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# Sorting yourself out of the system: everyday processes of elusive social sorting in Australia's disability social security regime for Indigenous Australians

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KAREN SOLDATIC & MICHELLE FITTS

WESTERN SYDNEY UNIVERSITY

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# Disability and Social Regimes of Sorting

- ▶ Work of Grover and Piggott (2010) illustrates the ways in which social security systems are actual processes of social sorting:
    - ▶ Define levels of workability rather than disability
    - ▶ Implement regimes of service surveillance to those who can work at some level, even if this means highly precarious work, to ensure that they do the little work that may be available to them
  - ▶ These theories have focused on macro-structural processes of social security policy regimes as defined through legislative governance
  - ▶ In this paper we expand these accounts and focus on Australia
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# Disability, Indigeneity & Scale

- ▶ We argue, drawing upon extensive interviews, that screening workability via disability social security systems occurs at meso-levels of everyday practice across three areas:
  - ▶ Methodologically:
    - ▶ Bring in issues of race with a foci on Indigeneity
    - ▶ Bring in issues of scale with a foci on regionality
  - ▶ Enriches the theoretical positionality of disability social security regimes as enables us to move beyond macro-structural accounts and the ways these macro-structural processes are operationalized in varying geopolitical landscapes with differing racialized effects.
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# Australia: Macro-Structural Processes

- ▶ The assessment and measurement framework to determine disability status and disability social security eligibility for people aged between 16 and 64 years appears relatively simple under initial examination.
- ▶ Three (3) core criteria were required to meet the eligibility of disability or medical condition:
  - ▶ fully diagnosed, treated and stabilised;
  - ▶ a minimum impairment rating of 20 points under the Impairment Tables of the Social Security Determination on the Federal Register of Legislation website for a single, diagnosed condition; and,
  - ▶ assessed as unable to work or be retrained for any work of at least 15 hours a week in the next two years.

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# Meso & Micro Processes of Social Sorting

While Macro-structural policy regimes define workability, we found these become operationalized via meso & micro processes in the following ways:

- ▶ Informational sorting: (to hard to obtain, identify and understand the information you need)
  - ▶ Polychrono sorting: (temporal based sorting which are competing and multilayered)
  - ▶ Creating emotional distress: (intense pressure created by demands of system)
  - ▶ Facilitated Sorting: (disability proven as you rely on the workability of others)
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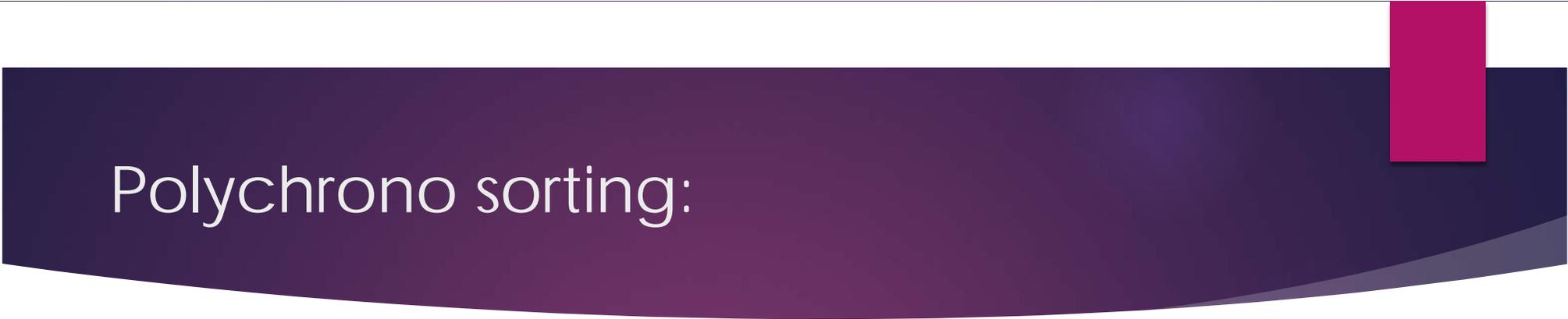
# Informational Sorting:

- ▶ I noticed they were on the forms of Centrelink now, they have a disclaimer that something like, it's not up to us to inform you of what your payment type – 'cause once upon a time I used to work for social security. And once upon a time if somebody came up to you and you said to them, they said to you this is my circumstances, well you could advise them on what path to take, or what process ... But now they don't, it's just you gotta guess, you got to do all the guesswork; you gotta know all the different payments. You gotta know what you could be entitled to and apply for it and then if you apply for it and get it, well good luck.
  - ▶ (Lorna, family member, son living with mental health condition)

# Informational Sorting:

- ▶ they said that I was rejected from the Pension that I didn't make 20 points or something. And I'm thinking, what's this 20 points. I don't know ... I don't understand what 20 points is. ... I didn't understand why I didn't make 20 points.
  - ▶ (Juliette, applicant, living with osteoarthritis, diabetes, hypertension, asthma)
- ▶ So I had to go back to the Centrelink office and do some digging around, around and find out where it was. So it was sitting there in the computers but no one had hit their button to send it through ... it was just the hassle of going back and forth to the doctors when they say they missing all these medical reports. 'Cause the doctors get very cranky when you have to keep going back and get the paperwork. ... Twice I did that, cause the first lot of paperwork they lost, so I had to redo it again.
  - ▶ (Rebecca, family member, daughter living with rheumatic heart disease)

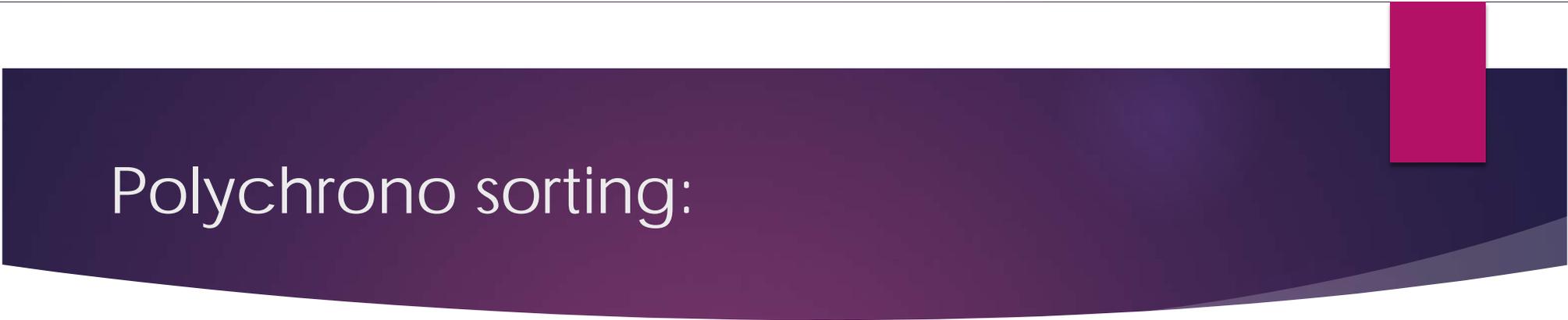
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## Polychrono sorting:

- ▶ And when I went there to apply for the disability pension, they rejected me on the basis that I was still getting treatment. You know? Like, some miracle might happen, forgetting I still have a permanent blind spot in my left eye.
    - ▶ (Harriot, applicant, living with vision impairment)
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## Polychrono sorting:

- ▶ Yeah, I got knocked back, 'cause I was waiting for an appointment with neurosurgeons. I had an appointment this year and I already had my operation, on my spine. So I was going to see if I could do it at, 'cause that was the only thing, to see the neurosurgeon. I couldn't walk properly. I had a lot of pinched nerves in my back that were all damaged, including the start of my leg and arm was really weak compared to my right hand.
  - ▶ (Betty, applicant, living with spinal injuries, hypertension and heart disease)

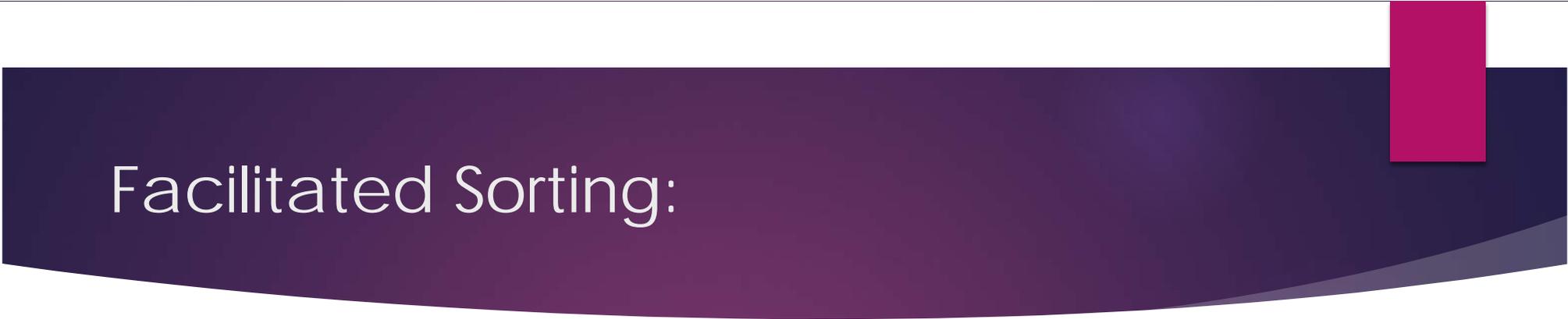
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# Sorting through the creation of mental distress

- ▶ It's pretty hard. That's why I'm on a medical certificate at the moment. I just can't cope with it – looking for 20 jobs a month, and doing work for the dole as well just to get by with the Centrelink wage.
  - ▶ (Bruce, applicant, living with a mental health condition)

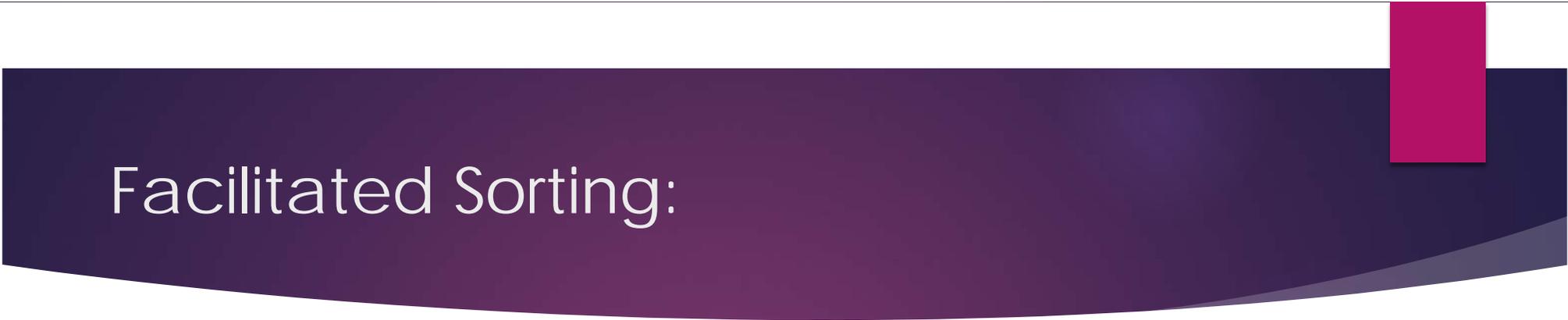
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## Facilitated Sorting:

- ▶ They've [other people applying for the DSP] definitely got to have somebody with them to talk up for them. ... And thanks to services like this one [Indigenous support organisation] who advocate, who send people with you or something like that, know how to talk to people, who offer their services, that's – I think they keep an eye on their client base like that, to make sure they've got the support and the education program to get advocacy and things like that. But otherwise they've got to have somebody with them, especially family.
    - ▶ (Shanelle, applicant, living with kidney disease)
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## Facilitated Sorting:

- ▶ Well, put it this way. If you don't have a good support person – like an agency, family member, you can be lost in all the paperwork. I kept everything as I went through, as evidence based. If they argued or said no I didn't, I'd pull out a folder, and go, 'what page, what date, I'll give you the evidence that it was lodged'.
    - ▶ (Jennifer, family member, partner living with kidney disease)
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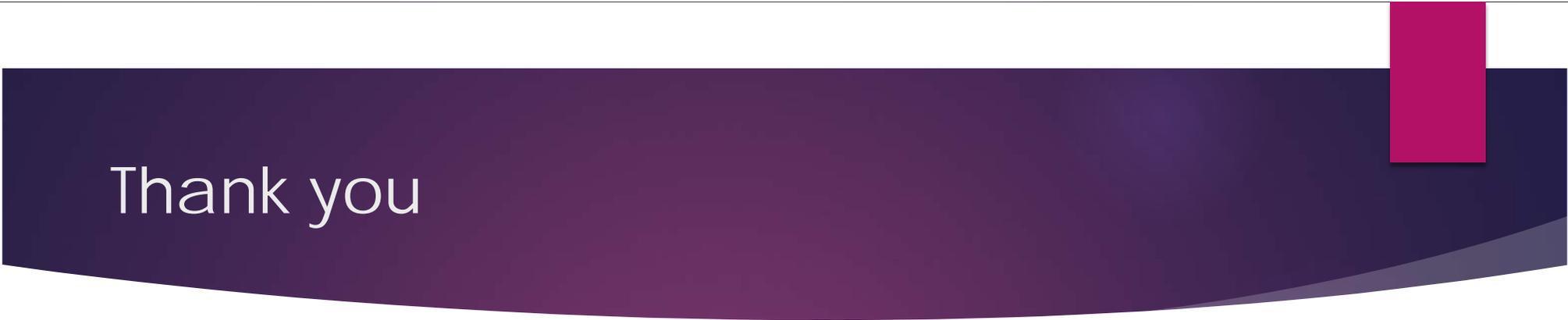
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# Workability of Others

- ▶ To prove disability you are required to generate the workability of others to get through the system:
    - ▶ Advocacy by family members, service & social workers and medical professionals
    - ▶ Constant negotiation by others on your behalf
    - ▶ Maintaining the information by others on your behalf
  - ▶ All of these family members & workers are outside the disability service system as person has not as yet qualified for disability services
    - ▶ Financial counselling services
    - ▶ Employment providers
    - ▶ Poverty Management services & shelters
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# Thank you

- ▶ Chris Bigby and her team for having us here today
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