Policy(ing) and practising subjectivities: young women's constructions with(in/out) Australian youth policies.

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Jan Edwards

PhD Candidate

University of South Australia

edwjk001@students.unisa.edu.au

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to provide some insights into the theoretical framework proposed for a study around gender and youth policy and welfare reforms. Specifically, the thesis will examine the subjectivities of young women and Australian youth policies.

There are currently three Commonwealth policies identified for examination from a feminist and poststructuralist stance. The policies are the Australian Youth Allowance, Work for the dole and the Parenting Payment.

The study has as one of its key interests, the welfare reform agenda. In this paper I will begin a tentative exploration of some of the main topics that will need to be understood in this study. I begin by positioning the discussion within the new welfare state, propose a feminist genealogy for the study, begin discussing the gendered nature of these policies, and briefly discuss each of the policies identified for examination. I discuss how feminist and poststructualist methods are the most appropriate to this study and conclude by sketching out the direction of the study in the future.

The demise of the welfare state

Australia, like many other first world nations is experiencing the grip of globalisation. The demise of the welfare state is clearly an outcome of the rampant march of the economic rationalist agenda globally. Women are less well served by the economic changes we are seeing. A recent analysis of gender and the economy in relation to globalisation suggests that " ... women's lives in various countries are shaped by economic forces often beyond their control..." (BererÍa, Floro, Grown & MacDonald, 2000: x) and that "[u]nless gender issues and concerns are understood, acknowledged, and addressed, globalization will only exacerbate the inequalities between men and women, even when its effects are contradictory" (p x).

It is not my intention to analyse and discuss globalisation except in relation to the dismantling of the welfare state. The impact of the global changes on the welfare state has been dramatic, and has altered the ways in which an individual relates to the state. For example, words such as poverty have virtually been eliminated from discussions, with the

blame for individual circumstances being moved away from social inequities and structural disadvantage to individual inadequacy (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst 2000). In this study I will examine these subtle changes in the discourses around youth policies and welfare programs more generally.

Within recent Australian policy documents around welfare reform, such as *Participation support for a more equitable society*, (DFaCS 2000a), certain communities are identified as being the problem. These are the "jobless families" and "job poor communities" (p 3).

Statements within the above document, including "Indeed the existing social support system may have failed many of those it was designed to help" (p 1), and "... joblessness, underemployment and reliance on income support remain unacceptably high and concentrated increasingly in particular segments of the population and in particular localities" (p 1) clearly identify that it is the poor people - it is their fault. In the individualisation of blame for each set of personal circumstances, society and governments see themselves not being responsible for increases in societal problems such as unemployment.

Increasingly, the problem of unemployment and underemployment is described as the individual lacking in "work skills" (p 14), "literacy and numeracy skills" (p 20), being "low in self-esteem" (p 30), experiencing "economic and social exclusion" (p 31) and of course, experiencing "joblessness" (p 47). The goals stated within the policy documents are for "self-reliance" (p 4), "social inclusion" (p 13), optimising "capacity for participation" (p 31), "early intervention and prevention" (p 4) and "fairly sharing" (p 5) work opportunities.

These discourses position the inadequacy as being within individuals. These issues could be discussed around the topics of the economy, the restructuring of work and the casualisation of the workforce. However, the new welfare reform discourses have been neatly framed as issues of individual inadequacy.

Other discourses within *Participation Support* (DFaCs 1999a) are around such things as "improving service delivery" (p 24), "simple and responsive income support structure" (p 62), "mutual obligation" (p 51) and "social partnerships" (p 47). For example, the new "Individualised Service Delivery" focuses on " ... specific objectives to promote and support participation and to help recipients maximise their level of self-reliance" (p 24). It is not difficult to see where these discourses have begun from and how they are currently being manifested. What we often do not know is the effects of these policy decisions and discourses on the lived lives of young women.

The study I am proposing will examine these policy effects on the real lives of real people effected by these often-remote policy decisions and discourses.

Proposing a (feminist) genealogy of welfare reform discourses

In this study I am proposing to conduct a Foucauldian genealogy of current welfare reforms. For the moment however, it is possible to see how these discourses have emerged globally from Thatcherism, Reaganomics and more recently Third Way politics. In discussing the policies of Thatcher and Regan, Benería, Floro, Grown & MacDonald state that "... the new emphasis on the unique power of the market as the most efficient allocator of resources" ..."replaces the earlier goal of welfare states to promote social welfare through equity and redistributive policies" (2000: ix).

Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward (1982) discuss more specifically Regan's attack on the welfare state. They argue that the main influence on the changes we are currently seeing is from the way in which business now influences, or in some instances runs

government. Writing from a US perspective in 1982, Piven and Cloward "... are persuaded that the current mobilization against the welfare state will fail" (44), and that changes are designed to more effectively control populations,

> In short, it has always been recognized that the most effective way to "regulate the poor" in the labor market is to close off access to alternative means of subsistence" (1982: 32).

By closing off access to subsistence incomes, such as welfare payments, pressure is brought on wage labour. Piven and Cloward (1982) state that this was a planned strategy in Reagan's attack on welfare in the US. They argue,

> If the desperation of the unemployed is moderated by the availability of various benefits, they will be less eager to take any job on any terms. In other words, an industrial reserve army of labor with unemployment benefits and food stamps is a less effective instrument with which to deflate wage and workplace demands (p 26).

And,

> When people fear for their subsistence they accept onerous and dangerous working conditions. They work harder, and they work longer. They more readily accept discipline, follow orders and submit to humiliation. An insecure labor force is thus a more productive labor force and a cheaper one, quite apart from wage levels. (The new regulations denying food stamps to striking workers and to entire welfare families when a working member goes on strike, seem intended to have exactly this disciplining effect). Conversely, a labor force that is made more secure by the possibility of alternative means of subsistence is less docile, less productive and more costly (p 28)

The above influences on welfare recipients and waged labor can be clearly seen on the Australian policy landscape (see DFaCS 1999, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2000d).

In the US, terms such as "workfare" (Piven & Cloward 1982: 34) and phrases such as ""... social welfare programs encourage malingering, that they are presumably designed to ameliorate" (p 3) are rebadged and circulate around the globe. Whilst current trends in Australia are not described as Reaganomics, Thatcherism or even 'Third Way' politics (see Giddens 1998), there are many elements and directions that bear striking similarities. Terms from the UK that have migrated to Australia include, "social inclusion", "cordinated delivery" and "supporting a return to employment". These terms are just three that show the universal nature of current welfare reforms (Cabinet Office 1999).

Some groups are targeted more in these reforms than others. Angela McRobbie (2000) commenting on the position of women and girls in relation to third way politics in the UK states,

> In the drive to create an employment-led society women and girls find themselves at the forefront of Government policy, with young women increasingly targeted on the basis of their high performance in education. At the same time women are the target of attempts to cut down on benefits and dramatically lower the costs of welfare (p 100).

Single mothers in the UK (Elizabeth Bullen, Jane Kenway & Valerie Hey 2000), New Zealand (Stephen Uttley 2000), Canada (Cynthia Lee Andruske 2000) and Australia are

being identified within the welfare reform policies to return to the paid workforce as soon as possible.

In Australia it is proposed that parenting payment will cease when a child is 13 years old. How it was decided that 13 was an appropriate age is unclear at the moment, however, this should become evident in an examination of the 'Parenting Payment' arrangements within the new welfare reform package. For example, in the initial discussion paper that framed the review of welfare reform, (DFaCS 1999a), whilst recognising the "important and valuable role" (p 20) of parenting, states that "bringing up children is only part of a lifetime. Parenting Payment cannot last forever and getting a job -even a part-time job - is the best way for parents and their children to achieve financial security" (p 20).

The need for reform of the Parenting Payment is rationalised as an increase of 'lone parents' receiving this benefit, numbers having risen from 240,000 to 382,000 over ten years. It is anticpated that by 2006 there will be 475,000 people receiving this form of income support (DFaCS 1999: 20). What is apparent is that first world countries are increasingly turning their backs on the most vulnerable members of the community in dismantling welfare policies and that women appear to be targeted in these reforms.

Discourses of needs, values and youth policies

Stephen Uttley (2000) in discussing the policy problem of women in New Zealand uses Nancy Fraser's (1989, 1990) notion of 'needs talk' in describing the history of welfare reforms aimed at rescuing unmarried mothers " ... in order to alter the behaviour of those women whose behaviour undermined the position of women as the guardians of social purity" (Uttley 2000: p 447). He states that in the needs discourse,

> Needs are assessed within the JAT in relation to the legal system, or a set of bureaucratically defined criteria, or through professional interventions designed to return individuals to 'normality'. Expert discourse is concerned with how needs might be transformed into a language that can make them susceptible to intervention, regulation, and control by social agencies. Needs are transformed into individual cases, clients and consumers and the focus of discussion is accordingly deflected to need satisfaction rather than need interpretation" (p 443).

Similarly in Canada, Cynthia Lee Andruske writes, the "[g]overnment viewed welfare recipients, especially women, as skill deficient and dependent. To resolve this, government sought to "fix them up" through training programs so women could find well paying jobs quickly" (2000: 1). Andruske adds that policy makers fail to see and understand "... women's perceived needs, women's actual needs, and women's skills " (p 10) and as a consequence, women on welfare remain marginalised.

The needs discourse is also evident in the youth policies identified for analysis. The inadequacy of young people is very much a part of the basis in justifying a rationale for identifying youth as a problem group. Part of the process in developing policies according to Carol Bacchi (1999) is to identify the problem. Within the Australian welfare reform agenda, single mothers have been identified as a 'problem'. McRobbie commenting on the situation in the UK, suggests that "[t]he underlying debate around welfare and responsible citizenship is directed at either the disadvantaged (e.g. single mothers) or the poor and antisocial (e.g. young women who get pregnant), and the aim is to dramatically reduce the costs of benefits and, more radically, to shift the whole culture away from the expectation of welfare" (2000: 104). This expectation is thinly disguised in the discourses around social inclusion, economic

and social independence. For example, the *Social Exclusion Unit* (Cabinet Office, 2000: 2) explains the reasons that teenage pregnancy rates are so high as,

> The first is **low expectations**. Throughout the developed world, teenage pregnancy is more common amongst young people who have been disadvantaged in childhood and have poor expectations of education or the job market. One reason why the UK has such high teenage pregnancy rates is that there are more young people who see no prospect of a job and fear they will end up on benefit one way or another. Put simply, they see no reason not to get pregnant.
>
> The second is **ignorance**. Young people lack accurate knowledge about contraception, STIs, what to expect in relationships and what it means to be a parent...The reality of bringing up a child, often alone and usually on a low income, is not being brought home to teenagers and they are often quite unprepared for it. They do not know how easy it is to get pregnant and how hard it is to be a parent.
>
> The third is **mixed messages** ... (original emphasis)

The above discourse runs contrary to the other policy discourses of inclusion and community. Young women who become pregnant are clearly described as lacking, dependent, irresponsible and needy in the discourse above. It seems then that the warm and glowing discourses around caring and community thinly disguise the positioning of young women in the welfare reform agenda in the UK.

'Mutual obligation' is the term or keyword of the discourse being used in Australia to mirror the Third Way rhetoric of values, "no rights without responsibilities" (Giddens 1998: 66). In the Australian context, the concept is described as, a "... renewed awareness that for societies to function effectively, the growth of individual "rights" and "choices", needs to be married with a growth in individual "responsibilities" and "obligations" to society" (DFaCS 2000b, 2000c, 2000d & 2000e: 32).

In the UK currently, there is an entire arm of government devoted to addressing the problem of social exclusion. Social exclusion is described as;

> ... a shorthand term for what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown (Cabinet Office, 2000: p 1).

Similarly, within the Australian welfare reform package (DFaCS 1999, 2000a & 2000b) there is a strategy called 'participation support'. The benefits of participation are described as;

> Economic and social participation can reduce the risk of exclusion for individuals and share the benefits of growth more equitably (DFaCs2000: p 12).

The similarities between the approaches is obvious and the problem the Australian policy is aimed at addressing as described in the package is a "... growing reliance on income support" (p 7), and an "... increase in numbers of joblessness among families with children ..." (p 6), "... jobless lone parent households ..." and "... among single people, there is also now a higher proportion without paid work" (p 6).

The welfare reform package sets about providing evidence for the conclusions that must be obvious by now to us all. Case studies within the *Participation Support* (DFaCS 2000b) document illustrate the new requirements for those currently receiving parenting payment. 'Veronica' recently separated from her husband with a 2 year old child "... is put onto a periodic review process, which enables Centrelink to monitor and assist with her immediate problems that are preventing any discussion of the need to develop long term plans to participate either socially or economically. When her separation problems are under control, she then begins the process of future planning regarding her participation" (2000: 22).

These discourses frame 'Veronica' as suspect and needy, having 'separation problems' needing to be controlled and fixed and the subject of considerable surveillance framed as monitoring and assistance. This is the process that Uttley (2000) described as "intervention, regulation and control by social agencies" (p 443) and Andruske describes as "symbolic violence" (2000: 10) experienced by women through government policy.

Gender emerges clearly as an issue within the Australian welfare reform agenda because of women's different relationship to the labour force, participation in unpaid and unvalued domestic work and the responsibilites of parenting which despite recent progress, remain as issues unresolved. There are considerable similarities between the discourses around welfare reform in the UK, US, Canada and Australia, there are also differences. I expect to be able to uncover the differences and describe them as the study progresses. This study will also seek to identify the differences or ruptures within what increasingly appears to be a global policy trade.

Therefore, the genealogy I am proposing for this study is based around the work of Michel Foucault (1977). Daphne Meadmore, Caroline Hatcher and Erica McWilliam (2000) describe genealogy "[a]s unmasking or denaturalizing work, it is concerned with the "small" stories, the marginalized topics, and taken for granted practices..." (466). Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (2000) describes genealogy as,

> ...allow[ing] the analyst to trace the ways in which discourses constitute objects that can be examined as either true or false according to the codes of the discourse (p 497).

Essentially, the process of genealogy provides an opportunity to rethink "existing theories of knowledge and its truths" (Adams St. Pierre p 498). Whilst there is no prescriptive method for conducting a genealogy, Kendall and Wickham (1999) describe a Foucaldian genealogy as follows,

- describes statements but with an emphasis on power;
- introduces power through a 'history of the present', concerned with disreputable origins and unpalatable functions', ... pointing out things about the origins and functions that they would rather remain hidden;
- describes statements as an ongoing process, rather than as a snapshot in the web of discourse;
- concentrates on the strategic use of archaeology to answer problems about the present (p 34)

There is more than one way to do a genealogy and there is not necessarily a 'right' way. For example, in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), *Madness and Civilization* (1971), *The History of Sexuality: 3* (1986) Foucault traces the discourses and emergences of power back to ancient times. More recently, Valerie Harwood (2000) traced the emergence of Behaviour Conduct Disorder to a period of time following the end of the second world war and the growth of psycholgical testing. Julie McLeod (1995) in her analysis of gender education

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policies in Victoria since 1975 focussed on a specific period of time in which to examine feminist truths and educational reform through government policies.

Therefore, it is not necessary to trace the emergence of the term youth to ancient times in order that a genealogy be useful. In Foucault's own words, (cited in Patton, 1979: 115),

> All my books, whether it be *Madness and Civilization* or this one, are, if you like, little tool-boxes. If people want to open them, to use this sentence to short-circuit, discredit or smash systems of power, including eventually those from which my books have emerged ... so much the better!

Topics for examination in a feminist genealogy of youth policies might therefore include, describing statements within youth policy discourses focussing on gender and power; examining the origins of the current discourses around youth in policies and examine how the origins of these discourses around young women function; describing how the process of policies is ongoing and how current discourses will contribute in the future to how the truths about young women will be known; concentrating on the archaeology of statements within the policy texts to examine how certain truths become 'sayable and visible' and how these 'statements are linked and recur' (Kendall and Wickham: 1997: 33); examining the history of the policies and how young women are made subjects within the policies; exposing the power of the normalising male experience as the developmental starting point of these policies.

The genealogy I am proposing "... seeks to enquire into processes, procedures, and techniques through which truth, knowledge, and belief are produced" (Meadmore, Hatcher & McWilliam 2000: 263). I want to continue now to discuss youth policies within the welfare reform agenda.

Youth policies in the welfare reform agenda

Turning now more specifically to policies that effect youth within the welfare reform agenda, it is possible to see these same discourses being used to position youth and young people generally in particular ways. For example, the Parenting Payment policy clearly has implications for not only women as sole parents, but for young women as teenage mothers. Wanda Pillow (1997: 142) in her study of teen pregnancy in the US states "[a] feminist analysis in this sense would seek to interrupt and disrupt the circulatory of assumptions about authentic experiences of teenage pregnancy by examining assumptions about gender and sexuality".

In the youth policies identified for examination, similar assumptions prevail and it is these assumptions and the exercise and circulation of power that needs to be challenged and disrupted. For example, Elizabeth Bullen, Jane Kenway & Valerie Hey (2000) in discussing teenage pregnancy and Third Way politics discuss the moral panic around the issue of teenage pregnancy and the positioning of welfare recipients as lacking in moral character. They add,

> Applied to welfare dependency, the concept of 'moral hazard' potentially reinforces both negative assumptions and myths suggesting teenage girls become pregnant in order to receive welfare benefits. It also positions the Government as moral guardian as well as risk minimiser (p 446).

The Parenting Payment, has always caused considerable public discussion. In Australia, myths circulate where young women are targeted for public vitriol as 'getting pregnant to get

the pension'. In a recent study of early school leaving in Australia, a young woman called 'Ruth' spoke about her life as a young mum and her experiences within the local community,

> I didn't want to be a single mum. I look like a single mum. I don't look like someone who is studying. People think of me as the stereotype and I hate it. I just hate being a single mum on the pension. Like I walk down the shopping mall with Tommy and all I get is disgusted stares from the old people like 'Look at another one', and they just don't think I might be doing something with my life. They just automatically assume by the way I dress that I'm just one of those mums who get pregnant for the money, you know. I haven't been harassed or anything. It's just the way they look at me. What I read in people's expressions. It doesn't upset me so much as piss me off (Smyth, Hattam, Cannon, Edwards, Wilson & Wurst, 2000: 170).

Transitions to ...

The Youth Allowance policy defines youth as age 16 years to 25 years. The policy in effect defines who is considered to be youth or not, and provides further impetus for rethinking existing notions of transitions. The Youth Allowance (DEETYA 1996) was introduced to,

> ...replace a number of current income support payments for young students and jobseekers. The Youth Allowance will provide a simpler, more effective system to support young people as they make the transition from education to work and from dependence to independence. It will cover young people aged 16-20 years old and full-time students up to age 25 years" (p 2)

The rhetoric of the policy is about independence, treating all young people the same regardless of their activities and removing disincentives to study. This rhetoric is clouded by the structural arrangements within the policy.

For example, the ways in which means testing of parental assets and income is applied to all young people, that is, students, unemployed, part-time workers and part-time students, excepting 'homeless' (DEETYA 1996: 6) defies the notions of independence and transitions to adulthood as described within the policy aims. There has been a recent body of work that has examined the notion of transitions and 'new adulthoods' and what this notion might mean for young people at this moment in time. I want to talk about two specifically within the Australian context. Johanna Wyn (2000) and Johanna Wyn & Peter Dwyer (2000) and the relationship of these works to the proposed study.

In a recent Australian publication Johanna Wyn (2000: 1) provides a different perspective around Australian youth where she suggests that a "...'new adulthood' has replaced 'youth'", arguing that currently both categories are under reconstruction. She (Wyn 2000: 1) further argues that "...young people do not necessarily have access to the kind of adulthood experienced by the 'baby-boomer' generation - not because the processes of 'transition' are flawed, but because social, economic and political change has affected 'adult' lives as well as those of youth". Recently, Wyn and Dwyer (2000: 152) argue that today's youth experience 'multi dimensional lives' and this has "... pushed to the limit the old notion of youth as a transition to adulthood" (153).

Bullen, Kenway and Hey (2000) in discussing 'choice biographies' (Dwyer, Harwood & Tyler 1998 & 1999) in relation to Third Way politics state that young people "...who adopt a choice biography are becoming more numerous and are governed less by convention and habit and more by individual preferences, assessments and possibilities" (p 447). In the UK, Meg Maguire, Stephen Ball and Sheila Macrae (2000 [see also Ball, Maguire & Macrae 2000])

discuss what they describe as a 'refusal of adulthood'. In their study they illustrate the 'refusal of adulthood' as,

> ... mak[ing] 'sense' in relation to the struggle for identity which is taking place in the lives of Anne, Fiona and Delisha. Becoming an adult is a 'scary' thing for Fiona, who is surrounded by unemployed adults, managing a precarious economic existence. 'Big decisions' are too much for her - she is still only a 'little girl'. On the other hand, Anne simply is not ready to commit - she is caught up in a rich and satisfying immediate world - investing in an unknown future just isn't sensible or even desirable, in a setting typified by insecurity, change and instability... (p25).

They show these young women as dependent on their families for emotional security, accommodation and money and an inability or lack of desire to separate from their parents thus refusing to become adult. Transitions, adult, adulthood, independence and others are keywords in the discourses around youth.

In a recent evaluation of the Youth Allowance policy (DFaCS 1999b) the main concerns around the policy identified in the consultation were,

- the impact of the extension of parental means testing on unemployed 18-20 year olds and their families;
- the ability and capacity of education institutions to cater for the needs of a wider group of under 18's;
- service delivery issues; and
- the impact on the community sector (p 4).

The structural arrangements and the implementation of the policy more generally raise questions about a range of topics. For example, in terms of the means testing aspects of the policy and the payment of benefits to some young people via their parents' bank accounts belies the discourse in the policy around transitions to independent adulthood. How is it possible to assist young people to become independent adults whilst denying their capacity to manage a small sum of money on a daily basis. The structural arrangements would therefore appear to contradict the stated aim of the policy.

Mutually obliging: working for the dole

The concept of "mutual obligation" (DEETYA 1996, DFaCS 1999b, 2000c & 2000d) is in itself, I will argue, quite problematic. For example, the process or requiring young people to perform certain obligations requires considerable monitoring and surveillance and as such represents a disciplinary technology where young people become complicit in their own domination.

The work of Michel Foucault is important in "... order to uncover the particular regimes of power and knowledge at work in a society and their part in the overall production and maintenance of existing power relations" (Weedon, 1987: 107-108). Foucault examined the historical constructions of madness, sexuality and prisons and the resultant control exercised over individuals by the state. If we were to apply the same principles and processes used by Foucault to the term youth and youth policies we should be able to see how control is exercised over this segment of the population, and perhaps the purposes which this segmentation is aimed at achieving. How is the segmentation of certain sections of the population an exercise of power? And what are some of the ways in which this occurs? Fraser and Gordon (1997: 122) pose the following questions about 'dependency' and these questions are applicable to the proposed examination of youth and youth policies.

> Why are debates about poverty and inequality in the United States now being framed in terms of welfare dependency? How did the receipt of public assistance become associated with dependency, and why are the connotations of that word in this context so negative? What are the gender and racial subtexts of this discourse, and what tacit assumptions underlie it?

Questions that need to be asked around the youth policies include the same questions of dependency, negative constructions and connotations, poverty and economic and educational inequality. The institutions where these assumptions are framed need investigation. An investigation of these institutions is possible through an analysis of the documents generated in the monitoring processes of these organisations. The institutional bases of government and the school are two sites that construct discourses that in turn construct individual subjectivities. Weedon (1987) states,

> The most powerful discourses in our society have firm institutional bases, in the law, for example, or in medicine, social welfare, and education and in the organization of the family and work. Yet these institutional locations are themselves sites of contest, and the dominant discourses governing the organization and practices of social institutions are under constant challenge. ... Moreover, particular discourses themselves offer more than one subject position. While a discourse will offer a preferred form of subjectivity, its very organization will imply other subject positions and the possibility of reversal (p 109).

The suggestion is that individuals are able to resist discourses, in this case, the interest is in policy discourses. This research aims to discover the variety of subject positions that are allowed/offered/available within the youth policies. Where are the sites of resistance and struggle, if there are any?

In speaking of sexuality, Foucault (1991: 101) discusses the development of 'reverse' discourses with regard to homosexuality where "...homosexuality began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturality' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified" (p 101). It is therefore important to identify the areas of resistance or instances where 'reverse' (Foucault, 1991) discourses to youth policies are developed. Will, and how will young people whose subjectivities are perhaps socially constructed by the policy resist both the implementation of the policy and by what means and using what strategies? Is it possible to construct a reverse discourse around the policy and the ways in which youth are constructed within the policy using the discourse of the policy itself?

Constructing reverse discourses is an important aspect to the study; the feminist and poststrucuralist projects are aimed at change. Reverse discourses and areas of resistance may identify possible changes to the policies themselves. Kenway, Willis, Blackmore & Rennie (1994) agree that poststructuralism provides feminism with some valuable tools, stating that, "... we see post-structuralism as theory which acknowledges discourse and practices of struggle and resistance, which recognizes the dynamic interplay of social forces, and which therefore can readily be deployed as a theory *of and for change'* (p 188)

Techniques or technologies of the self are tools or instruments of governmentality. The artfulness of government is the control of subjects through their freedom (Rose 1998). James Marshall (1996) states 'that whilst we believe ourselves to be free, to be acting autonomously, in general, we are not. Instead we have become governed' (p 93). Rose (1998) further suggests that in the current context,

> ... the novel forms of government being invented in so many 'postwelfare'
> nations at the close of the twentieth century have come to depend, perhaps
> as never before, upon instrumentalizing the capacities and properties of 'the
> subjects of government', and therefore cannot be understood without
> addressing these new ways of understanding and acting upon ourselves and
> others as selves 'free to choose' (p 13).

Stephen Ball (2000) working from Foucault, discusses the disciplinary technologies of
performance or the act of performativity. He describes performativity as "...a technology, a
culture and a mode of regulation, or a system of 'terror' in Lyotard's words, that employs
judgments, comparisons and displays as means of control, attrition and change" (p 1) and
"within this new mode of regulation, the organisation of power within definite forms of time-
space..." (p 2)

> There is not so much, or not only, STRUCTURE of surviellance, as a FLOW
> of performativities both continuous and eventful-that is SPECTACULAR. It is
> not the possible certainty of always being seen that is the issue, as in the
> panopticon, it is the uncertainty and instability of being judged in different
> ways, by different means, through different agents; the 'bringing-off' of
> performances-the flow of changing demands, expectations and indicators that
> make us continually accountable and constantly recorded¾ 'giving the
> position of any element within an open environment at any given instant'
> (Deleuze 1992, P. 7). (Ball 2000: 2 original emphasis)

There are elements of performativity within the mutual obligation discourse that forms the
basis of the Mutual Obligation Initiative (2000d) which forms the basis for the arrangements
in the 'Work for the dole' and the Youth Allowance policies. For example, the judgement
aspects are apparent through the categorisation of some forms of activities being counted
towards the obligation. 'Terror' aspects of performativity are evident through the breaches
discourse of the policy where financial assistance is diminished when a person fails to meet
the obligations. One theme of this study is to see if there are in fact reverse discourses
against these policies and the disciplinary technologies of governmentality and performativity
to name just two.

The Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment and Work for the dole policies represent a rich
source of data and a starting point for the study. I will briefly discuss one of the approaches I
aim to use.

Keywords

Working with keywords in the policy discourses will be critical in making sense of these
polices. I would intend to following Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1997) who trace the
genealogy of the keyword *dependency*, which they conclude has a range of meanings such
as economic, sociolegal, political and moral/psychological. The keyword*dependency* is
significant in the rhetoric of current political and social debates and needs to be examined in
relation to youth policies. In this research I will search for and explore the keywords as
framing discursive events through discourses in the policy and their deep and often contrary
meanings.

I want to turn now to discussing feminism and poststructuralism in this study and conclude
by showing the links between the topics of welfare reform, youth policy, feminism and
poststructuralism with gender in order to show how these aspects of the study link together
as a whole.

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Feminism and poststructuralism

Feminism and poststructuralism together provide a powerful way of approaching an analysis of youth policy with a focus on the welfare reform agenda as it is currently being played out in Australian life. I want to further the discussion focussing on three feminist influences, Catherine Marshall, Christine Weedon and Carol Bacchi.

After Catherine Marshall (1997: 23-24) a feminist and critical stance in approaching the problem will provide insights and pose questions around these policies such as, How do girls and young women fare in these policies? Who benefits from these policies?; Who loses from these policies? And, how do those usually silenced and marginalised fare?

Most importantly, Marshall (1997) suggests that we need to avoid the tendency to assume that women's experiences are the same regardless of race, class and sexuality.

Class is another important thread to this study. I will examine how the middle classes apparently are able to escape the scrutiny or gaze of government. Welfare is very much about class. The issues of gender and race as they intersect with class is a feminist project. After Christine Weedon (1987) this project is about "[feminist criticism seek[ing] to privilege feminist interest in the understanding and transformation of patriarchy" (p 136).

Carol Bacchi (1999) argues that genealogy is an appropriate means to "historicize claims to knowledge, indicating shifts in thinking and acting around particular issues" (p 40-41). Following Foucault, she focuses on the effects of policy, that is, the effects of discourse as discursive events on the lived lives of people. She adds,

> [t[hree general categories of effects can be identified: first, the ways in which subjects and subjectivities are constituted in discourse; second, the effects which follow from the limits imposed on what can be said - as an example, designating some areas of our lives as appropriate to public supervision, and some as 'private' (Fraser, 1995; Olsen, 1985); and third, the 'lived effects' (Bordo, 1993) of discourse (Bacchi 1999: 45).

Poststructuralism can provide feminism with strategies to deconstruct knowledge and construct theories to examine the "... relation between language, subjectivity, social organization and power" (Weedon, 1987: 13). It is important to remember that poststructuralism is broader than just the name of 'Foucault'. Whilst I suspect that my work will be heavily influenced by Foucauldian perspectives, it is important to resist closure and keep open the possibility of being involved in ongoing debates around Foucault and feminism. Julie McLeod in her doctoral thesis (1995: 66) discusses the need to continually question the relationship between these theoretical positions and the " ... need to consider the political dimension of theoretical work". Having said this I have show above how I expect that Michel Foucault's theories of discourse and power, governmentality, technologies and subjectivity provide powerful strategies to deconstruct policies and particularly youth policies.

Poststructuralism together with feminism provide valuable strategies and tools to deconstruct policies. Dianne Elam (1994) carefully places feminism with deconstruction arguing,

> ...feminism and deconstruction are beside one another in that they share a parallel *divergance* from (or dislocation of) politics and philosophy. ...feminism shifts the ground of the political, interrogating the opposition between the

public and private spheres. ...Deconstruction displaces our understanding of
how theory relates to practice by rethinking the opposition of philosophical
reflection to political action...feminism necessarily upsets the way we think
about politics because its activist political movement is inseparable from a
critique of the history of representation (p 1).

I will further the discussion by examining subjectivity in this project in relation to feminsm and
poststructuralism.

Subjectivity

The question of how individuals might be constructed by policy and how they might resist
policy is central to this study. Policy may construct subjectivity. Subjectivity as I currently
understand it is the process where individuals are constructed socially (and within youth
policies politically and economically) in different forms. Subjectivity is also an individuals
awareness or consciousness of themselves. The notion of subjectivity has arisen from a
variety of different areas for example, in Marxism, subjectivity denies human agency, within
structuralism, "[t]he subject implies agency, action and authorship, but also subjection"
(Abercrombie, Hill & Turner 1984: 417). Nick Mansfield (2000) has recently conducted a
genealogy of subjectivity. He begins by introducing the topic of the subject and self,

> Although the two are sometimes used interchangeably, the word 'self' does
> not capture the sense of social and cultural entanglement that is implicit in the
> word 'subject': the way our immediate daily life is always already caught up in
> complex political, social and philosophical-that is-shared-concerns (p3).

He traces the subject through a range of fields and concludes,

> Theory therefore is everywhere proposing the subject as both the most critical
> and important, but also the most elusive and abstract phenomenon. In the
> end, these attributes cross-multiply with one another. Our subjectivity is
> critical only in its abstraction, important only in its elusiveness (Mansfield
> 2000: 179)

Within this study I would initially intend fixing on a feminist poststructuralist meaning of the
subject and subjectivity which Christine Weedon, (1987: 21) defines as,

> For poststructuralist theory the common factor in the analysis of social
> organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness
> is *language.* Language is the place where actual and possible forms of social
> organization and their likely social and political consequences are defined
> and contested. Yet it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our
> subjectivity is *constructed.* The assumption that subjectivity is constructed
> implies that it is not innate, not genetically determined, but socially produced.
> Subjectivity is produced in a whole range of discursive practices¾ economic,
> social and political¾ the meanings of which are constant struggles over
> power. Language is not the expression of unique individuality; it constructs
> the individual's subjectivity in ways, which are socially specific. Moreover for
> poststructuralism, subjectivity is neither unified nor fixed. Unlike humanism,
> which implies a conscious, knowing, unified, rational subject,
> poststructuralism theorizes subjectivity as a site of disunity and conflict,
> central to the process of political change and to preserving the status quo
> (original emphasis).

The disunity and conflict experienced by individual subjects as produced by a range of discursive practices, that is, economic, social and political practices, are another important thread in this study. I will examine how young women socially constructed by Government polices might practice a range of 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1977) in order to comply with the requirements of the policy and thus avoid the punitive (economic) measures that exist within the policy. In the study I will examine how resistance and/or compliance with the Government policies might produce sites of disunity and conflict within and for individuals. Therefore, for the moment, I would fix on a definition of subjectivity as disunified, in conflict and constantly under reconstruction, but recognise that theorisations on subjectivity continually emerge.

For example, Ball, Maguire and Macrae (2000: 281) provide a new perspective when they state that "[w]e must also take on board the very possibility that, "it may be that subjectivity as a value necessary for life is also unequally distributed' (Grossberg 1996 p. 99)". I interpret the previous statement to mean that they see subjectivity as a personal value - in the same way that integrity and honesty, for example are values. This construction therefore provides a further alternative reading of subjectivity. The reference to unequal distribution is also interesting because the term is often associated with wealth and class location and therefore to a certain extent is outside of individual control. Following this example to its conclusion it would appear that to accept the notion of subjectivity as a value provides a different problematisation of subjectivity that will need to be examined further as the study progresses.

Weedon (1987) above describes how language has a role in the development of subjectivities. I now want to turn and discuss gender and subjectivity with a focus on language before concluding.

Gender and subjectivity

Discussing 'technologies of gender' Teresa de Lauretis (1987) states,

> For the understanding of one's personal condition as a woman in terms of social and political, and the constant revision, revaluation and reconceptualization of that condition in relation to other women's understanding of their sociosexual positions, generate a mode of apprehension of all social reality that derives from the consciousness of gender. And from that apprehension, from that personal, intimate, analytical, and political knowledge of the pervasiveness of gender, there is no going back to the innocence of "biology" (p 20).

Similarly, Susan Bordo (1990) and Carol Gilligan (1982) argue that no knowledge is gender neutral and that men and women in speaking the same words associate different meanings with these words and mistranslations occur as a result of what are essentially miscommunications. In describing their position towards poststructuralism and the role of language and discourse, Kenway, Willis, Blackmore & Rennie (1994) acknowledge the role of language and discourse in shaping subjectivity.

> [W]e see post-structuralism as theory which acknowledges discourse and practices of struggle and resistance, which recognizes the dynamic interplay of social forces, and which therefore can readily be deployed as a theory *of and for change.* Post-structuralism is a term applied to a very loosely connected set of ideas about meaning, the way in which meaning is struggled over and produced, the way it circulates amongst us, the impact it has on human subjects, and finally, the connections between meaning and power.

> For post-structuralists, meaning is not fixed in language, in other cultural symbols or in consistent power relationships. It shifts as different linguistic, institutional, cultural and social factors come together in various ways. Meaning is influenced by and influences shifting patterns of power. And finally, it constitutes human subjectivity which is, again, regarded as shifting, many faceted and contradictory (p 188-189).

In terms of the study I am proposing, young women will be attempting to describe their experiences through a discourse which is masculine (Smith 1987, Gilligan 1982) because this is the discourse available to them. This may, I suspect, create additional sites of disunity and conflict¾ how I should deal with this is not yet apparent. However, Kenway et al (1994) argue that despite the basis of language, the struggle over meaning and power is central to the poststructuralist project. Janet Ransom (1993: 142) further adds that the positions adopted by Bordo (1990), Gilligan (1982) and other feminists has allowed them to "... develop a fuller sense of the way that power penetrates subjectivity. It has been an important part of feminist work, not merely to reject the truth claims of reason to impartiality, but also to account for their plausibility."

The discourse of government policies may create for young women areas of disunity and conflict within individual subjectivities. Questions needing to be asked include, how is it that the policy has the power to penetrate subjectivity? For example Bessant (1993) raises the notion of 'dependultcy'. This notion could be useful in interrogating the policies because the stated aim of the policy discourse is to assist young people to become adult whilst the policies insist on extending the period of economic and social dependence through extended periods in education and training. I suspect that the very contradictions within the set of arrangements of these policies may create for individuals sites of disunity and conflict within individual subjectivities. For example, despite disagreeing government policies young women may conform to the policy to avoid punishment.

These circumstances could mean that individual subjectivites were constantly being reconstructed, socially, politically and economically. Bullen, Kenway and Hey (2000) in discussing teenage pregnancy and Third Way politics state that, "[l]abour's handling of teenage pregnancy falters because it is based on a masculinist view of identity" (448). The authors discuss the desires and fantasies of young women which remain framed in terms of "...traditional motherhood, romance and female desirability values to sustain themselves and that this too attracts both political and cultural disapproval" (454). In terms of young women's subjectivities and the issue of teenage pregnancy it would appear that the government and the community remain out of step with young women's desires and this creates both sites of disunity and conflict within young women themselves and in relation to this study, government policies.

Youth subjectivity and more particularly, the subjectivity of young women as youth are socially constructed. Within this project it is necessary to examine the formation of subjectivities and discuss the notion of welfare subjectivities. Subjectivities of working class and middle class girls in the UK are examined by Valerie Walkerdine (1998) who found that middle class young women were in the process of constructing "supergirl identity" (p 199) where failure was feared and not optional. Middle class girls regulated their own sexuality differently from working class girls in an effort to secure a "bourgeois identity" (p 200). In *Daddy's Girl* (1997), Walkerdine confronts the sexualised images of working class girls and women as "... lacking, as having latent pathology" (p 30). How young Australian working class women as youth construct subjectivities through government policies is the purpose of this study. I raise the issue of class here because of the means testing that is a part of the eligibility criteria of the policy. It is unlikely that middle class young women would be effected by government policies because based on parental income they are unlikely to be eligible for

assistance within the welfare framework. I will need to ask how are these policies aimed at working class people and what are the class constructions within the policies? I will investigate how the latent pathology of working class young women might be evident through the policy and the various discourses around the policy. An understanding of the regulation and self-regulation, which occurs as a consequence of policy that then produces different subject effects, is what is sought. Class is therefore another major thread to this study. Not only does the parental means testing within many new policies suggest that young women who have access to income other than welfare should access that income [ie. remain dependent on their parents as 'dependultcy' (Bessant 1993)] or manipulate the policy eligibility criteria. That is, perform the technology required in order to access a welfare income. As Walkerdine (1997: 30) argues "[t]he 'lack' in the working class mind" is the issue and problem with which governments need to manage.

Conclusion

I have sketched out very briefly a study around young women's subjectivities and the role of Government youth policies in shaping their subjectivities. I have identified what can best be described as the 'big hooks' from which particular elements of the study will hang. For example, the welfare reform agenda emerges as a significant and pivotal point around which the study will revolve. I believe that feminism and poststructuralism as outlined offer a productive set of tools and an appropriate stance from which to examine the issues of youth policy, young women and welfare reform. Clearly, there are other ideas that need to be incorporated as the study progresses, however, the above serves as a starting point for what promises to be an exciting and interesting study.

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