te gaan dan een stimulans. Velden sluiten niet goed aan waardoor de respondenten terugtrekgedrag vertonen. De wijze waarop de verschillende velden met elkaar ‘interacteren’ vormt een deel van de verklaring waarom mensen veelal contraproductief handelen. Armoede is niet alleen het resultaat van een gebrek aan geld, sociale contacten of een goede opleiding, maar ook het gevolg van uitsluitingsprocessen binnen domi nante sferen van de samenleving. Deze uitsluitingprocessen zorgen voor een cirkel van armoede die lastig te doorbreken is en die uiteindelijk tot een bestendi ging van het uitkeringsbestaan zal leiden.

De hierboven beschreven mechanismen vertonen een zekere hardheid. Hoewel de interviews enige tijd geleden zijn afgenomen, vinden ook nu nog soortgelijke processen plaats – zoals beschreven in de epiloog.