

**THE EFFECTS OF IDEOLOGICAL DECISION MAKING ON THE
MATERIALITY OF WOMEN'S LIVES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF
CHILD CARE SUBSIDY POLICIES AND SERVICES IN AUSTRALIA AND
CALIFORNIA**

Thesis submitted by

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STATEMENT OF SOURCES

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

Nonie Harris

Date

**STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS INCLUDING
FINANCIAL AND EDITORIAL HELP**

Supervision: Professor Anthony McMahon

Editorial Assistance: June Tonnoir and Glenda Darville

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this thesis is to use a critical feminist theoretical framework to explore the relationship between government ideology, child care subsidy policies and services and the materialities of women's lives. This exploration is undertaken by:

- Comparing child care subsidy policies and services in California and Australia.
- Focusing on the experiences and accounts of women service users in California and Australia.

These aims are consistent with feminist literature that encourages researchers to look for emerging representations of child care, and also to position child care issues in a range of gender equity and social justice discourses.

Critical feminist theory informs all aspects of the study. It provides the context for framing the topic, choosing the methodology, and the analytical lens used for the interpretation of the literature and the data. The methodology is micro-level, cross-national comparative and qualitative. This study relies on in-depth interviewing as the primary data gathering method.

Qualitative, cross-national comparative research that values feminist theorising provides a unique opportunity to explore child care policy. This study demonstrated that the ideologies that benefit patriarchy are embedded in subsidised child care policies and are active cross-nationally. In this study the impact of these ideologies differed only in degree, not in the patriarchal intent of the policies.

The women's material lives were shaped in different ways by their respective subsidy contexts. For the Californian women, accessing a scarce residual service required them to be highly resourceful. They were not able to choose the child care they preferred, change their child care arrangements if dissatisfied with the quality, or pursue employment advancement because the additional income would preclude subsidy access. The Australian women saw their semi-universal subsidy service as an entitlement. The higher levels of subsidy meant they were more able than the Californian women to choose the care arrangement they preferred. In reality, though, infant and community based child care were difficult to access, the cost of care was a significant issue for middle-income women, and the women spent a substantial amount of time and effort locating quality care they could afford.

The women's lives were also shaped by their experiences of poverty, racism, individualism and sexism. Their vulnerability to these forms of oppression was increased by the use of subsidy services. The Californian women recognised their disadvantage due to class and race and

actively resisted the construction of themselves implicit in these forms of oppression. The Australian women did not identify class and race as forms of oppression related to their use of subsidy. However, the semi-universal nature of child care subsidy provided the Australian women with the illusion of choice and obscured aspects of the system that reinforced conservative roles for women. Whilst the residual Californian subsidy service foregrounded oppression based on race and class, it obscured the respondents' ability to conceptualise their experiences as gendered. For both groups of women their gendered disadvantage was rendered invisible by neo-liberal individualism and therefore difficult to identify and actively resist. Nevertheless and despite these barriers, both groups of women recognised that child care subsidy services were not provided to meet the needs of women. They believed policy makers were selfishly motivated and concerned with maintaining their own positions of power and privilege.

This study reinforces the value of critical feminist theorising that identifies the ideologies embedded in social policies. Placing women's experience at the centre of this policy analysis revealed the effects of ideological decision making on the materiality of women's lives. This thesis provides a strong endorsement for the engagement of feminist policy makers and members of the women's movement with child care policy. Without this feminist engagement the mechanisms of patriarchal power, implicit in social policy, will remain obscured and unchallenged.

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PART ONE: THE STUDY

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCING THE THESIS

It is important that the imaginative centring of child care issues in a range of social justice and gender equity discourses should continue (Fincher, 1996, p. 166).

It is a critical time for child care subsidy policy and services in California and Australia. A sense of urgency informs the lobbying by American child care advocates and women's policy organizations: "Senators must hear from you about the importance of child care funds to help families work and children succeed!" (National Women's Law Center, 2004, p. 1). The Federal Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) reauthorisation is three years late and the President's "... proposed budget for the CCDBG ... would result in over 300,000 fewer children receiving child care help by 2009" (Blank, 2005, p. 7). The fiscal crisis faced by the American States means money for child care subsidies and child care provider support is being squeezed (Child Care Action Campaign, 2003). In California in 2004, 280,000 children were on waiting lists for child care subsidies (Schulman and Blank, 2004). Hundreds of thousands of American women cannot choose to place their children in affordable, quality and accessible child care.

In an Australian newspaper Babette Francis (2003) claimed that "... child care is not a 'women's issue'" (p. 1). A review of the major parties' policy platforms reveals the unfortunate truth of this claim – child care policy statements are embedded in 'family' policy documents (Liberal Party, 2001; Crean, 2002). At the 2003 International Women's and Gender Studies Conference in Brisbane a delegate expressed concern over the lack of feminist engagement with child care issues and compared the current state of child care policy and services to watching a slow motion train wreck. Anne Summers (2003b) says: "There is, in fact, a child care crisis in this country" (p. 4). Perhaps the most telling statement about the current position of child care in Australia was made by Larry Anthony, a recent ex Federal Minister for Children and Youth Affairs. When questioned by the press about his appointment as a director of ABC Learning, Australia's largest private child care company, his response was: "I'm delighted to be joining ABC Learning centres as a non-executive director. I think they're a very well-run company, they've got good management, and it's a good product" (Anthony, 2005, p. 1). Child care in Australia has become a commodity, a private enterprise where federal child care subsidies are used to fuel the record profits of child care companies.

The Australian and American child care financing stories are in many ways different (Brennan, 1998). Their historical journeys and their service delivery systems are different, but at their ideological core they may be very similar. In both countries child care has moved from the private world to the public agenda "... politicising previously depoliticised need ... moving into the terrain of the social" (Fraser, 1989, p. 175). What does this mean for Californian and Australian women? How are they negotiating these policy contexts and making sense of a service that is a large part of their lives but is not publicly acknowledged as their own? What can be learned from their diverse experiences, and can a clearer understanding of the political location of child care and the way it is financed provide an opportunity for effective future policy planning?

At a broader level, social policy discourses reinforce the invisibility of women. There is no public linking of women's needs to the provision of the services that have a great impact on their lives. Women are told that they have equality and that "...realist women have never thought of (them)selves as 'unequal'" (Francis, 2003, p. 1). Joanne Baker (2003) argues that this social context is shaped by a neo-liberal ideology, pervasive in both Australia and America, that promotes "... the privileging of decontextualised narratives that emphasise self-determination and the elevation of personal choice over considerations of collective good" (p. 1). In this neo-liberal context the emphasis on individual choice means the experiences of 'women' are negated and depoliticised, and personal experience is isolated from the social structures that continue to benefit from sexism.

I have begun this chapter by focusing on the immediate child care financing and policy dilemmas facing Australia and California. In the following sections I will provide the biographical context of my thesis topic, articulate the research aims, and define child care subsidy and the assumptions that underpin this thesis. I will also outline the critical feminist theoretical framework that has informed all aspects of this research project.

Topic Selection and Biographical Context

"The point is that academic research projects bear an intimate relationship to the researcher's life ... Personal dramas provoke ideas that generate books and research projects" (Oakley, 1979, p. 4). As this statement was true for Ann Oakley, providing the inspiration for her research project, documented in *From Here to Maternity*, so it is that my life circumstances provided inspiration for this research project. I gained a unique perspective on services in California and Australia by working in child care service planning and using a variety of child care options in both countries. My involvement with a Californian state funded 'workfare' program particularly highlighted the situation of welfare 'dependent' mothers struggling to enter the workforce

without the support of adequate child care subsidies. Comparatively, Australian subsidised services appeared comprehensive and accessible.

My work experience in the child care field started in 1986 in a Child Care Resource and Referral Agency in California. The Agency had contracted with the State of California to provide child care referrals to the recipients of Aid to Families with Dependant Children (AFDC), who were mandated under the Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN) program to undertake training in preparation for entering the workforce (Time Inc., 1985; Californian State Legislature, 1992). GAIN met the costs of participants' child care for one year after which time parents were expected to pay the full cost of care (Californian State Legislature, 1992). We planned for this by encouraging mothers to place their children's names on waiting lists for subsidised child care, at child care centres with subsidised slots or with alternative payment programs. Inevitably the state child care payment time limit would be reached and children's names were far from the top of the waiting lists for subsidised care. In many cases mothers could not meet the full cost of child care and their jobs and training opportunities were lost. Mothers returned to AFDC and were again mandated to participate in the GAIN program. An inadequate child care funding system had failed these women when they needed it most.

My daughter was born in California in 1990. As my husband was a student, and we largely relied on my income, I returned to part-time work when my daughter was five weeks old. She was enrolled in a parent participation child care centre five afternoons per week. I remember that the care cost was US\$450.00 per month, almost half of my take home salary. We received no direct assistance with the cost of this care from the state. We returned to Australia in 1992, and soon after I was employed part-time in the child care service planning area. My experience in Australia of more affordable, government subsidised child care contrasted with my expensive American experience. In subsequent years, and since the birth of my second child, I have used and continue to use a range of subsidised child care options; occasional care, family day care, long day care, after school care and vacation care. In Australia affordable child care was available to support me whether I needed parenting respite, was undertaking university study, or working full or part-time.

I have reflected on and sought to make sense of these diverse experiences and their impact on my life circumstances and these reflections have influenced the choice of my research topic (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). Catherine Day (2001) refers to topic selection as a process involving choices; to choose to focus on one area and not another, to privilege one view and not another. Alan Peshkin (2001) also examines the role of subjectivity in the topic selection process. He claims that research topics are shaped by our subjectivity and that our subjectivity is

influenced by our experiences. The researcher's theoretical perspective is also relevant to topic selection. Feminist researchers should reflect on their theoretical assumptions and frameworks, and be aware that these are not separate entities "... but are constantly intertwined within the research process" (Edwards and Ribbons, 1998, p. 1). As a feminist researcher I am encouraged to engage in "... critical reflexivity about particular choices" (Day, 2001, p. 116), and I therefore acknowledge the interplay of my experience, subjectivity and theoretical perspective on the framing of my research questions.

Research Aims and Objectives

Ruth Fincher (1996) encourages researchers to formulate broad questions about child care services. She argues researchers have become too focused on the operational details of child care and too remote from the big issues. Further, she argues that it is a "... feminist priority to know whether and how provisions of national states can be beneficial to a diverse range of users of child care" (p. 166). Documentation is needed to help ascertain "... whether or how the conservative alternative of withdrawal (or minimisation) of government support of child care may be worse for users of child care (women in particular) than the centralised ... form of state intervention in child care that presently exist" (Fincher, 1996, p. 166).

O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver (1999) also provide encouragement for international comparative research that focuses on the welfare state and gender, arguing that a comparative analysis forces the researcher to abandon preconceived notions about individual welfare states: "We have broken with the common practice of individual scholars analysing their own countries" (p. 10). This point is further emphasised by noting that comparative studies are particularly relevant in the beginning of the new century where a comprehensive mapping of social policy patterns is becoming more relevant: "... it is important also to investigate not only state-market relations, but also ways in which states interact with families, both in terms of provisioning and services and of regulation, as well as how states mediate between families and markets (for example, income maintenance programs)" (O'Connor et al., 1999, p. 13).

The intention of my thesis is, therefore, to use a critical feminist theoretical framework to explore the relationship between government ideology, child care subsidy policies and services, and the materialities of women's lives. I will undertake this exploration by:

- Comparing child care subsidy policies and services in California and Australia.
- Focusing on the experiences and accounts of women service users in California and Australia.

A comparative study of California and Australia provided an opportunity to examine two services that differ at the service policy and implementation levels and may therefore shape women's lives in very different ways. I have chosen an American state, California, as one of the research sites, and Australia as the other research site. I made this decision for two reasons. Firstly, in America child care subsidy services are funded and administered at a state level, while similar services in Australia are funded and administered federally (Brennan, 1998). It would be beyond the scope of this study to compare the Australian subsidy system to 50 American state systems. Secondly, my personal history has informed the choices of California and Australia. Working and living in both locations provided opportunities to access sites with the advantage of local knowledge in both contexts (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992).

Subsidised Child Care as a Key Site

I have chosen subsidised child care as a key site in the examination of the relationship between ideologically informed policy making on the material lives of women. This section provides justification for the choice of this site. Subsidised child care is a key site for understanding the complexities of ideological impact on women's lives for the following reasons. Child care services are positioned at the nexus of women's participation in the public and private spheres. Bennett (2001) argues that "... child care reflects the high degree of ambiguity that the welfare state holds for women ... it reflects the degree to which women are subordinate as citizens and relegated to the private domain as it suits the goals of the state" (p. 35). Child care subsidy is the primary mechanism for public funding of child care in both Australia and California and is, therefore, central to the state's relationship with child care – it is a point of articulation between child care services and the state.

Though the United States and Australia have both been identified as liberal welfare regimes, defined by O'Connor et al. (1999) as having a "... restricted role for the state in the provision of income services, relative to markets and employers ..." (p. 3), subsidised child care policy in Australia is an exception to this liberal welfare regime category (Michel, 1999). Graycar and Jamrozik (1993) define Australian child care subsidy as a primary welfare provision as opposed to safety net service. Brennan (1998) supports this categorisation maintaining that child care subsidies in Australia are not "... restricted to those deemed 'needy'; rather, services accept users from a range of socio-economic backgrounds and charge fees which are related to family income" (p. 5). Child care is seen as part of the social wage. Conversely, in countries such as the USA and Britain, identified by O'Connor et al. (1999) as promoting maximum private responsibility, governments seek "... to provide a 'safety net' of child care service for the poorest families" (p. 154). Child care subsidy constitutes, therefore, a possible site of real

difference, enabling an effective examination of the impact of differing ideological contexts on women's material lives.

Definitions and Assumptions

For the purposes of this research project I have made the following assumptions:

- Child care subsidy refers to direct payments made by governments (federal, state, county or local) to parents or child care providers for the specific use of formal or approved informal child care services. Though I refer to child care tax credits in this thesis, the impact of this form of subsidy has not been the focus of this research project.
- I acknowledge that child care subsidies are implicitly problematic. Their very existence is based upon conservative assumptions about the responsibilities of the state and the responsibilities of women. The provision of child care subsidies by governments assumes that the role of the state is to assist women with their responsibility to meet the cost of child care. If the opposite position were true child care subsidies would not exist – governments would assume that it was their responsibility to meet universally the full cost of accessible, quality child care services.
- It is also not my intention to focus on a simple top down model of ideological influence that assumes that women service users are entirely powerless and acted upon. Rather I assume that women service users are capable of resistance, challenging and affecting the system within which they exist. Dalton, Draper, Weeks and Wiseman (1996) support acknowledgment of this more complex view; "... the dominant view of policy is that it all happens 'up there'. ... social policy debates and contests occur in many different locations with many different contributors" (p. xii).
- Neither do I assume that women's experience is universal, and I further acknowledge that many women negotiate multiple oppressions. Resisting sexism is not a priority for all women and in many women's lives negotiating contexts shaped by race and class may be the reality of their experience. Collins refers to the "... outsider within ... the white middle class feminists who over generalised without reference to the diversity of women's lives" (in Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004, p. 101). My unearned privilege as a white woman, claiming to be a feminist researcher, could lead to the obscuring of difference in my own research: "Asking 'which women' is one of the ways that researchers can shed light upon social structures, institutions and systems that otherwise might be difficult to see" (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004, p. 103).

Originality and Significance

This thesis makes an original and significant contribution to the knowledge and understanding of women's studies. This thesis is original for three reasons – topic uniqueness, and the methodological and theoretical approaches I have chosen. A micro-level cross-national comparative study that focuses on women's qualitative experiences of using child care subsidy services appears to be a unique research endeavour. I have reviewed relevant literature and concluded that my study will fill a gap in the literature and move beyond existing findings. My critical feminist theoretical framework also provides an uncommon angle of vision. I have chosen a "... planned way of perceiving... of consciously selecting a lens, for its potential to explore and thereby enhance our research understandings" (Peshkin, 1998, p. 408). My research focus, methodology and theoretical stance will together contribute to feminist knowledge by exploring, in an original way, women's social realities and also how social policies act to "... reproduce male domination and female subordination" (Meehan, 1995, p. 1).

Theoretical Context

Theory is what provides the moral and political meaning, purpose and value of experience (Thompson, 2001, p. 34).

This study will rely on a critical feminist approach. This theoretical framework will inform all aspects of the study. Guba (1990) in his text *The Paradigm Dialog* explores and defines the term paradigm using the categories of ontology, epistemology and methodology to make comparisons between alternative paradigms. Paradigm he defines as "... a basic set of beliefs that guide action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (p. 17). Guba (1990) compares positivism, post-positivism, constructivism and critical theory and considers their assumptions about the nature of reality, the role of the researcher and the purpose of knowledge. Guba's discussion is about the theory of knowledge, which Sarantakos (1993) claims has "... influenced the structure, process and direction of social research ... and provided a theoretical basis (for) the methodologies..." (p. 33). These authors assume that all research is guided and informed by theoretical knowledge: the researchers' worldview and their understanding of the nature of reality, the role of the researcher and the purpose of knowledge. Researchers have not always acknowledged the theoretical assumptions implicit in their inquiry. Feminist researchers have critiqued positivists for their belief in the intrinsic neutrality of their perspective (Reinharz, 1992). Feminists assume that theory is implicit in the research act and to ignore the existence of theoretical assumptions denies the context and meaning of the research. When the researchers articulate their theoretical assumptions they acknowledge the existence of a framework in which the research process is logically situated "... providing a philosophical basis for deciding what kinds of knowledge are

possible and for ensuring that the knowledge is both adequate and legitimate” (Day, 2001, p. 116). The theoretical framework informs all aspects of the research process, providing context for the framing of the topic, choosing the methodology and analytical lens of interpretation.

Critical theory opposes the positivist paradigm. Critical theorists, such as Horkheimer (writing in the 1930s and 1940s) critiqued the positivists’ conception of theory which they believed “... was absolutized, as though it were grounded in the inner nature of knowledge as such or justified in some ahistorical way, and thus it became a reified, ideological category” (Horkheimer, 1989, p. 194). Knowledge acquisition, especially in the complex social world, may not always rely on an accumulation of logical, hypothesized and proven facts. Critical theorists, whose initial “... imaginary [sic] (was) centred on class” (Fraser, 2003, p. 1), recognised that scientists are themselves historically and socially situated, and the knowledge created by scientists is not neutral and apolitical. Individuals are not ‘free’ to act; rather their actions and reactions to society are positioned in oppressive contexts: “The existence of society has either been founded directly on oppression or been the blind outcome of conflicting forces, but in any event not the result of conscious spontaneity on the part of free individuals” (Horkheimer, 1989, p. 200). ‘Factual’ knowledge, therefore, is mediated through social context and social context impacts epistemology which “... is historically rooted and interest bound” (Held, 1980, p. 254).

“The task of critical theory, according to Horkheimer, is to penetrate the world of things to show the underlying relations between persons” (Aronowitz, 1989, p. xiii). Critical theorists aim to expose historically situated and prevalent mechanisms of oppression, assuming the existence of an oppressive and knowable reality. Implicit in this process is “... the theorist’s awareness of his [sic] own partiality” (Aronowitz, 1989, p. xiii). Further, critical theorists reject the notion of objectivity arguing that positivists’ false notions of truth are instrumental in legitimising current systems of power. Focusing on the “... institutions of daily life” (Aronowitz, 1989, p. xvii) is a central task, with the intention of seeking material freedom, the exposure of power and domination and the illegitimate use of power (Held, 1980; Fraser, 2003). Critical theorists engage with ideology to accomplish these tasks. This engagement is relevant to my research aims: the impact of ideologically informed policy making on the material lives of women. Ideology is shaped by our current context and knowledge, and insight into ideological identity is gained by an understanding “... of its social function” (Horkheimer in Held, 1980, p. 186). Ideologies mask and conceal social contradictions that benefit powerful groups. Ideologies, which are “...embodied and manifested in social relations” (Held, 1980, p. 186), are formed from ideas, symbols and worldviews. The role of the critical theorist is to describe the way ideology distorts social relations. But description alone is not sufficient. The activities of social

institutions should also be critiqued, acknowledging that these critiques are defined by their time and culture. The ‘truth’ (how things really are) that can be claimed from these critiques exists within these boundaries, since “... material life sets limits on human understanding” (Hughes, 2003, p. 160).

I have chosen a theoretical framework for this thesis that is informed by critical and feminist perspectives, and in the following section I will explore the relationship between these two perspectives. Agger (1998) positions feminist theory within critical social theory, claiming “... feminist theory as a legitimate variety of critical social theory ... the foundations of feminist theories that explain domination in social structural terms” (p. 99). Nancy Fraser (1989) claims that the strength of critical theory is that it provides a framework of analysis for the issues of the time. The issue of our time according to feminist theorists is male domination and female subordination: “A critical social theory frames its research program and its conceptual framework with an eye to the aims and activities of those oppositional social movements with which it has a partisan, though not uncritical, identification” (Fraser, 1989, p. 113).

Critical theory has been criticised by feminist theorists for its gender blindness and privileging of the public sphere. Feminist theorists have sought to place women’s experiences and the private sphere as central to an understanding of oppression thereby challenging the taken for granted private/public separation. Fraser (2003) refers to “the ‘labour monism’ of the Frankfurt School” (p. 7) (of which Horkheimer was a member). The focus of these critical theorists was class and economic redistribution; the politics of gender were ignored (Agger, 1998). Feminist theorists responded by positioning sexual politics as central to an understanding of oppression. Habermas’s post-war theorising on the welfare state provided “... a new diagnosis of late-capitalist ills: the colonisation of the lifeworld by systems” (Fraser, 2003, p. 8). However, according to Fraser, the possibilities of Habermas’ critiques were not fully realised because gender subtexts in social institutions, such as the public and the private, were naturalised. Feminist theorists seek to centralise gender relationships arguing that these relationships are politically constructed: “Thus much feminist theory is devoted to clarifying the structure of the social and political world and the way in which gender functions to produce and reproduce male domination and female subordination” (Meehan, 1995, p. 1).

The generalised other, implicit in critical theorising, is the object to which rights are attached. This is a universalist assumption that “... supports Habermas’ notion that there are universally valid moral laws that attach to all people by virtue of their humanity” (Canaday, 2003, p. 52). How do feminists reconcile this modernist commitment with “... issues of identity and difference” (p. 74)? Calhoun (1995) argues that “... the tension between universality and

difference (is) the central issue informing contemporary debates in social and cultural theory” (p. xii). Critical feminist theorists have sought to acknowledge difference without embracing the post-modern disembodied subject. Canady (2003) argues that Nancy Fraser has been able to explore theoretical positions that acknowledge universality and difference within a critical feminist theory: “While the politics of redistribution are the politics of universal rights, the politics of recognition are the politics of concrete, particular needs” (p. 52).

In this section I claim a critical feminist perspective as the theoretical basis of this thesis. This theoretical framework provides the context for my topic selection, research methodology and the conceptualisation of the study findings and conclusions. In each section of this thesis I will draw on this theoretical perspective as the basis for a more chapter relevant use of theoretical knowledge.

Outline of the Thesis Chapters

In this chapter I have articulated the research question and situated it within the context of my biography and also within a critical feminist theoretical framework. In *Chapter Two: Methodology* I have focused on the issues and dilemmas of qualitative, feminist, cross-national comparative research. I have also provided detail about the design and implementation of the study. In the literature review chapter, *Historically Rooted and Interest Bound*, I have focused on the history of and the interests associated with child care subsidy policy in California and Australia. I have reviewed other relevant literature in this introductory chapter and also the findings chapters. I have divided *Part Three: Findings and Discussion* into four chapters. In the first of these chapters, *Critical Realists: Two Women’s Biographies*, I have presented the biographies of Californian and Australian women who received child care subsidies. I have focused on the women’s constructions of themselves and their child care need. In *Chapter Five: Child Care Choices in ‘Everyday/Everynight Lives’* I have explored the diverse experiences of service users, service administrators and policy makers. In this chapter I was particularly concerned with the way child care subsidy policies shape the material lives of women service users. In *Chapter Six: Responding to Conditions of Domination* I have explored the impact of subsidy policies on women’s construction and positioning of themselves in response to conditions of domination. In the *Summary and Conclusions* I have summarised the findings of the thesis and outlined the original contributions made by this thesis to the body of knowledge. I have also recommended areas for further research.

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

Feminist scholarship is an exacting terrain that is built on the premise of challenging hierarchical modes of creating and distributing knowledge. Feminists employ a variety of strategies for creating knowledge about women and their social worlds, which often lies hidden from mainstream society. A feminist approach to knowledge building recognises the central importance of examining women's experience. It often takes a critical stance toward traditional knowledge-building claims that argue for 'universal truths'. Research conducted within a feminist framework is attentive to issues of difference, the questioning of social power, resistance to scientific oppression, and a commitment to political activism and social injustice (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004, p. 3).

This chapter describes the methodology and methods chosen for this research project, and details the philosophical assumptions I use to inform these choices. I also examine dilemmas particular to this research. An important aspect of this study is the cross-national comparative nature of the research with its implications for feminist theorising on the welfare state.

The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section I discuss *Critical Feminist Research* and in the second section *Feminist Cross-National Comparative Research*. These first two sections inform the third section of this chapter, *Doing Feminist Research*. In this section I focus on the process of designing and doing the research including discussions about ethical considerations, site selection and gaining access, and data analysis. The final section of this chapter is concerned with the trustworthiness of the study and to what extent the data constitutes generalisable knowledge.

Theoretical Knowledge

The point of feminist scholarship is to end the oppression of women. The purpose of knowledge is empowerment, in the sense of enabling the purposive action ... This has implications for what we call an adequate understanding. Social change requires a road map, a theory of what is and should be (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004 p. 91).

The critical feminist framework informing this thesis was presented in *Chapter One: Introducing the Thesis*. In the following section this theoretical knowledge is used to frame discussions about critical feminist research.

Critical Feminist Research

Ann Oakley (1979) was a pioneer in feminist research. Her research in the 1970s, for example in *From Here to Maternity: Becoming a Mother*, had clear goals: for women to tell of their own experiences; to value and share women's knowledge; to explore experiences relevant to women's lives; to include the personal experience of the researcher; to expose the ideologies shaping women's experience and to use research "... to have an impact on those who formulate policy ..." (Oakley, 1979, p. 4). These goals are concerned with making women and their experiences visible, and also actioning social change (Roberts, 1981). These are the assumptions that underlie feminist research. Shulamit Reinharz (1992) reminds us, however, that feminist research is not a single definable entity: "Instead of orthodoxy, feminist research practices must be recognised as a plurality ... there are women's ways of knowing" (p. 4). Oakley's (1979) early articulation of feminist research goals and also the emphasis on multiple ways of knowing form the basis of feminist research. Feminist research is not a particular research methodology or method but is rather a perspective on undertaking research that values "... the voices of feminist researchers at work and (accepts) their diversity" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 5).

Feminist research methodologies can be quantitative or qualitative and can include methods such as interviewing, observation, surveys, oral history, experimental research, content analysis, case studies, and action research (Reinharz, 1992). Ramzanoglu and Holland (2002) note that a feminist research perspective does not "... prescribe what feminist methods must be..." (p. 1). These methods are feminist because they are guided and informed by feminist theory. Feminist theory frames the construction of research questions, the method of data production, and provides a lens through which to analyse and interpret data. Reinharz (1992) argues that the use of feminist theory exposes the political reality of personal experience: "A feminist perspective means being able to see and analyse gender politics and gender conflict" (pp. 249-250). Diane Fowlkes's (1987) exploration of feminist epistemology is consistent with this assertion. She maintains that feminist epistemology is concerned with "... the nature of what we know and how we know what we claim to know" (p. 1). The essential assumption of feminist epistemology is its recognition of the political nature of knowledge production.

Feminist research perspectives are associated with the interpretive and critical theory paradigms, in direct opposition to the positivist approach, though Sarantakos (1993) argues that the feminist perspective deserves a paradigm of its own. Feminist positions adopted, in opposition to the positivist paradigm, include rejection of value neutrality, unequal and separate relationships between subject and object and one knowable reality. Gorelick (1991, in Neuman, 2003) further urges feminist researchers to reject the apolitical approach of interpretive social

science and "... adopt a more critical approach and advocate social change more assertively" (p. 80). Harvey (1990) refers to critical research as looking under the surface exposing the historical and structural context of issues: "Phenomena, from a critical vantage point, are not considered to stand on their own but are implicated, embedded and located in wider contexts..." (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998, p. 3). These structures are "... maintained through the exercise of political and economic power which is legitimised through ideology" (Harvey, 1990, p. 19). Critical research therefore is engaged in a process where taken for granted concepts are deconstructed and then reconstructed. A conversational process is used to question lived reality in order to develop new understandings (Shacklock and Smyth, 1998). The researcher is actually engaged in a theory building process whereby she moves back and forward between data and abstract concepts "... between social totalities and particular phenomena; between current structures and historical development..." (Harvey, 1990, p. 29).

Issues of Power and Difference

Knowledge is never innocent or neutral. It is a key to power and meaning. It is used to dominate and control. When white women anthropologists write about indigenous women, they do so in the conventions of representation bounded by their discipline, university and politics and white Australian culture. Such representations are based on interpretation and translation and, as such, offer partial truths about indigenous women (Morton-Robinson, 2000, p. 93)

In this section I address issues of power and difference. I assume that the creation and maintenance of both power and difference are interrelated and an examination of these connections provides a useful foundation for reflecting on and undertaking feminist research.

Critical feminist theorists endeavour to expose the nature of gendered oppression. This involves an exploration of power and how it is used to maintain and reproduce male domination and female subordination. Feminist researchers are also concerned with issues of power and how patterns of domination and subordination are reproduced in the relationship between the researcher and respondent. Positivists accept the implicit authority of the researcher, failing to acknowledge the potentially exploitative nature of the research relationship (Oakley, 1981; Stanley and Wise, 1983). The taken for granted superiority of the 'objective' scientific mind concerned early critical theorists such as Horkheimer, who challenged the apolitical, ahistorical positioning of the scientist claiming that the scientist and the person should not be separated (Stanley and Wise, 1983; Horkheimer, 1989). Implicit in this separation is a failure to recognise that the scientist is embedded in oppressive social structures and is implicated in supporting and

reproducing oppression. Dismantling these power relationships is a primary task for feminist researchers. The unchallenged researcher and researched relationship is like a "... colonial power relationship – the oppressor defines the problem, the nature of the research, (and who is researched) ... Research is inherently value laden and reflects the power structures within which the research exists" (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004, p. 107).

Feminist Theory was transformed by its engagement with postmodernism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism. Issues of difference were foregrounded. The white, middle class, heterosexist constructions implicit in feminist scholarship were challenged (Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002; Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004). The focus on the 'universal' woman had obscured the reality of complex and oppressive contexts. Difference had been erased and the oppression implicit in feminist theorising unnoticed. The construction of a 'universal woman' is useful when advocating the betterment of women as a whole at the political level. However "... an examination of feminist research will show that the use of the universal category of woman also allows the researcher to create an inferior 'other'" (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004, p. 103). Since it was not sufficient to add women and stir to the research process (Harding, 1987) it is not possible to address the issue of difference by simply adding and stirring: "By just adding difference into the analysis, the researcher reinscribes and maintains the status quo of the social hierarchy. The researcher maintains this dominant position as the one with the power to add the difference" (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004, p. 106). The researched become the exotic 'other' (Collins, 1991).

Engagement with issues of power and difference is a task central to critical feminist research. But what strategies can the researcher use to ensure that her research practice reflects this engagement? A number of feminist authors have provided guidance in this area. A basic tool in this process is reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to "... the tendency to reflect upon, examine critically, and explore analytically the nature of the research process" (Fonow and Cook, 1991, p. 2). Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004) argue that reflexivity is a powerful tool for recognising the researcher's own social position and assumptions, and that she herself is not the 'universal' woman. Reflexivity is the first part in the process deconstructing the authority of the researcher. Hesse-Biber and Yaiser (2004) recommend researchers convey their own positionality to respondents and to the research audience. The researcher should engage in processes that promote collaborative research such as being willing to answer questions from respondents and returning transcripts (where possible) to respondents for comment.

Weber (2004) also recommends strategies for integrating difference into all aspects of the research process. Scholarship that attends to difference should recognise the contextual nature

of race, gender, class and sexuality. These are concepts that change over time in response to “... new economic, political and ideological processes, trends and events” (Weber, 2004, p. 124). They are also socially constructed categories defined by powerful groups within cultures – socially constructed systems of power relations. The researcher should, therefore, look at the “... relational nature of these systems of inequality rather than the differences in rankings of resources that accompany these systems, (this) forces us to focus on privilege as well as on oppression” (Weber, 2004, p. 128). Collins (1991) refers to the interlocking nature of oppressive systems and urges the researcher to investigate the connections between these; “... the interaction among multiple systems as the object of study” (p. 42). Weber (2004) also notes the categories of race, gender, class and sexuality are embedded in the everyday lives of individuals as well as social institutions. People resist and challenge the definitions of them imposed by more powerful groups; “... subordinate groups actively resist oppression and devaluation in numerous ways everyday” (Weber, 2004, p. 129). The actions, lives and motivations of subordinate groups should be viewed through their own lenses, not the lenses of dominant groups.

My task as the researcher has been to construct my research within a context that recognises these assumptions.

Feminist Cross-National Comparative Research

The feminist cross-national comparative nature of this research was particularly challenging and, I thought, ultimately rewarding. It was a complex undertaking requiring my engagement with the methodological and conceptual challenges and dilemmas of this uncommon but increasingly relevant type of research. In this section I have described and addressed these challenges and dilemmas. Firstly, I have defined and established the relevance of cross-national comparative research. I have also explored the feminist debates in cross-national policy research. Finally, I will discuss the challenges I faced when undertaking this research in the Doing Feminist Research section of this chapter.

Defining Cross-National Comparative Research

Lena Dominelli (1991) provides a succinct definition of cross-national comparative research; “... explaining and giving an account of similarities and differences between countries ...” (p 9). Patricia Kennett (2001) also provides an excellent definition; “... the explicit, systematic and contextual analysis of one or more phenomena in more than one country” (p. 3). Kennett (2001) reminds us, however, that comparative policy research should not just focus on government provision, but should also acknowledge the complexities within welfare delivery systems; “... cross-national social policy analysis is as much about appreciating relationships across policy

areas and between the range of different providers in the national context as it is about recognising and integrating a global perspective into comparative research” (Kennett, 2001, p. 5)

There are various types of comparative research such as comparisons within countries, across time (Clasen, 1999), between genders and age categories and across states within the same nation (May, 1998). Cross-national comparative research can happen at either the micro or macro level. At the micro level individual programs are compared usually within nations with similar political and social structures. Macro comparisons attempt to examine whole ‘systems’ over a range of countries and across time (May, 1998). Deacon, Hulse and Stubbs (1997) maintain that social policy research should focus on supranational or global rather than comparative contexts. Kennett (2001) argues, however, that comparative studies that acknowledge global complexities, for example governance at multiple levels, are highly relevant and valid: “... only through analysis incorporating a number of interrelating levels, macro and micro, (that) an understanding of the complex processes taking place can be understood and the diversity of differences between nation-states can be highlighted” (Kennett, 2001, p. 38).

Alcock (2001) lists four approaches to cross-national research. Firstly, theoretical studies; ‘... attempt to explore, and to explain, the differences between the different welfare systems of different countries and to assess the extent to which they are the result of internal policy making or external dynamics’ (p. 5). The second approach focuses on particular sectors across nations such as social security, child care policy, housing and health. Thirdly, evaluating policy effectiveness across states, and finally country comparisons where welfare provisions in selected countries are compared (Alcock, 2001). Kennett (2001) agrees with Alcock’s (2001) assertion that there are various approaches to cross national research, and details three categories. The first category entails hypothesis testing on a large scale using quantitative methods across many countries, though in such studies depth may be sacrificed for breadth. Micro studies, the second approach, rely on qualitative data gathering techniques and “... emphasise cultural sensitivity and specificity, agency and reflexivity in the policy research process” (Kennett, 2001, p. 7). The final approach focuses on regime theory, and makes use of welfare state typologies.

Rationale for Undertaking Cross- National Comparative Research

Social policy research has tended to focus on the policy and welfare contexts of individual countries. This is a reflection of the reality that welfare policies have been developed in particular national contexts (Alcock and Craig, 2001). Alcock (2001) maintains that this

situation is changing as "... international forces are increasingly shaping the policy agendas of national governments, so that welfare provision is less and less the product of national policy debates or political considerations ..." (p. 4). Pressures on policy making need to be viewed within the context of globalisation and its accompanying burgeoning capitalist economy, where international agencies are seeking to control social policy in individual countries (Alcock, 2001). Examples of these agencies and organisations are the European Union, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and transnational companies (May, 1998; Alcock, 2001; Kennett, 2001). Countries are also pro-actively engaged in examining the policies of other nations with the possible intention of transferring policies into their own contexts: "Social, cultural and economic manifestations are imported and exported across borders" (Kennett, 2001, pp. 1-2). May (1998) also argues it is also an opportunity to learn from the mistakes of others.

Clasen (1999) maintains that there is a need for large-scale comparative research as well as micro-level cross-national studies that are "... contextually rich" (p 3). Countries are growing more interdependent and the challenges they face are similar, though their social policy responses have not necessarily been the same; "... the need for better understanding of common features and crucial differences between not only individual welfare states but particular policy programs in order to unravel why and how welfare needs, or demands are being transformed into social policy" (Clasen, 1999, p. 4). Comparative cross-national research provides a tool for analysing the impact of differing policy regimes (Fincher and Saunders, 2001).

Sainsbury (1996) further notes that recently there has been a renewed feminist focus on welfare state research in a comparative context: "Crucial to this reorientation have been feminist critiques of mainstream analysis of welfare states and the combining of feminist and comparative perspectives" (p. 1). Mary Daly (2000) also argues that the focus of feminist scholarship has moved from the complexity of particular welfare systems to scholarship interested in variation between countries. Lena Dominelli (1991) also critiques single state policy research arguing that nation states are not autonomous entities and noting the tendency to ignore issues around class, gender and race. Poole (2000) agrees, maintaining that comparative social policy research has tended to be gender blind; "... feminists have begun to rework orthodox comparative typologies ..." (p. 186).

Methodological Issues and Challenges

Clasen (1999) argues that the methodological issues and challenges of cross-national research are worth examining, as this type of research does not have the same methodological implications as other types of social research – challenges are compounded when research is

undertaken across borders. Further, Oyen in Kennett (2001) asserts, "... in order to advance our knowledge about cross-national research it is necessary to raise questions about the distinctive characteristics of comparative studies" (p. 5).

Central to this type of research are issues of definition and concept. A major challenge for cross-national comparative policy research is conceptualising the welfare state and/or social policy contexts of different nations. These conceptualisations are highly contested within the comparative social policy field. Defining what you are comparing is fundamental to effective comparative research and is especially challenging in the social policy context. Esping-Andersen (1990) in *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* argued that not all welfare states are the same and defined, at a broad level, three types of welfare state regimes; liberal, corporatist and social democratic. Mary Daly (2000), a feminist sociologist, defines social policy regimes as "... the systematic set of arrangements governing the relations between politics and markets..." (p. 5) and critiques regime theory as gender blind maintaining that the private sphere has been marginalised. Daly (2000) prefers 'welfare families' acknowledging a more complex conceptualisation of the welfare state arguing her preference for a move away from an over-reliance on ideal types and "... from large typologies and binary matrices in favour of research less concerned with neatness of fit and more with the messy and stubborn practices encountered in social reality" (p. 12). Kasza (2002) agrees with Daly, claiming that welfare 'regimes' are little more than illusions and that the complexities of welfare provision are not captured in such broad categorisations.

Diane Sainsbury (1999) emphasises the importance of the ideologies concerned with families and gender and asserts that regime definitions can be challenged and recreated as gender regimes: "A gender policy regime entails a logic based on the rules and norms about gender relations that influences the construction of policies" (p. 5). This provides the feminist researcher with a conceptual framework for critiquing welfare policy that places gender relations at the centre of policy analysis (Sainsbury, 1999). The nexus between state, family and market is crucial to feminist theorising in a cross-national context.

At a micro-level, defining what you are comparing is also of critical importance. Mabbett and Boldersen (1999) note that one of the greatest challenges of cross-national comparative research "... is to understand the idiosyncrasies of national conditions (and) the conceptual frameworks of the actors" (p. 52). Social policy interventions are interpreted and understood differently in different countries and are informed by distinctive intellectual traditions. May (1998) also notes that underlying assumptions about 'social need' tend to be highly contested; cultural assumptions may not be the same. An issue of major policy debate, in one country, maybe of no

policy significance in another. Specific words can even have different meanings and connotations. National data may therefore differ because they reflect different ways of conceptualising problems and constructing social issues; different categories are used for generating statistics based on different assumptions, definitions and government priorities (May, 1998; Mabbett and Bolderson, 1999; Kennett, 2001). Alcock and Craig (2001) agree and note that empirical comparability relies on comparing social indicator data across countries; "...there is no guarantee that such data has been gathered and published on a similar basis in each country - and indeed (it is) a much greater likelihood that it has not" (p. 6). Gathering your own data is therefore advantageous, though the costs involved in generating your own qualitative or quantitative data mean that researchers often have to rely on official sources of data.

Mabbett and Bolderson (1999) note that comparison in the cross-national context is not a controlled experiment as it may be in the natural sciences. However, equivalence of concepts is important if you are to have "... confidence that the components and their properties being compared are the same or indicate something equivalent" (Kennett, 2001, p. 44). Cross-national comparative research should be designed to have comparative conceptualisations and comparative methodologies; concepts form the basis of relating one country to another. A potential problem in this regard is the researcher's lack of familiarity with a country other than their own which may lead to confusion and misrepresentation of important features. The researcher should strive for linguistic equivalence, measurement equivalence and conceptual equivalence, all of which require an "... intimate knowledge of the context and culture" (Kennett, 2001, p. 46).

Doing Feminist Research

Defining the Study

What defined my research experience was a set of circumstances that came together to provide an opportunity to undertake research. These circumstances included an opportunity to travel to the research site and my past work experience in the child care field, which provided access to informants, study sites and respondents. A two-country framework was manageable and allowed in-depth exploration of child care subsidy policy. The obstacle of inconsistent state generated data, based on differing assumptions of need was overcome by gathering my own data.

Mabbett and Bolderson (1999) describe the process of going into another country to collect data as a "research safari" (p. 52). I undertook such a safari when I travelled to California to undertake research for my PhD. The opportunity to undertake research in the United States arose when my husband accepted a six-month position at a university in the San Francisco Bay

Area. The prospect of returning to a place where I had previously worked in child care service planning, and pursuing research in this area, was an opportunity too good to miss. In the seven years since we had left California child care services and policies had changed, however the child care agencies and staff were almost the same. My employment history in the local child care industry gave me credibility and therefore access to the field. Agency staff were willing to talk to someone they had either known personally or if they knew of the agencies I had worked for. My employment in the field also meant that, though my child care subsidy knowledge was not up-to-date, I had a good understanding of the frameworks of child care subsidy provision in California. Gaining access to the field, therefore, relied on my prior knowledge of child care policies, my relationship with service providers, and the opportunity to reside for six months at the research site.

The first step in the analysis of the cross-national research process is to identify the type of comparative research being undertaken. Comparative research on child care subsidy policies is micro level comparative research, defined as individual program comparison in nations with similar social structures (May, 1998). My study focused on a particular sector (child care) as opposed to a broader theoretical or country comparison study (Alcock, 2001). This study also fits well with Kennett's (2001) second approach to cross-national research which is a micro study relying on qualitative data gathering techniques.

Valid comparison is at the heart of cross-national comparative research. Identifying what you are comparing is a fundamental challenge. Initially this could involve identifying the type of welfare state regimes America and Australia are – both are liberal welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990). Daly (2000) and Kasza (2002) argue, however, this regime labelling ignores the complexities of welfare state provision. Therefore, consistent with Kasza's (2002) recommendation "... that policy-specific comparisons may be a more promising avenue for comparative research" (p. 271) my focus was on defining and comparing two child care subsidy policies and services. Both countries have formulated policies and programs with the intention of subsidising the cost of child care. It was most useful for me to initially define the Californian subsidy services as residual, because subsidies are narrowly targeted to people with the lowest incomes. I have also initially defined Australian child care subsidy as a semi-universal service since the subsidy is available to all users of approved child care on a sliding scale (Graycar and Jamrozik, 1993).

Choice of research method, as with non-comparative studies, should be informed by the research topic, theoretical framework and what is possible. Cross-national comparative research has, in the majority of cases, been quantitative relying on the analysis of data generated by

states and international organisations. In this research project insight into experiences of women service users (primarily), service administrators and policy makers was valued and achieved by using qualitative research methods, providing respondents with an opportunity to share their own experiences of negotiating differing policy contexts. Qualitative research "... refers to research about person's lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings ..." (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 11). It is applicable to research problems that seek to understand the nature of people's experiences within complex systems. Cross-national comparative research, according to Kennett (2001) requires methodological equivalence. I chose semi-structured interviews as my primary data gathering method. I also undertook document analysis as a secondary data gathering strategy.

Data collection was completed in two phases; phase one in California and phase two in Australia. Data collection strategies were identical in both California and Australia so that accurate comparisons could be made. These strategies were:

- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with women using subsidised child care services in California and Australia.
- Qualitative semi-structured interviews with people involved in the formulation of policy and the delivery of services in the child care subsidy field, in California and Australia.
- Identification of documents (policy statements, legislation, press releases etc), that form the basis of child care subsidy services in California and Australia, for the purposes of document analysis.

Daly (2000) discusses "... the merits of a two country framework ..." (p. 12) maintaining that this smaller comparative framework provides greater detail and focuses "... attention on the complexities of small-scale as well as large scale variations" (p. 12). Additionally, there is less need to rely on ideal types and micro-level outcomes can be explored. The two-country approach also provided the basis for a more manageable qualitative research project. Mabbett and Boldersen (1999) remind the cross-national researcher "... on-site visits and face-to-face interviews ... are especially resource intensive in the cross-national context" (p. 51).

Methodological equivalence was challenging to achieve when selecting study sites. Subsidised child care service delivery systems vary greatly between California and Australia. In Australia child care subsidies are administered by the Commonwealth government in a standardised way to all eligible parents. Meyers, Heintze and Wolf (2002) define the Californian public child care system as complex: "Assistance was provided through a variety of mechanisms, including direct service and vendor agreements with non-profit centres ..." (p 167). Determining study sites in these vastly differing service delivery contexts, with the need for methodological equivalence in

mind, meant defining the elements of subsidy delivery system that would provide the basis of comparison. Rather than trying to find the equivalent agencies in California and Australia (they do not exist) it was appropriate to seek to match the elements of the service delivery systems in the context of the research question. I therefore chose the following site levels; service receiving, service delivery and policy making. These sites were applicable to both the Australian and Californian child care subsidy systems. I drew my respondents from each of these sites.

Ethical Considerations

Research always involves ethical dilemmas. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) refer to the complexity of ethical considerations in research noting that a brief acknowledgment of ethical standards at the commencement of a project is not enough. All interaction throughout the research project should be viewed in the context of ethical behaviour. For feminist researchers ethical considerations are positioned within the context of power relations, most commonly between the researcher and the respondent. There are a number of strategies the feminist researcher can use to promote an ethical research process: acknowledgement of the impact of power and difference; reflexivity; attention to research practices; and the adoption of protocols for ensuring ethical standards are adhered to (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004). Of course some feminist theorists (Roberts, 1981; Oakley, 1999) have wondered if ethical research is even possible since all research is embedded in oppressive material realities. Nevertheless, the feminist researcher, acknowledging the complex contexts within which research is undertaken, should prioritise ethical research practice. Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) specifically suggest: “You will need to work out your ethical position in relation to the researched, your accountability for the research, how you should present yourself (and) what the researched are to be asked to consent to...” (p. 157).

Codes of ethical research practice with human participants were originally established in the Nuremburg Code, adopted during the Nuremburg Military Tribunal held after World War II (Neuman, 2003). These codes were enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, and form the basis of current ethical practice in social research. Some of the basic principles of ethical practice are:

- Ethical practice is the responsibility of the researcher
- Participants should not be exploited for personal gain
- Informed consent should be received from participants
- Confidentiality of participants is guaranteed
- Participants will not be coerced or humiliated

- The research should not cause any unnecessary physical or mental harm
- The methods chosen should be appropriate to the topic
- Research should not be conducted in secret
- The sponsor of the research should be identified
- Findings should be consistent with the data
- Study design should be clearly articulated
- Consider and anticipate repercussions of published research (Neuman, 2003).

James Cook University students and staff are required to apply to the Human Ethics Sub-Committee for approval to undertake research with human participants: “The purpose of the Human Ethics Sub-Committee is to protect the welfare and rights of participants involved in any research in accordance with the National Statement of Ethical Conduct Involving Humans and James Cook University” (Research Office, 2004). In accordance with the Sub-Committee’s guidelines I submitted an Ethics Application to the Human Ethics Sub-Committee and received approval to undertake my research project in November 1998 (Ethics Approval Number H849).

The formulation of an ‘Information Page’ was a requirement of the ethics application process. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) remind the researcher that preparation for the research task is incomplete until a cover story is developed. A cover story is a planned, consistent informational statement used by the researcher when approaching a respondent: “Cover stories are written or verbal presentations of yourself” (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 31). It is a way of introducing yourself, your research topic, your purpose and to state also how you wish the potential respondent to be involved in the research project. In my information page/cover story (Appendix 1) I introduced myself, and the purpose of my research. I also detailed what was expected of respondents and reminded them that their participation in my research was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the research at any time or choose not to answer particular questions. I used this introductory statement as the cover story when initially approaching potential respondents and I also read the statement to respondents at the beginning of their first interview. In California I worked with a child care service agency that administered a child care subsidy service. I used my introductory statement as the basis of my written request to the Agency Director (Appendix 2) asking for permission to undertake research within her Agency.

Informed consent is fundamental to ethical research practice. At no time should research participants feel coerced into participating in the research: “It is not enough to get permission from people; they need to know what they are being asked to participate in so they can make an

informed decision” (Neuman, 2003, p. 124). Sarantakos (1993) urges the researcher to be clear at the project onset informing “... the respondent of the type of questions, the degree of question sensitivity or stress and the possible [true] consequences...” (p. 24). I was clear about the nature and purpose of this research project from the beginning and throughout the research project. Respondents were encouraged to ask any questions about the project at any time. All respondents were asked to sign an Informed Consent Form (Appendix 3). My Consent Form, printed on University letterhead, detailed the purpose of the project, relevant contact people, expectations of the participants and assurances about confidentiality. When informal meetings happened, for example casually meeting a staff person during an agency visit, I always identified myself and the nature and purpose of my research.

Gathering the Data

The Sample

Theoretical and practical factors influence the size and nature of the sample in qualitative studies; “... optimal numbers will be determined by the research topic and question – what you are wanting to find out, from whom, and the likely variability of the experience of the phenomenon under investigation” (Darlington and Scott, 2002, p. 52). Representitiveness is not the goal of qualitative sampling. Rather qualitative researchers seek a “... small collection of cases, units, or activities that illuminate social life” (Neuman, 2003, p. 211). Qualitative research relies on non-probability sampling techniques such as haphazard, quota, purposive and snowball sampling. In this study I have used purposive and quota non-probability sampling techniques. My purposive sampling relied on identifying particular types of cases for investigation, for example women who received child care subsidy: “The purpose is less to generalise to a larger population than it is to gain a deeper understanding of types” (Neuman, 2003, p. 213). My quota sample relied on drawing respondents from specific categories of people. The categories were service users, service administrators and policy makers in both Australia and California.

Three factors influenced the size of my sample. Initially, was my sample sufficient to answer my research question and secondly, had I been able to achieve theoretical saturation? Glesne and Peshkin (1992) define theoretical saturation as “... successive examinations of sources yields redundancy, and that the data you have seem complete and integrated” (p. 132). Finally, what was I able practically to achieve? Qualitative interviews are “... labour intensive and time consuming, from data collection through to analysis, so there will often be practical constraints on the number of people who can be interviewed” (Darlington and Scott, 2002, p. 53). In this study I did recruit respondents in every category. In both Australia and California I would have liked to interview legislators at State (in California) and Federal (in Australia) levels. However

due to the legislators' heavily committed schedules, and constraints on my ability to travel to Sacramento and Canberra, it was not possible to organise these meetings. Duke (2002) notes that access to powerful people is often difficult "... as they have the power to create barriers, shield themselves from scrutiny and resist the intrusiveness of social research" (p. 45).

Reoccurring themes emerged from the interview data, indicating theoretical saturation was generally achieved. I am reluctant to argue though that additional interviews would not have revealed new information. My six-month residency in California imposed a time constraint on my data collection, and the realities of a time limited PhD study impacted the scope of what was possible in Australia. These practical study limitations have been addressed by reference to relevant documents such as policy statements, media releases, government and agency websites, subsidy program policy and procedure manuals and appropriate research publications.

Data were collected for this study using two qualitative methods; semi-structured interviews and document analysis. The first aim of this study was to seek the reflections of women who reside in Australia or California and receive child care subsidies. In California I worked with a Child Care Service Agency that administered a child care subsidy program. At the time of my research the agency's subsidy program served 40 families with sixty children. In California it is typical for non-profit agencies to administer child care subsidy programs using State or Local Government funds, as in this case (Meyers et al., 2002). After receiving permission from the Agency Director, the Subsidy Program Coordinator copied and mailed my recruitment flyers with an introductory letter (Appendix 4) to subsidy recipients. Respondents were paid US\$25 to participate in the research. The Subsidy Program Coordinator thought this payment "... was really appropriate". To maximise response rates recruitment flyers were mailed to subsidy recipients in March 1999 and then again in May 1999. Five women responded to the first mail out and one additional woman responded to the second mail out. All these women agreed to participate in the study. Four women were able to complete two interviews with me and due to work and child care commitments the other two were able to meet with me once. Both the Agency Director and the Subsidy Program Coordinator thought this was a very positive response rate.

In Australia child care subsidy is administered and allocated by the Federal Government to all parents using approved and registered child care providers. Since there are no local child care agencies administering subsidy payments I approached child care facilities (two community based and one private) to recruit respondents. These child care centres gave me permission to place my recruitment flyers (Appendix 5) on their notice boards. From these flyers one woman contacted me; though due to her work and child care commitments no interview followed from

our initial contact. Using work and friendship networks proved a more successful respondent recruitment strategy. I was able to recruit six respondents, three of whom met with me twice.

The second aim of this study was to compare child care subsidy systems in California and Australia, exploring the links between government ideologies, service policies and structures and the material lives of women. I chose to explore these links by interviewing policy formulators and service administrators in Australia and California. In California, focusing on a city council funded child care subsidy agency provided access to the policy formulators for this program. I interviewed the Mayor of the City once and the City Child Care Coordinator twice. Within the Child Care Service Agency I interviewed the Agency Executive Director three times and the Child Care Subsidy Program Coordinator twice. I was also able to spend some time in the agency from March to June 1999, attending meetings and chatting informally with agency staff. Though this Agency is in many ways typical of subsidy delivery agencies in California, subsidy is also provided through Alternative Payment Programs and by subsidising slots in child care centres. To reflect these diverse service delivery models I interviewed two Centre Directors from directly subsidised child care facilities and an Alternative Payment Coordinator at a child care resource and referral agency.

Child care subsidy in Australia is administered by the Commonwealth Department of Families and Community Care. State and Local Governments are also involved in the child care sector and have responsibility for licensing child care centres, sponsoring family day care schemes and operating community based child care centres. I therefore interviewed the following policy formulators; the Assistant Director in Planning and Innovation, Child Care Branch in Canberra, a Child Care Officer at the State Office of Child Care and the Director of Community Services for the local City Council. Each person was interviewed once. At the service delivery level, I interviewed the Directors of five community based and private child care centres serving infants through to school age children.

The table below summarises the number and type of interviews undertaken for this research project.

Table 1: Number of Respondents and Interviews by Target Cohort and Location

Respondent Target Cohort	Australian Respondents	Californian Respondents	Total Respondents	Total Interviews*
Service Users	6	6	12	19
Service Administrators	5	5	10	13
Policy Makers	3	2	5	6
Totals	14	13	27	38

*Some respondents were interviewed more than once

Semi-Structured Interviews

The use of semi-structured interviews has become the principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of data about their lives (Bologh in Reinharz, 1992, p. 18).

The primary method I used to collect data in this study was the semi-structured interview, with an emphasis on in-depth exploration. Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander (1995) particularly, describe in-depth interviewing as a form of qualitative research and note that "... a primary focus of in-depth interviewing is to understand the significance of human experiences as described from that actor's perspective and interpreted by the researcher" (p. 12). Denzin (1989) also reminds us that the interview is a conversation, a conversation with a purpose. The in-depth interview allows the researcher to access and understand the social reality of another person. Additionally, May (1993) draws attention to the suitability of interviewing for gaining an understanding of women's experiences, challenging official accounts of women's behaviour and exploring the private realms of their lives such as child rearing; focusing on what women actually say they do rather than what experts say they do or should do. Also, Finch (quoted in May, 1993) comments that "... women interviewing other women is conducive to the easy flow of information" (p. 103) for a number of interesting reasons: women are used to intrusions into their private lives; interviews conducted in a woman's house give the interviewer the status of guest; and the structural position of women in society means that women's "... consignment to the privatised, domestic sphere ... makes it particularly likely that they will welcome the opportunity to talk to a sympathetic listener" (p. 103).

The feminist research perspective provides added support for the choice of interviewing as the primary data gathering technique "... because we wanted to hear what the women had to say in their own terms ... opening our ears to the voices and perspectives of women so that we might begin to hear the unheard and unimagined" (Belenky in Reinharz, 1992, p. 19). Further Reinharz (1992) promotes the use of semi-structured interviews employing open-ended questions that encourage description and discovery. Interviews offer the opportunity to have access to the respondent's own thoughts and words rather than those of the researcher. Additionally, in an unstructured interview situation, the realities of daily life are more likely to intrude on the interviewing process providing further information about particular life experiences.

Interviewing may involve more than one interview with each respondent and in the case of this research project two interviews were done, where possible, with each respondent. Initial interviews provided an opportunity for 'tell me what it is like' questions and provided an informal initial introduction (McMahon, 1993). Second interviews provided an opportunity "... to clarify and validate data from the initial interviews ... based on the themes found in the initial analysis of the data" (Sandelowski and Pollock, 1986, in Reinharz, 1992, p. 21). The themes of the first interview were summarised for the respondents and their comments used in the final analysis of information collected. The development of themes and finally theories through the interview process was consistent with the inductive approach used in qualitative research. Further, in the context of promoting discovery, questions were open ended. The non-directive questions were used as a guide only, prompting areas of discussion relevant to this research project. The emphasis was on flexibility rather than on standardisation and generalisation (May 1993). Denzin (1989), who defines three types of interviews, defines this particular interview type as the non-scheduled standardised interview.

Strategies used to encourage a successful interview process were a positive approach to the research process that engendered an atmosphere of trust and established me as the learner and recorder. I was therefore expected to listen and not to preach. I wanted to emphasise the positive nature of the research project, fostering an atmosphere of openness, mutual respect and trust. Further, trust was maintained during the interview process by my willingness to be open and use appropriate self-disclosure. I attempted to foster a safe atmosphere. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) note that "... friendship is not an essential condition for conducting research; being accepted and trusted is" (p. 106).

Interviews were conducted with three groups of respondents; women service users, service administrators and policy makers and were conducted in Australia and California. The

interviews were conducted in a variety of locations. Respondents chose the location most convenient for them. For policy makers and service administrators it was their work offices. Service users chose to either conduct the interviews in their own home or in my home or at my work office. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) advise the researcher when selecting places to conduct interviews: “Defer to your respondents’ needs because their willingness is primary, limited only by your capacity to conduct an interview in the place they suggest” (p. 73).

I constructed interview schedules appropriate to each category of respondent. For example, the interview schedule for women service users in California was not identical to the interview schedule for women service users in Australia (Appendix 6). The two subsidy provision systems are very different and the questions I asked reflected these differences. However, many areas I wished to cover were the same for both groups of women. Examples of these areas were; biographical information, type of child care used, the level of subsidy received, why they chose their current child care arrangements and how they accessed their child care subsidy. The interview schedules were not static documents, and they were not used rigorously and consistently for every interview. The schedules evolved as I reflected on the interviews; what had worked and had not worked in the interview, what unanticipated areas were explored by respondents, and respondents’ feedback about the interview process and content. The interviews with the Californian women were conducted before the interviews with the Australian women, and the initial Californian interviews informed the structure of the subsequent Australian interviews. Some of the themes that emerged in the Californian interviews and were explored in the Australian interviews were: stigma attached to subsidy use, impact of subsidy availability on employment decisions, and policy maker motivations for providing child care subsidies. My interview schedules were also revised based on feedback from supervisors, fellow students and child care agency staff. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) refer to this process as the repeating feedback loop where “... friends, informants and advisors give you the benefit of their insights and critiques. Such facilitators are the *sine qua non* of sensible question development, if not all research from inception to completion” (pp. 66-67).

Completing two interviews with the majority of service users was not only useful for the question development process, but also for obtaining feedback from respondents on my initial theorising, and to clarify and explore themes that arose in the first interview: “Multiple interviews are likely to be more accurate than single interviews because of the opportunity to ask additional questions and to get corrective feedback on previously obtained information” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 37). I also noticed that respondents had time to reflect further on questions from the first interview. Second interviews were more in-depth and reflective – trust had been established. The impact of ideology was specifically explored in the second interviews. This

was achieved by asking respondents directly what they thought about child care subsidy policy and the motivations of policy makers.

Interview schedules for service administrators and policy makers (Appendix 7) were less structured. These respondents were from diverse agency and policy contexts and their interview questions were related to their position and function within their organization. Multiple interviews were possible with administrators and policy makers of the Californian child care service agency. My engagement with the agency over a number of months provided an opportunity for the multiple interviews, and I also noted that the interviews became, over time, an in-depth and critical exploration of subsidy policy. I asked two types of questions; information gathering and questions about the values that informed the service or the policy. Again the experience in California influenced the direction of questioning in Australia.

Reflections on Issues of Power and Difference

I argued in the first section of this chapter that engagement with issues of power and difference is central to critical feminist research, and my own reflections on the interview process are informed by this assumption. In this study I have interviewed diverse groups of respondents. The respondents were diverse because of their country of origin and the category in which they were situated. They were also diverse because their class and ethnic backgrounds were different. The implications of this diversity and its impact on the interview process will be explored for two groups of respondents. One group of respondents were policy makers and the implications of interviewing these powerful individuals are worth consideration. The second group are the service user respondents in California. Three of the respondents were African-American and two were Hispanic. I am a white, middle-class and Australian woman. The impact of our diverse positioning on the interview process deserves particular attention.

Karen Duke (2002) recently provided an account of her own experiences of interviewing powerful people. She aimed to give an insight into the dilemmas and complexities of undertaking this type of research. It was the intention of my research project not only to gaze in one direction – towards the “... ‘objects’ of policy” but also “... to those who are in the powerful position of making policy” (p. 39). As previously noted gaining access to elites is not always easy. However access was easier because of my knowledge of the field and my personal connections to the child care ‘world’ in California and Australia (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Duke, 2002). Regarding the interview process, Duke (2002) recommends that the interviews be personalised – what are their views and perspectives on the issues? I found this to be a successful interview strategy with policy makers. I believed it allowed this group of respondents to position themselves outside of the organization as detached observers able to provide an

informed critique of child care subsidy services. Elite respondents were more relaxed and responsive in interviews when their employing organization was less bureaucratic. Respondents were also more open when my engagement with their workplace had been substantial and/or their co-worker had recommended I speak to them. I noted this particularly with the Child Care Coordinator with the City funding the Californian subsidy service. We had two very productive interviews, exploring subsidy policy in depth. This contrasted with my interview with the Child Care Director at the Department of Families and Community Services in Canberra where the respondent focused on broad policy application rather than reflecting critically on the policy: "...civil servants are socialised to present their absence from the process of policy making. They are clearly often decisively influential but are almost always unwilling or unable to account for such influence" (Ball, 1994, in Duke, 2002, p. 49).

Reflexivity is a basic tool for recognising the researcher's own social position and assumptions, that she herself is not the universal woman (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004). As I mentioned earlier in this section I am a white, professional woman from an Australian regional city. This is a position of privilege. In many ways I am positioned differently from the service user respondents in California. Three of these women were African-American and two were Hispanic. All respondents were on low incomes. What were the implications for the interviews of these points of difference? Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) provide useful comment on how such reflections should be framed: "Making claims across differences means taking the responsibility for interpreting the social existence of others, and so is normative, personal and political as well as epistemological" (pp. 105-106). I acknowledge that my identity and its invisible privilege have influenced my interpretation of the impact of difference on these interviews. I have reflected on our 'difference' from each other and I argue that though our life experiences are in many ways different there are also many similarities. We are woman, working mothers and we all use subsidised child care. Acknowledgement, however, of our similarities does not negate the impact of our differences. To focus only on our 'universal' womanhood would be to obscure the reality of complex and oppressive contexts.

Negotiating racist contexts emerged as a dominant theme in the interviews with the Californian Subsidy users. This is consistent with Collins' (1991) assertion that: "Afro-American women create and pass on self-definitions and self-valuations essential to coping with the simultaneity of oppression they experience" (p. 43). I had not anticipated this emphasis prior to the commencement of the interviews. This, I think, is a reflection of my own white race privilege – race is an invisible unacknowledged issue in my life and I therefore acted as though it was not an issue in the lives of other women. This was an ignorant oversight on my part. Black and Hispanic women are the two groups most likely to be receiving poverty level wages (Burnham

2002) and welfare policy in America "...is grounded fundamentally in the government sanctioned subordination of people of color" (p. 122). Given these realities I should not have been surprised that my respondents came from these groups of women or that their life experiences are highly racialised.

Analysing the Data

Bogdan and Biklen (1982) comment that analysis must commence during the research project. Without this ongoing process, the research lacks direction. Further, they urge the researcher to plan their research on the basis of their observations and discoveries. During the first interviews, as I listened to respondents' comments, I began the process of trying to understand what I was hearing; I was trying to make sense of it. This is the beginning of "... formulating a thematic understanding ... we are trying to determine what the themes are, the experiential structures that make up that experience" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 79). The desire to make meaning continued as I read the transcriptions from the first interviews, providing the direction and content for the second interviews. I wrote theoretical and methodological memos (Bogdan and Biklen, 1982) and field notes (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992) to myself about what I was learning. I identified areas I thought needed further exploration, ideas that needed a basis and understandings that lead in new directions.

McMahon (1993) comments: "In the writing of my text I based my interpretations on the written documents I produced" (p. 38). I also want to emphasise the reductive nature of my research project. Merriam (1988) notes; "... theory is grounded in the data and emerges from them ..." (p. 142). This was achieved by thinking and reflecting on the interview process and gathered information, using memos and field notes, and systematically classifying and coding the interview transcripts. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) define coding as "a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data ... By putting like minded pieces together into data clumps, we create an organisational framework" (p. 133). I manually coded my transcripts. At first there were many new codes, but as the process continued the new codes became less and many older codes were redefined and combined. Through this process I drew conclusions and understandings, made connections and identified patterns (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992). The interpretation of my research is derived from this process of reduction.

Trustworthiness and Generalisability

Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002) raise issues regarding the trustworthiness and generalisability of feminist knowledge production. They emphasise the importance of the methodological decision making process arguing that: "Feminists (like all other social researchers) have to

establish and defend their claims to knowledge of social life ..." (p. 2). Feminist knowledge must be believable. This is an issue not only for feminist researchers but is a dilemma for the social sciences in general, especially where qualitative methodologies are favoured.

The research design should promote trust in the research findings. Trustworthiness can be established through prolonged engagement with the field, peer debriefing and support, member checking, negative case analysis and providing an audit trail (Padgett, 1999; Glesne and Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study prolonged engagement with the field was achieved by interviewing each respondent (where possible) at least twice and prolonged agency observation and involvement. Peer debriefing and support occurred through participation in educational, peer and professional groups where it was possible to discuss and review all aspects of the research process. Member checking was negotiated as part of the process of gaining access. In California, for example, the Agency Director and I committed to a process of ongoing consultation and review. Negative case analysis involves testing "... theories by searching for falsifying evidence to refute them" (Padgett, 1999, p. 85). I have achieved this by interviewing respondents I believe would have different understandings than my core group of respondents. I left an audit trail by keeping a log book in which field notes and theoretical memos were recorded. I have provided sufficient descriptive data and thick description, in the respondents' biographies, to promote transferability. Dependability and confirmability were met by attention to an inquiry audit and audit trail (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The interviews were tape-recorded, process notes were kept, and data were analysed, coded and recorded in a codebook.

The generalisability of a study of this nature should be considered. The following authors have provided insight into this process. Traditionally, external validity has relied on internal validity (a closed system). Lincoln and Guba (1985) remind us however that "... naturalistic inquiry operates as an open system ... it can at best persuade" (p. 329). Further, Kincheloe and McLaren (1992) argue that validity is not guaranteed by correct method alone. The complex nature of generalisability is discussed by Stake (1994) and he notes the limited value of drawing comparisons; the complete story may be left untold. Stake (1994) emphasises the complexity of knowledge acquisition, focusing on the social construction of knowledge. Accordingly, trustworthiness and generalisability have been achieved, in this thesis, by detailing my research methods, consulting with respondents and providing biographical detail that allows the reader to come "... to know some things told, as if he or she had experienced them" (Stake, 1994, p. 240).

Conclusion

This chapter has described the research methods I used to understand the relationship between government ideology, service policies and the materialities of women's lives. I believe that this relationship could be best explored in a cross-national comparative context. I have defined cross-national comparative research and provided a rationale for undertaking this type of research. I have also focused on the methodological challenges of cross-national comparative, qualitative research. The challenge of methodological equivalence particularly shaped the construction of the research project. My methodology was feminist and qualitative, and my primary data gathering method was the semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interviews provided the women service users with an opportunity to describe how their lives were shaped by child care subsidy policies, and also how they responded to their particular policy contexts. Central to this chapter has been my focus on the issues and dilemmas of undertaking research within a critical feminist theoretical framework. I have particularly explored issues of power and difference. Critical feminist theory also informs the following literature review chapter, guiding the selection of the literature and the focus of the content.

PART TWO: THE LITERATURE

CHAPTER THREE: HISTORICALLY ROOTED AND INTEREST BOUND

... the need is decontextualised and recontextualised: on the one hand, it is represented in abstraction from its class, race, and gender specificity and from what ever oppositional meanings it may have acquired in the course of its politicisation; on the other hand, it is cast in terms that tacitly presuppose such entrenched, specific background institutions as wage labour, privatised childrearing, and their gender-based separation (Fraser, 1989, p. 174).

The focus of this chapter is the history of and the interests associated with child care subsidy policy in Australia and California. I have reviewed other relevant literature in the introduction to this thesis and also in the findings and discussion chapters.

In *Chapter One* I argued that the theoretical framework should inform all aspects of the research process, providing context for the framing of the topic, choosing the methodology and the analytical lens for interpretation of the data. Critical feminist theory, the theoretical context chosen for this thesis, also frames this literature review and has guided my selection and interpretation of the literature. The literature in this review has been explored in the following sections:

- Child Care Subsidy Policy in Australia: History and Interests
- Child Care Subsidy Policy in California: History and Interests

Held (1980) refers to Habermas's contention that knowledge is "... historically rooted and interest bound" (p. 254). Habermas argued that knowledge is constructed within conditions that are both material and historical. He also refers to the interest bound nature of knowledge construction as technical, practical and emancipatory unfolding in "... three media, work (instrumental action), interaction (language) and power (asymmetrical relations of constraint and dependency) ..." (p. 255). Feminists have argued that Habermas's theory failed to problematise adequately gender relationships (Meehan, 1995). Nevertheless his emphasis on historical context and recognition of power in knowledge construction provides a useful foundation for a critical analysis of policy. I have therefore focused my review of the literature on the history of and the interests associated with child care subsidy policy in Australia and in California. My intention is to explore the discourses that inform child care policy and "to investigate the political effects of a specific discourse on society (in this case women), along

with the institutional preconditions for this discourse to have come into existence in the first place” (Landes, 1995, p. 93).

Though it has been critical theorists that have drawn attention to the historical context and political construction of knowledge, it has been critical feminists who have extended theorising beyond the taken for granted boundaries of the public and private – problematizing “... the gender-determined power differential in the intimate sphere” (Meehan, 1995, p. 9). Child care policies are positioned at the nexus of the public and private spheres and often reflect the state’s ambiguity towards women and children (Bennett, 2001). Bennett (2001) argues further that the ambiguity inherent in child care policy is not only related to formal child care and women’s participation in the paid workforce but is “essentially to do with power relations between women and men” (p. 40). Bennett recommended Nancy Fraser’s politics of need interpretation as useful for making sense of the highly gendered and contested nature of child care and child care policy. I have therefore used Fraser’s work in this literature review as a framework for theorising about the emergence and construction of child care subsidy policy in both Australia and California.

In this literature review I have focused on the activities of women in shaping child care policy and specifically subsidy policy. I have explored how women have conceptualised child care need, seen the role of the state as child care provider and interacted with the state to achieve their goals. I have not provided a complete historical account of child care and child care policy. Rather I have chosen to focus on historical moments that I believe have created the context for current subsidy policies.

Child Care Subsidy Policy in Australia: History and Interests

Deborah Brennan has been a major contributor to child care policy literature in Australia for over twenty years. She has documented the history and politics of Australian child care from a critical, feminist perspective, linking her analysis to the activities of the Australian feminist movement. In her recent edition of *The Politics of Australian Child Care: From Philanthropy to Feminism and Beyond*, Brennan (1998) summarises the journey of Australian child care policy over the past 100 years: “... child care in Australia has moved from being a peripheral matter – of interest mainly to charitable groups comprised of upper-class women and a few progressive educationalists – to a high profile, vigorously debated political and public policy issue” (p. 1). In this first section I will begin by reviewing literature relevant to the beginning of this 100-year period.

The Woman Movement: Originality and Activism

McMahon (2003) draws our attention to the particular construction of history in Australia where the views of white, protestant males are privileged. He links this construction to the British imperialist project "... where only imported and preferably British practice is legitimate" (p. 84). This has had two consequences; that British history was transposed into the Australian context because it was assumed they were essentially the same and a failure to recognise the construction of Australian history as male centred and colonial: "The effect of this neglect has been to write social activists, especially women activists and religious women, out of the few social welfare histories ever written about Australia ..." (McMahon, 2003, p. 85). Of particular interest to me is not only the obscuring of women in Australian history, but also that these assumptions have led to the obscuring of the originality of their activism. McMahon argues and I agree that 19th Century feminist activists were indeed responding creatively to uniquely Australian conditions. Louisa Lawson's 1889 comment demonstrates this will to create new responses to social injustice:

In this comparatively young country we have not reached the condition of extremes in wealth and in poverty, but our methods, our rage for wealth, our whole social system being precisely a reproduction of the system of the old world, the result here must in the long run be just the same. Nothing but a change in the social conditions can save us from the dangers now threatening America and England. We must set ourselves to discover a system under which all who are willing to work can earn the necessaries of life (p. 52).

This statement is however more than an appeal for an original response to the Australian context – it shows us what the basis of that originality was. In this statement Lawson assumed that personal disadvantage is the result of an unjust social system rather than individual inadequacy. Her views were typical of first wave feminist activists who "...discerned structural disadvantage underlying individuals' troubles ... (and who) became increasingly influential and persuasive as the 1880s and the early years of the 1890s proceeded" (Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath and Quartly, 1994, p. 158). This connection was the essence of their originality: "Their attitudes to the poor were different to those derived from the English Poor Law and so were their attitudes to the franchise, suffrage and workers' rights" (McMahon, 2003, p. 92).

Workers rights and 'the woman question' were the two main areas of social activism in Australia during the period from the 1880s to 1910. The movements associated with these issues were defined by their recognition of structural disadvantage and also by believing that the state had a role in addressing disadvantage. This recognition of the state's potential was not solely based however on the link made between the personal and the political, but also arose

because of the particular context of European settlement in Australia. As a penal settlement state activities defined the early formation of the colony and: “Certainly, from the beginning of European settlement, there was an expectation that the state had a role to play in the provision of services to certain groups of people” (McMahon, 2003, p. 7). These assumptions about personal troubles and political solutions combined with the uniqueness of 19th Century Australia (that is not the same as Britain) provided the context for first wave Australian feminist activists and their work in the formation of early child care services.

In the 1880s Louisa Lawson established a women’s journal, *The Dawn*. This was published until 1905 and aimed to give Australian women a voice and to advocate for social reform (Lawson, 1990). Lawson, an articulate and progressive woman, was one of the first women to advocate publicly for the extension of state responsibility beyond the public education system to the welfare of underprivileged children: “The school (for poor children) derives no State aid. Why? we should ask. Are not these children as much entitled to it ... as those attending public schools?” (Lawson, 1888, in Lawson, 1990, p. 163). Lawson was seeking to extend state intervention beyond the public education system.

First wave feminist activists, of whom Louisa Lawson was a leader, were concerned with the economic vulnerability of women and its consequence for their material lives. They sought women’s independence rather than equality with men. Australian women in the nineteenth century had no basic political rights: “Denied the right to own property and the right to custody of their children, married women were also denied sovereignty over their bodies” (Lake, 1999, p. 19). Women’s vulnerability and dependence was linked to male conjugal rights and the burden of bearing large families. In Sydney in the 1890s a women’s refuge admitted 1169 women and 691 children in one month alone (Lake, 1999). Women and children’s economic dependence and consequent vulnerability to male violence was a potent issue for first wave feminists. “In Australia, feminists looked to the state to provide the conditions for women’s freedom – positive liberty – by protecting them from predatory violent men ...” (Lake, 1999, p. 56).

The focus of much first wave feminist activity was also women’s enfranchisement. Louisa Lawson, Dora Montefiore, Rose Scott and Maybanke Wolstenholme (later Anderson) were founding members of the Womanhood Suffrage League established in 1891 in NSW. Women’s status as mothers provided the moral basis for political rights claims and federally women gained the vote in 1902. However enfranchisement was not alone sufficient for women’s progress as Rose Scott warned, foreshadowing the advent of the maternalist welfare state:

Make no mistake! Accept no petty local, short sighted victory for women. Its possibilities are for all nations and for all time! And its birth at the beginning of the 20th century heralds to a world oppressed with poverty, suffering and sin, the advent of a mother-women's world with loving heart and sheltering arms... (Scott in Lake, 1999, p. 49)

In other words the interests of first wave feminists extended beyond women's suffrage – but nonetheless these diverse interests were always concerned with the welfare of women.

Early Child Care Movements

Australian first wave feminists were attracted to, as were American feminists, the kindergarten movement ideas of German philosopher Froebel (1782-1852) (Roberts, 1993; Brennan, 1998). He led the kindergarten movement, which its founders saw as providing the possibility of preventing future social ills by investing in early childhood education. Maybanke Anderson (then Wolstenholme) was inspired by the Free Kindergarten movement (from America and based upon the German kindergarten movement) and saw its possibilities for the welfare and education of children. However, she also recognised child care as an issue for working women: "... she (Anderson) asked the college laundry-maid who minded her young children, Maybanke was told they were left at home by themselves all day, and their mother was very worried about them" (Roberts, 1993, pp. 108-09). Anderson saw the Free Kindergarten movement as a way to address lack of child care for working mothers and as well as early childhood educational reform.

City life in Australia at the end of the 19th Century was harsh, especially for women who were often the sole providers of their families. The Australian economy was closely linked to the British economy and in the early 1890s entered into the worst depression (with Britain) in its history. Grimshaw et al. (1994) describes the situation for families: "Families were plunged into desperate straits when the sole breadwinner was thrown out of work... Men, women and children trapped in poverty in the cities and towns kept themselves from starvation by whatever strategies they could" (p. 175). In 1896 in the midst of this depression and its accompanying poverty and desperation Maybanke Anderson (then Wolstenholme) and Miss Liggins "...located premises for the first Free Kindergarten at 23 Charles Street, Woolloomooloo" (Roberts, 1993, p. 110). This first free kindergarten received part of its funding from the state (850 pounds per year). Maybanke Anderson commented at the time:

It seemed a suitable locality. On a doorstep near stood a woman who said she went out to work. 'Every day?' 'Yes'm, mostly every day. Either washin' or cleanin'. What do I do with the children? Well, yer see it's like this. The lidies where I go won't have no youngsters about the place, so I

'ave to leave 'em 'ere.' 'Outside?' 'Well, you know, I couldn't leave the door open, so I have to lock them out.' And there they were, three grubby mites, sitting on the narrow curb, with their feet in the gutter. They were among our first children. (in Roberts, 1993, p. 110).

Plate 1: First Free Kindergarten, Woolloomooloo, 1896.



“23 Charles Street, Woolloomooloo, the site of the first Free Kindergarten, which was established in 1896” (Roberts, 1993, p. 112).

This kindergarten and the others that followed could not begin to meet the demands for care. Their classes were overcrowded and the waiting lists were long but they had “... the true sweet kindergarten spirit that makes light of difficulties” (Anderson in Roberts, 1993, p. 110). Although not the first kindergartens in the colonies, those established under the Free Kindergarten movement were the first free kindergartens. By 1906 there were six free kindergartens in Sydney’s poorest areas and at the time of Maybanke Anderson’s death in 1927 there were 15.

The women responsible for establishing the free kindergartens believed that the state should not ignore the importance of infant education. They also challenged the authoritarian teaching strategies of the public education system by supporting unstructured learning: “It was allowing children to play, telling them stories and even letting them do as they liked” (Anderson in Roberts, 1993, p. 109). But most importantly it was about providing free kindergartens in poor neighbourhoods. The Free Kindergarten Union in New South Wales had three objectives:

To set forth Kindergarten Principles.
 To endeavour to get those principles into every school in NSW.
 To open Free Kindergartens wherever possible in poor neighbourhoods
 (Roberts, 1993, p. 110).

Brennan (1998) argued that bourgeois philanthropists supported and saw these kindergartens mainly as instruments of social reform: “Through kindergartens these upper and middle-class women aimed to reach the families who lived in the unsanitary, overcrowded and poverty-stricken suburbs of the major cities and imbue their children with middle-class values such as cleanliness, courtesy, industriousness and thrift” (p. 16). However, though at some level this may have been true, I would argue that this assumption simplifies a much more rich and complex story. Their activism was original and should be foregrounded because their activities provide insight into the roots of current child care subsidy policies. The engagement of feminists in early child care initiatives is of particular importance. First wave feminists, such as Lawson, Scott and Anderson, were active across a range of issues. They identified women’s disadvantage, advocated reform, and saw the state as implicated in the oppression of women and also as the vehicle for reform. Child care was viewed as a women’s issue and existed in a range of women’s issues with which they were concerned. They also saw women’s active engagement with the state and participation in its institutions as fundamental to achieving social justice: “Central to the creation of the maternalist welfare state was the appointment of women to a range of positions in the state... “ (Lake, 1999, p. 58).

Their originality was not in embracing the Free Kindergarten movement. Froebel had not originally envisioned kindergartens as free – his kindergartens had served the middle and upper classes that could afford to pay (Brennan, 1998). Free kindergartens were first established in America and it was Margaret Windeyer, an Australian suffragette, who when travelling to America and Canada to promote women’s enfranchisement was exposed to America’s Free Kindergarten movement. Professor Felix Adler had founded this movement (Roberts, 1993). Windeyer returned to Australia and her news of and excitement about the movement inspired Maybanke Wolstenholme and others to act. So their originality did not come from creating the Free Kindergarten movement but rather the way they conceptualised such a service in their own environment.

What was important and unique was that child care provision was seen as something that feminist activist women should engage with. The women had a vision that child care services would meet a range of needs: education of children; a support for working and non-working women; a way of addressing social issues such as poverty; and that child care centres were sites

for community engagement and social action: "... each kindergarten was a centre of social work for the homes surrounding it" (Roberts, 1993, pp. 113-114). They assumed that such services should be targeted to those in need, should be free and that the state should meet if not all at least part of the costs of service provision. I would argue that these women created the fundamentals that informed second wave feminists' conceptualisation of child care policy.

The focus of Australian first wave feminists on political solutions for personal troubles meant that taken for granted assumptions about the public and private spheres could no longer remain uncontested. This group of feminists saw what happened in the private sphere as public business: "This kind of analysis made nonsense of any political creed radically separating public and private life..." (Allen, 1994, p. 188). Nancy Fraser provides a framework for conceptualising the possible impact of linking the public and the private, and also of engaging with the state to meet needs previously defined as private. She maintains, "...when social movements succeed in politicising previously depoliticised needs, they enter the terrain of the social..." (Fraser, 1989, p. 175). This is potentially a problematic course to take. Fraser (1989) argues that the previously private need, in this case child care, will be vulnerable to being positioned by discourses unsympathetic to the vision of the social movement that originally politicised the need. Firstly, powerful interests will seek to redefine the original need to suit their own interests. Secondly, as they engage with the state, the members of the social movement will encounter the needs discourses of experts positioned within the state and its institutions. Conflicts arise, Fraser (1989) argues, "... among rival interpretations of social needs and among rival constructions of social identity" (p. 175). In redefining child care as public business the stage was set by first wave feminists for the child care policy contests that were to unfold in the 20th Century.

The Costs of Politicising Child Care

The first wave feminists had succeeded in moving child care from the private to the public sphere, engaging the state in the provision of a previously private need. Child care had now entered the 'terrain of the social' and was vulnerable to rival interpretations, particularly the needs discourses of experts. The kindergarten movement, despite its more radical roots, became the administrator of kindergartens. These kindergartens were the socialising agents of the middle class and their function was now to educate. John Smyth, a prominent educationalist of the time, saw kindergartens as the first step in the process of formal education and this educationalist support for "the 'education' function of the kindergarten ... [meant] forgetting the 'philanthropic' function of the kindergartens" (Edgar in Spearitt, 1974, p. 585). Though interestingly as the kindergartens settled into the educational role, parents using the kindergartens saw their function very differently. For many parents, kindergartens provided free

care for their children while they engaged in economic activity. Women had constructed their own child care need (that is child care enabled them to work out side of the home), challenging the more conservative educationalist representations of their need (Fraser, 1989).

The Kindergarten Union, founded in South Australia in 1905, was aware of this alternative construction and resisted it by restricting their service to children aged three and over and only offering half-day programs (Spearitt, 1979). Women working full time with younger children could no longer use the care. Alternative male centred educationalist discourses had repositioned and redefined the kindergartens to meet their own interests and needs. Some union members contested this repositioning and in 1914 the Victorian Kindergarten Union separated from the Education Department (Brennan, 1998). However, this action was not typical and kindergartens continued to become more aligned with the educationalist movement. In this position they were not seen by the state as threatening the bond between mother and child, and by the 1920s kindergartens were receiving higher levels of state funding than the more socially ambiguous Day Nurseries (Brennan, 1998).

Day Nurseries were "... an off-shoot of the Kindergarten movement" (Brennan, 1998, p. 26). The first Day Nursery association was established in Sydney in 1905 and later in Victoria in 1910. Kindergartens had become primarily educational institutions and Day Nurseries, established when kindergartens no longer served children under three, "... were specifically intended to meet the child care needs of women who had to undertake paid employment in order to support themselves and their children" (Brennan, 1998, pp. 26-27). In their first annual report the Sydney Day Nursery Association, established in 1905, set out their primary function:

It is (to enable these mothers) to keep their home and family together, and to supply their little ones the wholesome and loving care of which they are deprived ... that the Sydney Day Nursery has been formed. For the small sum of threepence per day children from 15 days to three years of age are taken charge of from seven o'clock in the morning until half-past six at night (Spearitt, 1979, p. 18).

The association viewed working mothers as an unfortunate reality for which they attempted to provide some reasonable standard of substitute care, assuming "... there can be no substitute for a mother" (Sydney Day Nursery Association in Spearitt, 1979, p. 19). Nurseries only catered for working mothers and required mothers to provide evidence of their employment thereby avoiding misuse of the service by non-working mothers. Nevertheless despite these conservative philosophies and rigid guidelines, the State was concerned that the Day Nurseries were undermining the mother-child bond. In 1926 the Royal Commission into Child

Endowment took an alternative stance and stated "... almost invariably the women who bring their children to the nurseries are good mothers" (Spearitt, 1979, p. 19). There was a danger, they argued, that mothers who did not have access to this care may be forced to relinquish their children to orphanages and institutions. Therefore, the nurseries were seen as "... preserving the bond between mother and child" (p. 20). The central theme between these two superficially conflicting views is the same – the sanctity of the mother child bond. Child care services had to negotiate these fraught contexts. They had to be seen as supporting socially disadvantaged mothers to strengthen their bonds with their infants. Yet they could not be seen to be encouraging middle-class women into the workforce and therefore undermining the bond between mother and child.

These tensions and ambiguities about motherhood became visible in the public policy arena in the early part of the 20th Century. First wave feminists had valorised "... caring work and motherhood as a basis for claims to honourable citizenship benefits" (Orloff, 1993, p. 322). Claims were made by women based upon the value to the state of their mothering activities. The state however viewed motherhood not as a valuable service or a basis for rights claims but rather as an institution that policies could shape to meet the needs and goals of the state. These tensions become apparent in the policy debate that followed the introduction in 1912 of a 5 pound Maternity allowance by Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher. This innovative benefit was also available to unmarried mothers and feminists at the time saw it as an "instalment of the mother's maternal rights" (Lake, 1999, p. 75). Critics of the benefit argued that it undermined marriage by rewarding single parenthood, and the selectivity of the benefit provision according to ethnicity pointed to an alternative agenda on the part of the government. As Grimshaw et al. (1994) comments:

Not all mothers were deemed eligible for the maternity allowance, however, and the categories of women excluded tell us much about the racial construction of the Australian nation... For white women, meanwhile, motherhood was lauded as their grandest vocation (pp. 206-207).

The state was using the maternity leave policy as a tool to support their White Australia policy. The policy debate around the maternity allowance extended into the 1930s when the allowance was reduced to 4 pounds and means tested. Through this experience feminists had learnt that they could effectively lobby the state for services to assist them in their roles of mothers, but they also became aware that such policies were likely to be co-opted by the state and used to construct 'motherhood' to serve the needs of the state. Also, focusing on services for mothers often precluded them from benefiting from rights in non-mothering related areas such as paid employment. So for "... forty years ... white women worked for their advancement within and also with difficulty against this powerful identity as mother" (Grimshaw et al., 1994, p. 208).

Before the 1930's Great Depression Kindergartens and Day Nurseries were receiving part of their funding from State Departments' of Public Instruction – the balance of funds were raised through philanthropic activities. However, with the severe deprivation associated with the Depression child care was seen as a site for improving the health of children. Children could be fed and medically monitored at child care centres. This possibility was recognised by the National Health and Medical Council and “In 1938 the Commonwealth Department of Health decided to set up Demonstration Centres in each of the six state capital cities for the ‘care, instruction, physical growth and nutrition’ of young children” (Spearitt, 1979, p. 22). These centres were known as the Lady Gowrie Centres. In this case child care was constructed as a site for providing medical services and closely linked with the scientific motherhood movement that flourished at the time. These expert discourses were created and monitored by male medical professionals. Truby King, an infant welfare expert declared at the time: “The problem of right or wrong feeding and nutrition in early infancy determines the health and fitness of the being throughout life and largely determines the fate of the race” (in Grimshaw et al., 1994, p. 228).

A second set of interests impacted on child care provision during this period. In the Great Depression women working in the paid labour force were seen to be taking jobs from men. This hostility towards working women grew and was associated with the continued “... glorification of marriage and maternity” (Damousi, 1992, p. 371). The link between masculinity and labour force participation was strengthened and “... anti-feminism was rampant in this climate” (p. 371). Nevertheless this did not mean that feminist women were not active and engaged with a range of issues including child care. Labor women such as Muriel Heagney agitated in this conservative context for the protection of working women's rights and by campaigning for equal pay.

The Commonwealth Department of Health continued to fund child care services through the war years. Women's participation in the workforce nearly doubled from 77,000 in 1939 to 155,000 in 1943 (Spearitt, 1979). Pressure from the Australian Association for Pre-School Child Development and the Federal Labor Women's Council meant that in 1943 “... the Federal Labor Minister for Health announced that crèches for children of mothers engaged in war work would be established in all states, and that the existing pre-school organizations would be accepted and subsidized by the Government” (Spearitt, 1979, p. 23). Brennan (1998) notes that this was the first time the Commonwealth Government had been under this level of pressure to fund child care for working women. It was a recognition by the state that women had a role in the paid workforce and led the government to consider what “... could be done to ensure that women's ‘domestic responsibilities’ did not conflict with their economic activity” (Davis, 1987, p. 88). Saunders and Boulton (1992) also discuss this linking by the state of women's work

performance and participation and their family responsibilities, and they provide a quote from a woman describing her experiences in 1942:

But there was nothing to be done about child care. The Sydney Day Nursery had a few centres in that period, but the attitude then was that they were for women who were forced to go to work because they were deserted wives, or widows, or had a no-good drunken husband. It was more regarded as a charity than you might want to be part of the work-force, or even have a rest from your children (p. 389).

Woman's organizations sought to address limited child care availability and the stigma attached to child care use. A national women's conference was held in Sydney in 1943, and the 200 delegates that attended represented 90 women's organizations from across Australia. They recommended that the Commonwealth Government establish a National Children's Bureau and fund a network of child care centres run by state and local governments (Davis, 1987). Davis comments that there was no "... mention of the needs of working women: the resolutions draw on the themes of child development and population growth ... This most probably reflects a prudent political pragmatism" (p. 92). The women's groups attending this conference had constructed child care to meet current state need rather than overtly linking child care services to the needs of women.

Debate continued around the role of government and not all women's organizations agreed with a state funded national child care strategy. The National Council of Women who had refused to attend the 1943 conference had previously "... opposed a centralised Federal child care scheme on the grounds that it 'took away all the initiative from the individual'" (Davis, 1987, p 92). Nevertheless the reality was that in war time the need for women's labour meant that the Commonwealth had to engage with child care. Initial resistance from the Commonwealth Government to fund child care was overcome by pressure from the Department of Labour and National Service. So at the beginning of 1943 the Minister of Health approached the; "Treasurer for the sum of 25,000 pounds not ... to fund a scheme of Commonwealth child care centres, but to encourage the existing voluntary organizations to extend their facilities..." (Davis, 1987, p. 92). This level of funding proved totally inadequate to meet the level of need and was terminated at the end of the war when mothers were encouraged by the state to leave the paid work force.

In this period of Australia's history child care had moved from the private to the public sphere, becoming a site used to support the agendas of the state and the discourses of experts. The state used child care funding as a mechanism for controlling women's participation in the paid labour

force. Such participation was discouraged during the 1930's Depression and encouraged during the Second World War. Male educational, medical and child rearing experts saw child care facilities as sites to promote their ideas and to shape mothering practice according to the needs of their particular discourses. Feminists also continued to be active through this period, though less visible as a social movement. Their post suffrage concerns had centred on issues of women's citizenship, and rights claims were linked to encouraging the state to recognise the valuable contribution of mothers, and to structure social provision accordingly. Orloff (1993) argues that these maternalist strategies were marginalised by the paternalist policies of the state, which reinforced the family wage system: "These early social policy initiatives institutionalised aspects of gender relations such as the family wage and the consignment of domestic and caring work to women... They provided the context of constraints and opportunities within which later developments occurred..." (Orloff, 1993, p 323).

The support by government for policies concerned with women's caring responsibilities did not mean that its relationship with women and their role as mothers was not without problems. The state's inconsistent approach to child care policy during this period reflects their ambiguous and often hostile approach to women and motherhood. Child care policies were not only linked to women's labour force participation but also to the construction of a particular type of motherhood. Women's primary responsibility for parenting was assumed and the nation building role of motherhood emphasised. However this emphasis was on the construction of a particular type of nation – the creation of a white nation consistent with the goals of the White Australia policy. White women were seen as the nurturers of a white Australia. Non-party feminists recognised the racism implicit in policies that supported white mothers only. Vida Goldstein made the following comment in 1912 on the maternity allowance (available only to white women): "It is the White Australia policy gone mad. Maternity is maternity whatever the race..." (in Lake, 1999, p. 76).

At the end of the Second World War the state's opportunistic and inconsistent relationship with formal child care was entrenched. The oppositional meanings apparent in first wave feminist construction of child care services had been lost in the "... course of its politicisation" (Fraser, 1989, p. 174). But women's groups had learnt valuable political lessons. They had learnt engaging with the state to meet child care needs came at great ideological cost.

I have argued in the first section of this chapter that the early conceptualisations of child care by Australian first wave feminists were unique. They saw child care as a women's issue and as a personal trouble requiring a political solution. Taken for granted assumptions about the public and private spheres were challenged and child care was moved through this process of

politicisation to the 'terrain of the social', with unlooked for consequences. During the first half of the twentieth century the state and various experts used child care, now firmly positioned in the public as well as the private sphere, as a site for the expression of patriarchal power. Feminists learnt important lessons during this period about the cost of engaging with the state and the seeds of feminist antagonism towards state control of child care were sown. Feminists now conceptualised the state as an instrument of patriarchy – the state's patriarchal nature had been revealed. The state had also learnt that child care policy could be used to manipulate and control women. Eva Cox summarised these lessons in 1983: "Most intervention has been aimed at preventing or limiting access to child care services, thus placing restrictions on women's opportunities" (pp. 186-187).

Women's Liberation, Child Care and the State

When working class women are fighting to create non-sexist communal childcare, then our feminist revolution will be on its way (Curthoys, 1976, p. 5).

In the following two sections I examine the issues that I believe provide further context for the child care subsidy policies of the second half of the 20th Century. In the first section I focus on the rise of women's liberation, feminist theorising about the oppressive nature of mothering and the family, the positioning of child care as fundamental to women's liberation and the creation of a community child care movement that rejected state and educationalist control. In the second section I have briefly explored the then new phenomenon of feminists working within the state. In the final section I have provided a history of child care subsidy policy in a context of feminist policy activism from within the state.

Women's Liberation

In the 1960s and the early 1970s the women's liberation movement emerged as a powerful social force. The movement at this time, influenced by earlier experience, adopted a particular position about the role of child care and also the role of the state in the provision of child care. Deborah Brennan (1998) acknowledges the reconceptualisation of child care in the early stages of the women's liberation movement: "With the resurgence of the women's movement at the end of the 1960s feminists began to articulate a new approach to child care" (p. 83). In her 1976 *Refractory Girl* article Ann Curthoys positioned child care as central to the feminist agenda and the liberation of women. Curthoys seminal article was based on a paper presented in 1975 at an anarchist feminist conference, and it provides an insight into the relationship between feminism and child care. Curthoys (1976) linked women's oppression with child caring responsibilities and argued that women's achievements in other areas amounted to nothing without the sharing

of child care responsibilities between men and women: “Only if the pattern of child care is completely changed can the mass of women be free” (p. 3). Child care is not precisely defined in this article, and Curthoys (1976) argues that she neither means just equality of caring between the sexes or a state funded child care model but rather “... the finding of new systems of child care altogether, where there is communal care of various kinds...” (p. 3). This is a feminist vision of child care rooted in community rather than the state and is typical of responses in the 1970s.

Central also to second wave feminist theorising was the conceptualisation of motherhood as oppressive. This was a view of mothering that was very different to the position held by first wave feminists who saw their roles as mothers as the basis for citizenship rights claims. In 1979 Deagan’s comment summarised the alternative view of many in the women’s liberation movement:

Among the essential pre-conditions for the maintenance of patriarchal power are the continued supply of cheap, efficient, child raising – commonly known as ‘mothering’ and the division of women against each other, in a way which prevents recognition either of a common enemy or the strength which lies in unity (p. 6).

Curthoys (1976) argued further “... the present family structure is so oppressive to women that the best personal solution is not to have children” (p. 4). However she acknowledged the dangers of this position – the rise of a group of childless women who do not engage with issues related to child care. This could be particularly problematic because she saw child care as an essential solution to the oppression of motherhood and family. Her vision was of a strong communal child care movement in which the public and private caring for children is done by both men and women; ‘... a strong child care movement, as a subsidiary or offshoot of the women’s movement, with revolutionary aims, devoted to the breakdown of existing work patterns and the establishment of communal child care” (Curthoys, 1976, p. 5).

Winsome McCaughey (1972), founder of Community Child Care, Victoria linked the concept of motherhood as oppressive to the goals of the community child care movement. In referring to the Community Controlled Child Care Action Group, McCaughey (1972) noted that:

The group denies the automatic assumption that as all women have the biological capacity to produce children, they thereby all have the same ability, knowledge, temperament or desire to be good mothers. It is unreasonable to expect a women to sacrifice the most vigorous and creative years of her life to full time mothering, to the exclusion of most of her other abilities and interests (p. 5).

McCaughey (1972) continues by noting that the group assumes that it is not in the best interests of small children to be cared for by their mother alone in isolated family homes. She argues therefore that children are the responsibility of the entire community and not just mothers providing total care. This assumption of community responsibility led to the view that governments had a responsibility to provide child care for children before they entered formal schooling. The Community Controlled Child Care Action Group advocated the establishment of widely available free child care for the use of parents regardless of the reasons for that use. The Group also assumed this care would be controlled and planned from within its local community and that parents and staff would work together in the administration of child care programs. Of particular relevance to this thesis was the group's vision of how community child care should be funded:

The cost of this project would need to be shared between Commonwealth, State and Municipal bodies.

Suggested Distribution:

- a. Federal: Responsible for research and building costs for child care facilities and for training courses.
 - b. State: Responsible for staff and salary costs of training colleges and child centres.
 - c. Municipal: Responsible for Land and Maintenance costs
- (McCaughy, 1972, p. 6).

This was a unique funding recommendation that meant that child care funds were not entirely linked to one level of government. Though McCaughy does not mention the reason for promoting this diverse funding base it may have been an attempt to weaken the policy control associated with the role of the primary service funder.

The community child care movement that blossomed at this time was also "... grounded in a variant of feminism which placed a high value on self-help activities and opposed the 'professionalisation' of child care" (Brennan, 1998, p. 84). I assume that this may have been in part a reaction to the expert discourses that had previously come to dominate child care services. These were the male educationalists and the medical and scientific mothering experts mentioned in the previous section. The community child care movement offered an opportunity for child care to be constructed in a way that was separate from the state and the experts.

Deagan's (1978) discussion in *Refractory Girl* broadened my conception of Curthoy's position and challenged the anti-educationalist view of the early community child care movement. Deagan discusses the position of the women's movement on child care noting that the

movement is diverse and positions on child care are contested within the movement. Given this limitation however she says:

... the movement is, in general, opposed to professionalism, particularly in child care ... The argument is that professionalism mystifies skills and techniques that are, or should be, everyone's property, and it is this which makes child care expensive, and so beyond the reach of most families. From this it is argued that the children of any community are the responsibility of the whole community and should be cared for accordingly (Deagan, 1978, p. 5).

Deagan (1978) saw four problems with this position. Initially she maintained that parents are not necessarily good at providing care for their children and that women involved in co-operative child care could not pursue full time work opportunities. Deagan also argued that co-operative child care reinforces women's position as unpaid carers and assumes that the skills needed for caring for one's own children are the same as for caring for groups of children. Deagan's concerns were about the quality of care children received in formal child care settings. She challenged feminist rejection of the educationalist model of care, arguing that care and education are inseparable concepts: "... the provision of one presupposes the provision of the other" (p. 6). So if you presuppose that when care happens education also happens then the debate is not about whether education and child care can co-exist but rather the type of education provided within the child care setting. The following comment from a child care centre Director in 1979 highlights this concern about the type of education. The centre employed mothercraft nurses or registered nurses (left over from the scientific mothering movement). The Director comments on this arrangement: "That has always seemed a bit funny to me because although they seem to know about the physical care of the children they don't really seem to have much conception of how a child learns and grows..." (Levy, 1979, p.10).

Feminists and the State

This conception of child care as publicly funded and also community controlled (Brennan, 1998) was one aspect of a wider debate that arose at the time about whether feminists should or should not engage with the state. In the early 1970s many feminists argued that working within the state was unacceptable: "This was an era when members of Women's Liberation looked forward to levelling the patriarchal fortress, not entering it" (Sawer, 1993, p. 96). Sawer (2003) characterises these anti-state attitudes of the early second wave feminists as "... more characteristic of US than Australian liberalism" (p. 106). Once this engagement with US feminist theory had subsided there was a re-engagement with "... the kind of feminist advocacy conducted since the 1880s" (Sawer, 2003, p.106). This return to a more positive engagement

with the state coincided with the election of progressive Labor governments at the state and federal levels in Australia in the 1970s.

In 1972 the Australian Labor Party was elected to govern federally and Elizabeth Reid was appointed as Women's Advisor to the Prime Minister Gough Whitlam: "Reid was an academic feminist, a philosopher teaching at the Australian National University ... involved for years in campaigning for abortion rights, decriminalisation of homosexuality, and rape law reform, using her philosophical training to frame arguments" (Eisenstein, 1996, p. 19). The Labor Government was persuaded to create this position through the direct influence of the women's movement based upon the argument that it was the most significant social movement of the time (Eisenstein, 1996). Reid instituted an original feminist approach to policy making that assumed "...no government activity is gender neutral and therefore all policy proposals must be analysed for gender implications and all Cabinet submissions monitored for gender impact" (Sawer, 1993, p. 97). Women's groups continued to be concerned with feminists entering the power structures, though pragmatic feminists of the time stressed, "... the need for a constructive relationship, without name calling, between 'movement women' within government and without" (Sawer, 1993, p. 97).

Yeatman (1990) identified two dilemmas faced by feminists working within the bureaucracy, known as femocrats. Sawer (2003) defined femocrats as feminists "... appointed to government with a mandate to improve policy outcomes for women..." (p. 111). Firstly, Yeatman (1990) identified the difficulty of pursuing feminist goals within organizations that were constructed by men to benefit and sustain patriarchy. Secondly, she questioned their attempts to represent to government the needs of all women when they were representatives of a small group of women who were privileged by their labour market status. Notwithstanding their good intentions there is, argues Yeatman (1990), "... an inevitable tendency in the development of policies and programs to reproduce the dualism that inheres in the modern gender division of labour..." (p. 81). So their feminism was expressed by the support of policies which privilege those participating in the labour force; "... but women less privileged, outside the primary labour market ... get something less like self-determination and much more like the old patriarchal ideologies of protection for themselves and their children" (p. 81).

The reality was that feminist activism was not positioned within one site alone. Feminist women lobbied for reforms to child care policy from within the government bureaucracy and also from outside of the state via lobby groups such as the Women's Electoral Lobby and Community Child Care. Referring to Labor Women who affected child care policy change at the 1973 Australian Labor Party Conference Brennan (1998a) comments: "Crucially, they were engaged

in strategic action inside the relevant policy-making process (in this case the Labor Party Conference) even though officially positioned as outsiders” (p. 88).

Louise Chappell (2002) theorises about feminist engagement with the state and the impact of this engagement on the formulation of child care subsidy policies. According to Chappell (2002): “Feminist activists can not avoid the state” (p. 3). Women had in reality engaged with the state to meet various needs whilst also conceptualising the state as patriarchal and inherently oppressive to women. Chappell (2002) argues that conceptualising feminist engagement with the state should move beyond whether feminists should or should not engage with the state. Instead the focus should be on “... what effect political institutions have on shaping feminist claims (and in turn, what effect these claims have on the nature of the institutions?)” (p. 3). The way state institutions are constructed has in many ways shaped feminist responses to the state and the way they use the state to meet their needs/goals. I will assume therefore when examining child care policy that the particular constructions of Australian institutions have shaped feminist responses to child care policy formulation and also that these responses have influenced the development of the institutions that generate policy. These assumptions provide a much richer context for considering the evolution of subsidy policy.

The Development of Child Care Subsidy Policy in Australia

Eva Cox’s (1983) summary of Australian child care policy issues post World War II provides additional context for the last 30 years of child care subsidy policy development. In the 1950s and 1960s middle-class women did not have access to Day Nurseries that tended to be located in low-income areas and were still associated with charity provision for poor women. Many of these women were searching for alternatives and they began to establish and administer kindergartens to provide quality pre-school education for their children: “By 1973, there were over 2000 pre-school/kindergartens in Australia, compared with fewer than 100 in 1939” (Cox, 1983, p. 193). Financing mechanisms and levels of funding for these child care programs varied greatly. Some facilities received state funds from State Health Departments and others through State Education Departments. Also, the growth of early childhood education programs during the 1950s and 1960s strengthened the position of pre-school/educationalist lobby groups.

At the same time many women began to enter the labour force and the pressure for work related child care services increased. In 1965, Mr Bury (then Minister for Labour and National Service) commented at the Women at Work Conference in Melbourne: “The truth is we can only achieve the potential growth in our economy by introducing more and more women into the workforce” (McCaughy, 1972, p. 4). Subsequently, a Women’s Bureau was established within the Department of Labour and National Service and in 1969 they produced data on the number of

working mothers responsible for preschool aged children who used formal child care arrangements. In Victoria 59,000 mostly mothers were responsible for 72,000 preschool children "... but only 4,500 of the children were in registered, supervised childcare centres, and of these only 701 were in government subsidized day nurseries" (McCaughey, 1972, p. 4). In May 1969 the Australian Bureau of Statistics undertook the first national survey on Australian child care need: "This survey estimated that 91,000 women with children not yet at school would have sought paid work if suitable child care had been available..." (Cox, 1983, p. 186).

From the early 1970s there was a dramatic increase in Federal Government child care policy initiatives. This occurred for the following reasons (explored in the previous sections); a post-war increase in women's labour force participation, the Government's recognition of the role of women in achieving sustained economic growth, the involvement of feminists in the bureaucracy and the increased influence of child care lobby groups. I have chosen to summarise these events in a series of Tables throughout the rest of this section. These tables highlight significant political events and the impact of these events on child care subsidy policy. I have begun with the passing of the Child Care Act in 1972 by the conservative Liberal/Country Party Coalition Government.

Table 2: Significant Political Events and Child Care Subsidy Policy Impact by Year: 1972 – 1974

Year	Significant Political Events	Child Care Subsidy Policy Impact
1972	Liberal Country Coalition Government passed the Child Care Act	Made Commonwealth funds available for capital and recurrent funding of child care facilities based on submissions by community groups. Women from families where both parents were working were excluded from government subsidised facilities.
1972	Australian Labor Party elected to government	Priority of newly elected government was universal pre-school education as a mechanism for fighting poverty.
1973	Australian Labor Party National Conference	Labor women succeed in changing ALP child care policy. “Their resolution stated that: a comprehensive child care service on a priority needs basis. This service should be government sponsored and community based. The aim of the service would be to provide community support for women to participate more fully in society” (Brennan, 1998, p. 83).
1974	Care and Education of Young Children Report (Fry Report) published by Australian Pre-Schools Committee	Advocated for pre-schools to be more heavily subsidised than full day child care facilities. Recommendations rejected by Labor government.
1974	Social Welfare Commission Report, Project Care	Prime Minister Whitlam uses recommendations in election campaign speech committing a Labor government to free pre-school care and “... subsidised child care with parents contributing according to their means” (Brennan, 1998, p. 88) and promised \$130 million to be spent on child care per year. Whitlam acknowledges this policy assisted the party’s re-election.
1974	Federal Government mini-budget	Child care funding reduced to \$34 million – final allocation after intense lobbying from feminist and community groups \$75 million.
1974	Labor announced the establishment of a Children’s Commission	Care and education of children no longer separate and high quality care to be made available to all children who need it. This committed the government to universal child care provision that “was flexible, community based and integrated” (Brennan, 1998, p. 90). Child care now viewed as the responsibility of the federal government and a distinct social policy area.

Source: Brennan, 1998

In the last 30 years child care policy, though now accepted as a commonwealth responsibility, was subject to pressure from groups representing diverse interests. The pre-school (educationalists) lobby groups and feminist supported community based groups became particularly active in the 1960s and early 1970s. In the 1970s conservative pro-family groups and the private child care lobby also became influential. The resilience of child care services at this time to the more negative pressures from conservative groups depended on advocacy and support from feminists within the bureaucracy and also sympathetic female members of parliament from both major political parties. Alliances were formed where previously there had been division. These alliances provided lobbying strength but there were

also costs for feminist child care advocates. Michel (2002) argues that because the goals of feminism are often politically unpalatable feminists have had to "... remain in the shadows while other social actors lobby for child care on behalf of interests that are not explicitly feminist..." (p. 333). Often the results of these alliances are less than ideal. For example, forming an alliance with the educationalists meant that feminists had to "... cloak their own support for child care in the rhetoric of another interest group (early childhood education ... being the most common)" (Michel, 2002, p. 334). There are a number of consequences that flow from these types of alliances. Firstly, the needs of only a small group of women may be met; secondly, feminist goals for the liberation of women are sacrificed and thirdly, it may lead to the institutionalising of expert discourses within the state. This, argues Fraser (1997), means that the expert discourses "... tend to become normalising, aimed at 'reforming' or more often stigmatising 'deviancy'" (p. 174). This result is far removed from the goals of the women's liberation supported community child care movement that valued the skills of mothers and resisted the professionalisation of child care.

Table 3: Significant Political Events And Child Care Subsidy Policy Impact By Year: 1975 – 1982

Year	Significant Political Events	Child Care Subsidy Policy Impact
1975	Conservative Liberal and National/Country Party Coalition elected	Child care reconceptualized as a private matter with minimum government intervention. The proposed Children's Commission not established.
1976	Office of Child Care created within the Department of Social Security	Emphasised child care for needy families rather than pre-school for privileged groups. Funding for pre-schools now devolved to the states and accessible via non-indexed block grants. This represented a separation between care and education.
1979	Formation of the Australian Early Childhood Association	Established to represent the needs of <u>all</u> early childhood services and to address diminishing government funding for all types of services.
1979	Review of Children's Services Program	Recommended direct subsidies to parents to assist with child care costs. This recommendation not taken up.
1980	Formation of the Australian Family Association	Resisted state supported child care services and advocated a return of women's 'traditional' role as primary care giver.
1981	The Spender Report	Recommended that the Commonwealth continue to be responsible for funding child care services and encouraged subsidies to be linked to enrolment levels rather than the award wage levels of staff. Also recommended that child care fees be means tested and further that the users of private child care be subsidised (consistent with private child care lobbying).
1982	Formation of the National Association of Community Based Children's Services	Resisted subsidies to users of private child care centres.

Source: Brennan, 1998

The Federal Government recognised that high quality care was expensive and that there were few families that could afford the real costs of such care. Child care subsidies were the key to making child care affordable. Prior to 1983 subsidies were entirely operational and available only to community based centres. Community groups were provided funding on the basis of successful submission. This system "... benefited those with the most time, resources and knowledge of lobbying and submission writing techniques, while it systematically disadvantaged those that were less well off" (Brennan, 1998, p. 115). However the operational subsidies received by child care centres failed to meet even the wage costs of centre staff. Centre management committees were faced with raising additional funds through parent fees and fund raising activities, and the cost of care for parents was equivalent to the fees of expensive private schools. Nevertheless operational subsidies, though inadequate and less than perfectly administered, did provide evidence of the Commonwealth's commitment to community based child care and providing funding (capital and operational) to encourage child care supply.

In the 1970s union interest in child care began to increase. Unions were concerned about the rights of child care workers and also services that supported workers' successful participation in the workforce. This interest occurred in the context of increasing women's labour force participation. Also, at this time, government began to view labour force participation for women as an effective way to avoid poverty – especially for the growing numbers of single mothers. Government saw child care as a mechanism for supporting women's transition into the labour force. With the Australian Council of Trade Unions' (ACTU) commitment to child care and the ratification of the International Labour Organization Convention 156, child care became an employment issue and the earlier feminist construction of child care as fundamental to the liberation of women virtually disappeared from the child care policy debate:

The aspirations of feminist and community child care advocates for a national system of non-profit services based around the needs of children and their families receded. Child care has expanded rapidly but has become a narrowly focused instrument of economic and labour force policies (Brennan, 1998, p. 187).

Table 4: Significant Political Events and Child Care Subsidy Policy Impact by Year: 1983 – 1988

Year	Significant Political Events	Child Care Subsidy Policy Impact
1983	Australian Labor Party elected	Detailed child care policy to commonwealth government funding and service expansion as part of the social wage. Child care also repositioned and aligned with “labour market strategies and social security reform” (Brennan, 1998, p. 164).
1983	Special Economic Needs Subsidy introduced	Provided child care fee assistance to low income parents using community based services. Subsidy was now no longer only operational.
1984	Office of Child Care moved from the Department of Social Security to the newly created Department of Community Services	Child care now more likely to be viewed as a general social service rather than a service for the ‘needy’.
1984	The Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) adopted an action program for women workers	Improved child care provision called for.
1985	New child care funding arrangements announced by federal government	The link between operational subsidies and award wages was broken and subsidy calculated on number of children served. Parent subsidy eligibility extended to parents on higher levels of income.
1985	Government repealed section 11 of Child Care Act	Centres were no longer required to employ some trained staff.
1987	Minister for Community Services and Health commissioned the Centre for Economic Policy Research to examine the economic issues related to publicly funded child care	The Centre found publicly funded child care contributed to social equality and also provided a positive economic benefit for the federal government. Economic benefit was used to support and extend publicly funded child care.
1988	Adoption of the National Child Care Strategy	Reaffirmed the values of diverse subsidy mechanisms – operational and fee relief to parents. Also committed the government to establishing 30,000 new child care places over a four-year period; the majority in out-of-school hours care.

Source: Brennan, 1998

In the 1980s policy decisions based on economic rationalist goals became paramount. Initially progressive ministers, such as Neal Blewitt, were able to use economic arguments to support publicly funded child care. Neal Blewitt commissioned a study from the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CPEP) that detailed the economic benefits of publicly funded child care. The National Child Care Strategy that followed used this economic data to ensure that operational and fee relief subsidies were maintained, despite considerable pressure within the government to change subsidy funding to a voucher only system. Under this strategy child care places were increased in community based centres, family day care, occasional care and out-of-school care services. Child care advocates supported these policies. However, the cost cutting agenda of the Labor Government soon reasserted itself, and less expensive options to meet child care need

were explored. Family day care and commercial child care centres were now viewed as potentially more 'cost effective' ways to meet increasing child care demand. Family day care organizations reacted negatively to this, believing limited government funding would undermine their struggle for improved wages and conditions: "In the context of attempts by caregivers to improve their industrial conditions and gain recognition for the quality of service they offered, the government's move was seen as insulting" (Brennan, 1998, p. 189).

The increasingly powerful commercial child care sector lobbied the government to extend fee relief to the users of their centres. The pressure from this lobby group and also the pressure to reduce government spending on child care led to an announcement in the 1990 election campaign, that if re-elected, the Labor Government would extend subsidies to parents using commercial child care centres. The Labor Government was returned to power and this policy was implemented, with the addition of some quality assurance mechanisms. These were to be implemented in 1994 and required long day care centres to be accredited if the parents using the centre were to be eligible for subsidy payments.

In 1997 the newly elected Liberal/National Coalition Government continued the process of shifting subsidies to parents. In July 1997 they withdrew operational funding from community based centres (and out-of-school hours care in 1998) and replaced fee relief and the child care cash rebate with a single subsidy payment to parents. This subsidy, known as the Child Care Benefit, could be used to assist with the cost of child care in registered formal and informal child care arrangements. Brennan (1998) saw this change as a "... move away from supply-side subsidies (such as capital and operational assistance to service providers) and towards encouraging competition between commercial and non-profit providers by subsidising consumer demand" (p. 213). And the reality is that under this subsidy policy the private for profit child care sector has grown enormously. These changes were cloaked in the neo-liberal rhetoric of consumerism and choice. Mothers were now genderless child care consumers who, with the tool of child care subsidy, could choose the child care arrangement that best met their 'individual' need.

Table 5: Significant Political Events And Child Care Subsidy Policy Impact By Year: 1990 – 1997

Year	Significant Political Events	Child Care Subsidy Policy Impact
1990	Ratification of International Labour Organization Convention 156, 'Equal Opportunities and Equal Treatment for Men and Women Workers: Workers with Family Responsibilities'	Committed the government to providing a range of worker support services including child care.
1991		Government extended fee relief availability from community based service users to users of private sector child care.
1991	Interim National Accreditation Council formed	Recommended voluntary accreditation and that quality assurance be linked to eligibility for subsidy (fee relief).
1994	Child care cash rebate	An additional non-means tested subsidy available to all parents using registered child care. Rebate was provided on the basis that child care was a legitimate business expense.
1996	Economic Planning and Advisory Commission	Recommended that all current subsidies – operational fee relief, cash rebate and fringe benefits tax exemption for employers – be replaced by a child care benefit that was means tested and targeted to support work related child care.
1997	Newly elected (1996) Liberal/National Coalition Government first budget	Operational subsidies withdrawn for long day care centres. And in July 1998 operational subsidies withdrawn from out-of-school hours care. Child Care Benefit introduced – replacing fee relief and cash rebate.

Source: Brennan, 1998

Significant changes in child care subsidy policies have occurred in the last 30 years in Australia. The commonwealth government moved from a tentative and inconsistent engagement with child care to accepting child care as a commonwealth responsibility and distinct area of policy. Second wave feminists saw child care as key to women's liberation. They did not hesitate to support the politicisation of this private need – as Australian feminists had done nearly 100 years earlier. Feminist activists aimed to have the state meet the costs of community controlled child care. They engaged with the state to achieve this goal as members of political parties, lobby groups and the bureaucracy. They responded to and used existing institutions, but they also were able to shape government institutions to meet their needs – for example the establishment of the position of Women's Advisor to the Prime Minister in the Whitlam Labor Government in 1972 (Chappell, 2002). Despite the influences of alternative discourses – expert, economic rationalist and neo-liberal – feminists have ensured that the Commonwealth has maintained a commitment across various governments to maintaining a role in assuming at least part of the responsibility for the cost of child care through their subsidy policies.

Child Care Subsidy Policy in California: History and Interests

Rose (1999) begins her book *A Mother's Job: The History of Day Care 1890-1960* by recounting a contemporary event. In 1994 a young mother lost custody of her two-year-old daughter because she had placed her child in a child care centre while she attended university. The judge, though acknowledging the bond between mother and child was strong, thought the home care offered by the father's mother was preferable to the care of strangers. Rose (1999) argued that this decision (later overturned) and the ensuing public debate "... exposed Americans' contradictory feelings about day care and motherhood" (p. 4). These contradictions are rooted in the history of America where a belief in 'mother care' has remained strong and the commitment to publicly funded child care weak (Michel, 1999). Rose (1999) agrees, maintaining that: "Although most people think of day care as a contemporary issue, in fact it has a long history in this country – a history that has profoundly shaped current attitudes and practices" (p. 5).

In this section I have explored the history and social context of child care services, focusing on the role and activities of women and feminists. Their early activities provide the roots of child care subsidy policies across all states including California. I have also focused on feminist responses to the development of child care financing policy in California.

Accidental Philanthropy and Early Child Care Movements

The day nursery is the most accidental form of Philanthropy imaginable. It comes into existence in the most casual fashion ... As church workers, nurses and settlements workers have gone in and out of the homes of the poor they have seen these neglected little ones, and it has been a simple and natural thing to group them under the care of a kindly woman, who is paid a small sum to mother and feed them through the day (Helen Glenn Tyson, 1925 in Rose, 1999, pp. 17-18).

In *Children's Interests/Mothers Rights: The Shaping of America's Child Care Policy* Sonya Michel (1999) argues that the deeply rooted American belief in 'mother care' has acted over the last century to prevent public acceptance of state funded child care. This enduring discourse has led to the positioning of women's engagement with the paid labour force as a 'social problem' and "... thus children's interests are implicitly positioned in opposition to women's rights" (Michel, 1999, p. 3). Michel (1999) attributes 'blame' for this situation to patriarchy and also to the politics of maternalism – both evident in the positioning of the first child care services in America. The emergence of this conservative positioning is explored in this section.

I have focused particularly on the writings of two American authors, Sonja Michel and Elizabeth Rose. Michel (1999) emphasises women's responses to the inadequacy of child care provision – creating child care solutions from whatever available resources: "... the history of child care is full of tensions between the daily practices of low-income, working-class and minority families on the one hand and white middle-class prescriptions for motherhood and social responsibility on the other" (pp. 5-6). Rose's (1999) exploration of the history of child care in Philadelphia also focuses on the perspectives of service users. Rose (1999) argues that her focus on the voices of women who used child care throughout these years revises "... simplistic analyses of welfare agencies as tools with which elites exercise 'social control' over the poor" (p. 7). Rose (1999) found that poor and working class women (from as early as the 1890s) challenged the conservative positioning of child care, "... seeing their wage work as an extension not an abdication of their responsibilities as mothers" (p. 5). Michel (1999) and Rose's (1999) focus on the voices of women is consistent with the approach I have adopted in this study. Further, their identification of the ways women both challenged the conservative positioning of child care and saw their engagement with the paid labour force as a signifier of good mothering are themes still evident in the responses of the Californian service users in this study.

Michel (1999) argues that the roots of child care in America are multiple and not easily defined: "Although we might be able to identify one particular day care institution as the first ... in fact the practice of child care had multiple and staggered origins, going back to colonial America and before that to early modern Europe" (Michel, 1999, p. 14). In early colonial America, women's productive labour was valued and child caring was not women's primary responsibility. Relatives or friends within the local community cared for children. In the 17th and 18th Century dame schools were also common. In these 'schools' women cared for other women's children in their own homes for a small fee. There was no stigma attached to women for sharing the caring responsibilities of their children. This changed in the late 18th Century when "... two factors transformed women's relationship to child care and domestic industry" (Michel, 1999, p. 16). The site of economic activity moved from households to public sites such as factories. Women, who had previously engaged simultaneously in child caring and domestic production within the home, found it difficult to participate in production outside of the home. Secondly, women were now assigned primary responsibility for caring for their children. These two factors worked together to reinforce women's disengagement from waged employment and their association with the domestic sphere.

During this period the foundations of public child care funding were also being laid – often in response to the increasing poverty levels associated with the industrial revolution. American

Colonies in the 18th Century passed Poor Laws based upon the English Poor Law, initiated by Queen Elizabeth I, and under which governments assumed part of the burden of caring for the poor. An initial governmental response to poverty was the establishment of Almshouses that provided shelter to the poor, mentally ill and physically disabled. In Almshouses children and adults were sheltered together. This unsatisfactory arrangement led to the establishment of orphanages for children. Rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and the American Civil War had meant that in the later half of the 19th Century the numbers of abandoned, orphaned and homeless children in American cities increased significantly. The conditions within the orphanages that housed many of these children were often appalling. State governments, concerned with the welfare of children in orphanages, instituted systems of state subsidies to assist with the cost of running and improving the quality of care in orphanages (Pennsylvania Department, 1996).

It was in these complex contexts that the first formal child care institutions were established in the United States. Quaker women founded the first day nursery "... as part of their workroom for poor widows at the House of Industry in Philadelphia in 1795" (Rose, 1999, p. 18). The House of Industry established a model of assistance where poor women were not separated from their children, as they had been when entering almshouses, by providing employment and child care within the same institution. At the same time infant schools were being established, modelled on the more enlightened child care practices of the British Infant School Movement (Michel, 1999). They aimed to educate children from their very early years. The first infant school was established in Boston in 1828. These early program models, emphasising support for mothers and children within one service and the enlightened education of children, did not endure and most had ceased operation by the 1840s. Rather, subsequent child care institutions were in most cases modelled on orphanages and were explicitly concerned with child saving.

In the poor and working class neighbourhoods of American cities at the end of the 19th Century many young children spent their days working or playing on the streets. White middle class philanthropists and reformers interpreted the children's situation as one of abandonment and vulnerability to social ills. These children were seen to be the innocent victims of poverty requiring saving. Removal of children from the public sphere of the streets and returning them to the 'safety' of private spaces was the goal of these philanthropists. The implicit assumption of this view was that children and their mothers belonged in the private world of the family – their presence on the street symbolised the breakdown of a particular social world:

Thus the sight of children playing in the streets was not only disturbing because of the potential for physical danger, but because it suggested urban chaos, lost childhood, family breakdown and the destruction of the home. In

the eyes of the reformers, children on the streets were by definition neglected and unloved (Rose, 1999, p.15).

Plate 2: Children Playing in the Street, Chicago, 1900.



“This image is typical of the garbage-strewn alleys that served as make-shift play areas for children in the neighbourhood surrounding Hull-House (Chicago). Lack of supervision and exposure to disease were common problems” (Schultz, 2004).

Original Caption: None
Artist/Photographer: Unknown
Date: 1900

Source: University of Illinois at Chicago, University Library, Department of Special Collections, Jane Addams Memorial Collection, JAMC neg. 296.

The following poem was included in the Jane D. Kent Day Nursery’s 2nd Annual Report in 1886 and is an excellent example of the child saving philosophy of the time:

Alas! On earth in every street
 Lie evil snares for little feet.
 ‘Tis from these very snares of sin
 The ‘nursery’ seeks to draw them in;
 And guard them till they pass away
 To streets where ‘boys and girls’ may play
 (in Rose, 1999, p. 17).

Early day nurseries tended to be modelled on orphanages, not only in their child saving ethos but also in their child caring and administrative practices. Churches were often the main source of financial support – various Christian churches and Jewish congregations were involved. There was a high level of involvement by Catholic nuns – specifically the Sisters of Mercy and the Sisters of Charity – who had had experience in administering orphanages. The Churches saw the day nurseries as useful sites for religious instruction: “There is another side to the Catholic day nursery – the spiritual side... There are also cases where the children of careless and indifferent Catholics would have otherwise been lost to the faith if it were not to the fostering care they receive in the nursery” (Catholic Charities Yearbook in Rose, 1999, p. 22). Though churches funded most nurseries, a small minority were run by private businesses. Researchers noted at the time the poor conditions existing in the for-profit centres; “... children were neglected, and that [owner] Mrs Clark profits by this ‘pseudo-philanthropic enterprise’” (Society for Organising Charity, 1916, in Rose, 1999, p. 23).

Nevertheless, research undertaken by Helen Glenn Tyson in 1919 (cited in Rose, 1999) based upon interviews with 100 women using day nurseries found that the mothers valued the child care services for the safe environment they provided for their children: “Thus, when the ‘elite’ women looked at the ‘homeless’ children of working mothers and decided to establish day nurseries they were meeting a very real need, despite the class and culture specific nature of their concern” (Rose, 1999, p. 17). Because the reality was, as Helburn and Bergmann (2002) remind us, women have always worked to support their families. In 1890 31.8% of married or once-married women in the USA were in the labour force and more than half of these had children (Michel, 1999). The rates of employment were even higher for African American women. In Philadelphia in 1911 54% of wives in African American families were in the paid workforce (Rose, 1999). Day nurseries were often established near sites of women’s employment such as textile mills, laundries and factories.

At the end of the 19th Century the primary formal child caring model was day nurseries financed by benevolent institutions. The first child care institution had been established in New York in 1854 (Nursery for the Children of Poor Women) and by 1901 there were 175 Day Nurseries across the country (Michel, 1999). Explicitly they were concerned with child saving and supportive of a conservative social order. Mothers’ employment was acknowledged as a regrettable necessity. James Flamant’s (1893) description of the purpose and accomplishments of the Infant Shelter in San Francisco, California (established in 1874) is an example of the positioning of child care as a charitable endeavour for unfortunate but worthy women:

An important feature of charity work in San Francisco, and one which has proved to be an unbounded success, is the home where mothers can leave

their children to be cared for during the hours they are at work... All accommodation for the temporary care of the young ones are provided, besides an exclusive kindergarten. During the last year the home cared for 6000 infants.

Later on the sisters of the Roman Catholic Church organised a day home on Hayes Street... and more recently another such shelter on Powell Street. Both are doing very well indeed, and serve as a great relief for the self-supporting, honest women in their attempt to keep the wolf from the door (Flamant, 1893, p. 5).

The connection between charity work and child care provision was also highlighted by Jane Addams' approach to settlement work at Hull-House in Chicago. In the Chicago Record-Herald the following comment was made about the first intentions and activities of Hull-House:

The first activity of the settlement was directed to the caring of the children of the vicinity, and the kindergarten work was in the charge of Miss Dow. As Miss Addams had foreseen, the sympathy of the people was most easily engaged through their children and the agencies set at work multiplied rapidly until they embraced every human activity (Chicago Record-Herald, March 4th, 1908).

In this charitable context there was little support from the philanthropists or the reformers for state funding of child care. In 1893 at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago a group of child care philanthropists met to promote the expansion of day nursery services; "But because of their elitist views, they never attempted to gain governmental support for universal provision and thus private child care remained limited and stigmatised" (Michel, 1999, p. 6), though there is some evidence that activist women were seeking a role for the state in funding early childhood education. Nellie Peters Black (1851-1919), an activist and philanthropist in Atlanta and the president of the Atlanta Free Kindergarten Association for twenty years was "...an ardent supporter of early child education ... Although unsuccessful at the state level, Black persuaded the locally administered public school system in Atlanta to incorporate kindergartens into their schools in 1919" (Shellman, 2004). Activists like Black saw linking early childhood care to primary school education as providing some legitimacy for state funding requests.

At the end of the 19th Century child care services were positioned within the American context in a way that has directly influenced current child care policy. Upper and middle class women were involved in the establishment and administration of child care services, and poor women

were the primary users of child care. The women who established services were philanthropists, not necessarily feminist activists. So child care was seen as an extension of charity work, primarily concerned with child saving rather than women's liberation. Women's paid work was viewed as an unfortunate reality and was not supported as part of a solution to women's oppression. There was little advocacy for a role for the state in the funding of child care services, even though the state had a history of partially funding orphanages.

Activist Women and the Shaping of Social Policy

In this section I will explore the role of activist women in shaping social policy in America. This exploration provides valuable context for the development of Californian child care financing policy detailed in the following section.

Maternalist Reformers

In the late 19th Century American activist women were involved in oppositional movements, such as the labour and suffrage movements, and also in philanthropic and charity work. An exploration of their activities and the paths that led to their engagement with the state provides insight into current funding relationships between the state and child care services. Kovin and Michel (1990) noted that during this period, and across national contexts, the emergence of large scale welfare programs coincided with the rise of women's movements: "Women ... succeeded to varying degrees, in shaping one particular area of state policy: maternal and child welfare ... (they) exerted a powerful influence on state definitions of the needs of mothers and children and the designs of institutions and programs to address them" (Kovin and Michel, 1990, pp. 1076-1077).

American feminist priorities at the end of the 19th Century were according to Cott (1987) grouped into three areas. These were firstly; "... service and social action, motivated variously by noblesse oblige ... this included benevolent, charitable, social welfare and (eventually) civic reform efforts..." (Cott, 1987, p.16). The second area was 'women's rights', where feminists pursued equality with men in the legal, political and civic arenas; and thirdly, some feminist activists fought for women's emancipation from oppressive social structures and conventions. Cott (1987) names the service and social action arena as the most loyal to the social order, in contrast to the emancipationists whose goal was to transform society radically. Early childhood services were established largely from the efforts of women operating within the first of these arenas – the philanthropists and the reformers.

Radical feminists, however, were not always comfortable with the activities of the elite philanthropists. Charlotte Perkins Gillman was a feminist activist, and Californian resident, who

challenged the social order of late 19th and early 20th Century America. In 1898 she published *Women in Economics*, a 'feminist manifesto', where she argued "... that women's secondary status in society, and especially their economic dependence on men, is not the result of biological inferiority but rather of culturally enforced behaviour" (1996, p. 2). Gillman's contempt for the philanthropic activities of privileged women is apparent in her comment in her book, *The Man-Made World: Our Andocentric Culture*:

Charity, as a vocation, is directly in line with the mother instinct ... it might almost be classified as a morbid by-product of suppressed femininity. The playground of a man-fenced 'society'; the work ground of a man-taught church; and the 'osmosis' of social nutrition, this leakage and seepage of values which would circulate normally, called charity; these are not a sufficient field for the activities of women (Gillman, 1911).

Gillman argued that women should be free to participate in the paid labour force for economic or personal benefit and private responsibilities, including child care, should be shared within multi-family communities. This was very different to the child saving vision of the charity run day nurseries.

This focus on structural disadvantage occurred in complex social and political contexts where workers' rights and suffrage were the central areas of activism for radical women. A key question was whether or not to engage with the state to address injustice. Gillman's comments focus on the structural nature of patriarchy, but she challenges implicitly the role of the 'man-made' state in addressing women's disadvantage. Her vision for multi-family communities sharing child caring responsibilities was not a state based solution. The dilemmas faced when dealing with the state are best exemplified by feminists' work around the rights and conditions of women workers. At the end of the 19th Century European, American and Australian feminists were engaged in discussions at international conferences about labour conditions (Michel, 1998b). Disputes and discussions at these conferences were not only related to the role of government in protecting workers from the excesses of industrialisation but also the implications for women of state protection. Some women argued that state protection specifically for female workers would "... bar women from the most lucrative occupations and serve to reinforce existing tendencies toward gendering the labour force" (Michel, 1998b, pp. 193-194).

Women's responses and their views on the role of the state in protecting women varied greatly. Both socialist and maternalist women favoured state involvement, though their areas of focus differed. Maternalist feminists at the end of the 19th Century sought equality with men and at the same time wished to have 'feminine traits' valued and acknowledged – as with the Australian

feminists who used their private sphere activities as the basis of rights claims: “Women’s sphere was both the point of oppression and the point of departure for 19th Century feminists” (Cott, 1987, p. 20). Maternalists saw the role of the state as sheltering women’s reproductive capacity and their activities in the private sphere.

Orloff (1993) questions the political power of these women and argues that state provision does not necessarily guarantee that women will be able to leave oppressive situations and maintain autonomous households – state provision does not “... embody a true social right” (Orloff, 1993, p. 322). This was a lesson learnt by early feminist reformers who had used motherhood as the basis for claiming citizenship rights. Their lack of political power meant that their maternalist claims, based on their private sphere services to the state, though achieving some positive benefits for women were not enduring. Paternalist policies that supported a male breadwinner model, however, did become the dominant model and state provision, therefore, reinforced the family wage, labour market participation for men and domestic responsibilities for women. These policies “... provided the context of constraints and opportunities within which later developments occurred...” (Orloff, 1993, p. 323).

Women activists seeking change at this time were a challenger group with no political power (Strong, Walters, Driscoll and Rosenberg, 2000). However, regardless of their lack of formal power and the dominance of the paternalist policies, they were able to affect policy change, particularly in the attainment of suffrage. The strategies used by activist women had also been successful for other challenger groups such as the abolitionists. To achieve change they created alliances with elite groups, developed organisational structures that could be used to leverage the state, secured financial resources and creatively used social action models: “For example, throughout the country, women’s clubs and other civic groups used private funds to establish free kindergartens inside public schools, leading to the widespread incorporation of free kindergartens as a state responsibility” (Strong et al., 2000, p. 677). Strong et al. drew on (amongst others) the work of Elisabeth Clemens (1993) who explored the organisational repertoires used by women’s groups to transform the United States political agenda.

Clemens (1993) argued that the American political system changed because of the activities of oppositional social movements with no formal political power, and further “... that the organisational dynamics of the American woman movement help to explain one of the most important institutional changes in US political history: the shift from the 19th Century ‘state of courts and parties’ to a political regime grounded in legislative activity and interest group bargaining” (p. 757). Orloff and Skocpol (1984) claim that late 19th Century America, in comparison to Britain, was not committed to strong social spending programs, for macro-

political reasons. There was a lack of a civil bureaucracy in a context of political corruption and patronage democracy: “Modern social spending programs were neither governmentally feasible nor politically acceptable at this juncture in U.S. political history” (Orloff and Skocpol, 1984, p. 726). In this context it was the philanthropists and reformers that became a significant political force due, though not solely, to the large number of women involved. For example in 1890 the General Federation of Women’s Clubs was founded and by 1905 the Club had 500,000 members and by 1910, 1,000,000. They were part of a “... dense network of women’s organisations... (that)... contributed to the founding of America’s distinctively ‘maternalist’ welfare state, a policy regime emphasising programs such as mothers’ pensions rather than unemployment and old age insurance” (Clemens, 1993, p. 760).

Clemens (1993) explores how these groups of women influenced the state and its role in providing social services – moving from community to bureaucracy. She argues that their position outside the formal political process provided opportunities to engage with the state in two ways. Firstly, the extensive range of women’s organisations became expert in securing and administering large amounts of money to run their various social programs. Their experience in managing organisations made them the logical choices for the distribution of state money. Secondly, women’s disenfranchisement meant that their organisations were free from the bargaining process for political gain that informed 19th Century politics. Further, women’s vulnerability due to their incapacity to form contracts meant they were often outside the protection of the employment contracts that protected male workers. Women’s groups therefore called on the state to institute protective measures: “These demands for economic regulation and social services mean that women’s politics are of particular importance for understanding both the beginnings of the American welfare state and the entrenchment of interest group politics” (Clemens, 1993, p. 782).

Rose (1999) explores the implications of the maternalist reformers policy dominance for child care services and their funding by the state. At the end of the 19th Century day nurseries, the principal child care service type, “... offered care for children as a charitable gift to poor families” (Rose, 1999, p. 71). The philanthropists and reformers assumed that women’s employment outside the home was the consequence of family crisis and breakdown. Mothers’ employment was not a goal pursued by these elite women. Their maternalist claims, based on the value of motherhood, meant that they petitioned the state for policies that enabled mothers to care for their own children by ‘protecting’ them from participation in the labour force due to inadequate income support: “By arguing that the public should provide financial support to enable poor women to devote themselves to full-time mothering, reformers at once demanded more from government and promoted a narrower definition of motherhood than did day nursery

supporters” (Rose, 1999, p. 71). The provision of child care services that supported women’s paid labour was no longer desirable. The dominance of maternalist ideology and the success of maternalists in influencing policy (for example the adoption of mothers’ pension legislation), meant that mothering, not economic self sufficiency, had become the basis of social policy. Day nurseries at the beginning of the 20th Century were cast in a negative light and mothering and child care became mutually exclusive policy arenas.

The impact of this conservative policy positioning on child care services was profound. Early advocates of child care services were now reluctant to support the expansion of new services. For example, in 1918 at the National Federation of Day Nurseries Conference Jane Addams, a pioneer of the settlement house movement, argued against the establishment of new day nurseries. Day nursery advocates no longer believed their services had the legitimacy needed to petition the state for funding: “In 1925, Helen Glenn Tyson noted that day nurseries were one of the few child welfare groups that had not petitioned the legislature for state aid” (Rose, 1999, p. 85). This position continued and the Federation did not pursue state aid until World War II. Consequently aid to mothers was entrenched as a social right, while publicly supported child care was not (Rose, 1999).

The issues raised in this section provide insight into the complexity of the policy making context in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. American women were not able to transform the state from paternalist to maternalist, but they were able to affect policy change from outside formal political structures. Their philanthropic activities had provided opportunities to align with elites and create and manage influential organizations. These groups were well positioned, therefore, to advocate for policies and administer services that assisted women. Their initiatives, however, were rooted in their charity work and were focused on engaging with the state to protect the vulnerable rather than challenging the state to affect structural change. The success of their organisational dynamics also meant that the philanthropists and reformers and their maternalist agenda had the greatest impact on state policy formulation (for example the mothers’ pension), though, as Orloff (1993) argues they failed to create an enduring maternalist state. I think it is worth noting that the maternalist state vision of these American women was not the radical maternalist vision articulated by Louisa Lawson and Rose Scott in Australia at the turn of the century. The American vision was a compromise that did not seek to challenge the patriarchal social order but rather to make women’s position within that social order more secure. Rose (1999) provides an excellent summary of the impact of this policy direction on women and child care services:

The result of the campaign for mothers’ pensions was that day nursery supporters could only talk about the need for nurseries in defensive, even

apologetic terms, while social commentators and policymakers went on assuming that the family wage system was basically functional, since mothers' pensions existed as a safety net. They were thus able to ignore the substantial numbers of women who fell through this safety net, did not have an adequate male wage to rely on, and suffered from a wage system that was constructed on the assumption of female dependence (p. 86).

Women's Liberation

In America in the 1960s and early 1970s the women's liberation movement created resurgence in radical feminist thought. Central to the movement was a new conception of the role of child care in the lives of women.

In her 1973 article *Child Care and Women's Liberation* Elizabeth Hagen argues that high quality, affordable and accessible child care is crucial to the liberation of women: "Feminists believe that the rearing of children is a matter for the entire society, not simply for individual parents or, more narrowly individual mothers" (p. 117). She assumes that individual caring by mothers serves the needs of patriarchy and not women and their children. This radical 'second wave' feminist view differs from the more conservative agendas of the philanthropists and maternalists who strongly influenced early child care policy initiatives. The women's liberation stance was not about protecting women's role in the domestic sphere but rather about liberating women from the tyranny of domesticity: "The crux of the women's liberation view of day care is the concept that mothers need to be liberated from confinement to the home and so do children" (Hagen, 1973, p. 119).

Hagen (1973) refers to alternative child care settings established by radical feminists such as Liberation Nursery in New York City, Children's House in Washington, DC and Princeton University NOW (National Organisation of Women) Day Nursery. These programs were community based and involved some parent participation. Parent fees financed these child care centres on a non-profit basis, and community groups, local councils and universities provided the space for the facilities. Boards of Directors, committed to a feminist philosophy of practice within the centre, administered services. However, these services were criticised for their all white, middle class users – a result of the unsubsidised cost of care. Feminist child care services were also unable to provide low cost infant care. These financial realities led feminists to recognise the need to engage with the state to meet at least some of the child care service costs. So, on the basis of radical feminist philosophy and these practical experiences, women's liberationists advocated "... universal publicly supported, community controlled day-care systems" (Hagen, 1973, p. 127). Klein (1992) claims that radical feminists now saw the function

of child care as 'liberation-universalisation' assuming that: "Through the use of child care services, mothers would be able to take voluntarily leave of their children to pursue other goals ... child care should be readily available to anyone who desires to use the service. In essence child care would function as a social utility, universally available to all women and families" (p. 19). Within this utopian vision child care services would also serve a consciousness raising function by challenging the role and structure of the nuclear family.

However, liberal feminists had another view of child care, which Klein (1992) terms as more pragmatic and realistic. This less radical view of the role of child care was articulated by organisations such as the National Organisation of Women (NOW) who saw child care as a citizenship right – conceptualised as a basic service like gas and electricity and not as a vehicle for women's liberation. Klein (1992) maintains that this lack of unity between feminist positions (essentially a theoretical issue) on the purpose and role of child care has meant feminists have been reluctant to engage with the child care issue: "A review of the literature on child care in both popular and scholarly press indicates a lack of adequate interest and vociferousness over this major social problem by feminists" (p. 20). Klein also argues that feminists have been pre-occupied with abortion rights and the Equal Rights Amendment (which focussed on gender sameness) to the cost of child care. The focus has been on child care in relation to middle class women and their need to balance work and family. It is also worth noting that these responses occurred within what O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver (1999) term a strong anti-feminist context where conservative groups actively campaigned against 'anti-family' government policy initiatives.

Contrasting the American social policy context in the 1970s with the Australian context at the same time provides additional insight into American feminists' ability to shape government child care policy. A significant event for the development of child care policy in Australia was the involvement of women in the Federal bureaucracy in the early to mid 1970s. This state engagement coincided with the election of a progressive federal government and also the rise of the women's liberation movement: "Feminists were thus poised to take advantage of the openness of Labor's Gough Whitlam, who came to power in 1972, inviting dissidents and outsiders to participate in his government" (Michel, 1999, p. 291). During this time, for example, femocrat Elizabeth Reid "... worked tirelessly to ensure that the national child care program was brought more in line with democratic and feminist ideals" (Brennan, 2002, p. 99). These efforts resulted in community based and government funded universal child care initiatives.

No similar context existed in the United States. Unsympathetic federal administrations vetoed progressive child care legislation throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Feminists were not part of these administrations in any publicly acknowledged or valued way. Innovative child care legislative initiatives relied on the efforts of feminist congresswomen such as Shirley Chisholm and a "... coalition of feminists and child care advocates (that) lobbied, nursed and coerced (the Comprehensive Child Care Act) through congress" (The Feminist Majority Foundation, 2000, p. 4). Feminists sought to establish groups that could lobby government on women's issues. In 1971 The National Women's Political Caucus (NWPC) was organised and their objective was "... to field women candidates, to influence both parties to support women, and to organise women at the state and local levels, based on the development of local caucuses" (The Feminist Majority Foundation, 2000, p. 1). But it was not enough, because as Michel (1999) comments "... feminists never made child care a national priority and would have found little receptivity in Washington had they done so" (p. 295).

Gwendolyn Mink (1990) adds another perspective to this argument when she maintains that this lack of female access to the political system was the result of gender ideology that established women's role in politics "... as the makers of men (and) as the wives and mothers of citizens ... this made political life a masculine affair and denied women a public political identity" (p. 93). According to Michel (2002) feminists also made strategic decisions to remain in the background of child care policy making in America, simply because the backlash against the feminist movement was so great. It made more sense for child care policy initiatives to be aligned with less controversial social policy agendas such as early childhood education.

In both Australia and America feminists, though positioned differently with regard to their interactions with the state, were both still dealing with liberal welfare regimes constructed "... on the needs of the male citizen worker" (Michel, 1999, p. 283). Michel argues, however, that an understanding of child care policy development based on welfare regime categorisation alone is inadequate. Both Australia and America are liberal welfare regimes (Esping-Anderson, 1990; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999) and yet their child care subsidy policies differ greatly: "Indeed, the societies where the most comprehensive systems of child care may currently be found (France, most of the Scandinavian countries, Australia and Japan) do not fit into any single regime category" (Michel, 1999, p. 284). Michel (1999) and O'Connor et al. (1999) have theorised about other possible factors that would account for the differences in child care policy – a federally funded universal child care provision in Australia and the "... intermittent and localised pattern" (Michel, 1999, p. 284) in the United States. Michel emphasises the importance of feminist vigilance (both within and outside governments) for maintaining government commitment to universal child care financing provisions. In Australia, also,

important alliances were formed between femocrats, community child care advocates, trade unions, child care workers and parents. These alliances successfully entrenched child care in Australia as part of the social wage. These crucial alliances that could advocate for universal child care policy initiatives were not formed in America.

Michel (1999) also claims a general reluctance in the United States by child care advocates to lobby government for the financial support of services. This was because of the history of child care provision in America – as a charity service for those in greatest need. Michel maintains that America and Australia share a history of stigmatised child care provision, and questions why there was subsequently a policy divergence in the 1960s and 1970s. I argue, however, in this literature review that though there are historical similarities their history regarding feminist engagement (crucial for understanding the policy divergence) with the state is different. First wave feminists in Australia saw women's oppression, due to their economic dependence on men, in the context of state created structural disadvantage (Grimshaw, 1994) and they therefore "... looked to the state to provide the conditions of women's freedom..." (Lake, 1999, p. 56) – the focus was on political solutions for personal troubles. I believe that these early Australian feminists provided a model for conceptualising the role of the state in meeting women's needs. This legacy underpinned second wave feminist engagement with the state in funding women's services such as child care:

Australian feminists, after some initial misgivings, displayed little reluctance in seeking the satisfaction of their demands through the (patriarchal) state. Since 1975, all women's services, including the most radical collectives running refuges, rape crisis centres or incest centres, have lobbied assiduously for greater government funding. As Sara Dowse has written: "The debate that scarcely happened is closed" (Dowse, 1984, p.146) (Sawer, 1990, p. xv).

This foundation did not exist for second wave American feminists. Child care services had been the responsibility of philanthropists and maternalists who saw the state as the protector of women's private sphere activities. The taken for granted assumptions about the public and private spheres were not challenged in the way first wave Australian feminists had done. In the early 20th Century these American women entrenched mothering as a social right and saw publicly funded child care as a threat to this position. Child care did not move confidently to the 'terrain of the social' (Fraser, 1989). But O'Connor et al. (1999) make an interesting comment regarding American feminist engagement with the state;

... it must be asked whether or not the absence of reliance on the government as a mechanism for achieving gender equality, identified by

Marion Sawyer in her comparison with Australia (Sawyer, 1990) is an inherent characteristic of the US women's movement or a realistic response to the political opportunity structure (p. 207).

The History of Child Care Financing in California

In their article *Child Care, Government Financing and the Public Schools: Lessons from California Children's Centres* Grubb and Lazerson (1977) argue that publicly funded child care centres in California are unique in the United States. They provide a history of the development of child care service financing in California up to the 1970s and begin their article by focusing more broadly on the 20th Century history of child care in the United States. In this section I have also begun by focusing on the history of Federal funding initiatives, the issues they raised, and the opportunities they provided for child care advocates and feminists. This discussion provides the context for the 20th Century history of Californian child care subsidy policy.

Federal Initiatives: Issues and Opportunities

Grubb and Lazerson (1977) identify three dominant themes in the history of American child care financing:

1. child care as welfare,
2. early childhood education as socialised play, and
3. integration into the public schools as a necessary prerequisite for universalisation (p. 20).

The welfare theme is embedded in the strong charity, child saving and philanthropic traditions (explored in previous sections). In this context child care (day nurseries) came to be seen as a welfare service for the disadvantaged. Middle class women who had no access to the day nurseries sought to provide alternative child care services, with a focus on early childhood education rather than care while they worked. In 1915 the first nursery school was established by University of Chicago faculty wives with the intention of offering "... wholesome play for their children, to give mothers certain hours of leisure from child care and to try the social venture of cooperation of mothers in child care" (in Kerr, 1973, p. 88). The popularity of this type of child care meant that after World War I nursery schools spread across the United States. Their purpose was to provide positive socialization opportunities for small groups of children in well-resourced facilities. Parents were involved in the establishment of nurseries, paid tuition and often participated in nursery programs. These arrangements precluded poor and working class women's children from attending nursery schools: "To a great extent, the history of day care has been marked by this polarity with the two models differing in their clientele, methods, goals and needs for public funds" (Grubb and Lazerson, 1977, p. 21).

During the 1930s' Depression these nursery schools became the site for federal government spending on child care. Under the Federal Emergency Relief Administration and later the Work Progress Administration (WPA) funds were granted to nursery schools to provide care for needy families and also to provide employment opportunities in the sector. Program funds were administered through state departments of education. By 1937 40,000 children across the United States were receiving assistance under the WPA. Kerr (1973) argues the WPA nurseries were: "A testament to the strength of the nursery school movement, the program represented the first federal recognition that the education and guidance of young children was a responsibility warranting the appropriation of public funds" (p. 90). However, the linking of the administration of child care funds, at this time, to state education departments had implications for the more socially progressive goals of child care.

Before World War II child care advocates envisioned day care centres as both sites of early childhood education and also as possible centres for social work activity as part of the social reform process. However, the funding of child care by public school systems meant that the social reform elements of child care withered during the 1930s.

In order to survive [in the public schools], we could not tell of the work we were doing with the families or with the parents; we must try to prove as soon as possible that the children who had attended kindergarten could progress so much faster in the first grade. Consequently, we lost our splendid birth right of family welfare work and knowing the child in his [sic] home, and we began to work for very elementary forms of the three R's (Hill, 1931 in Grubb and Lazerson, 1977, p. 22).

The Second World War provided new opportunities for child care advocates to justify child care for working women and secure government funding for child care. Women's vital war time work meant that child care services were essential. The use of this 'crisis' was an immediately effective strategy, however it provided no basis for addressing the ongoing child care needs of women and children: "The focus on women's war work left no voice for mothers who could continue to earn wages after the war, for mothers who worried about the quality of care their children received in government-funded day care centres, or for the children themselves" (Rose, 1999, p. 166).

Susan B. Anthony (niece of the famous suffragette), a feminist journalist, used women's wartime work as the basis of her day care advocacy. In her book *Out of the Kitchen – And into the War* she challenged maternalist arguments that women's private sphere work was their primary contribution to the state. She argued that women and men's civic obligations were

similar (Rose, 1999). The War offered the possibility of women gaining equality with men, because of their equal contribution to the welfare of the nation. Anthony maintained that if women contributed to the state in the more meaningful way of paid employment then the state had an obligation to meet the needs of women by providing "... a vast network of approved, low-cost nursery schools, so that the children we cherish will not be among the growing list of war casualties" (Anthony in Rose, 1999, p. 165). The federal government was unconvinced and federal funding for child care was terminated at the end of the war.

The Development of Child Care Subsidy Policy in California

Grubb and Lazerson (1977) focus specifically on the history of child care financing in California. "California Children's Centres are a creation of World War II, begun in 1943 as part of federal subsidisation of child care to meet the wartime demands for women in the labour market" (Grubb and Lazerson, 1977, p. 23). At the end of the war 25,000 Californian children were using child care – more than any other state. The Department of Public Instruction administered the Children's Centres. The child care community accepted this administrative arrangement as the Department had previously administered the WPA nursery school funds. The federal government viewed subsidy funds (established under the Lanham Act, 1942) as a wartime measure only and at the end of the war congress ceased providing funds to the states.

Kerr (1973) maintains that California was the only state to subsidise child care after federal support ceased: "In 1946 California's legislature voted to continue support for the Lanham centres, making two-to-one matching funds available on a year-to-year basis to local boards of education for operation of the program" (p. 97). Funding was appropriated yearly until 1957 when child care funding became a fixed part of the California State education budget: "This decision is intriguing, for it made the state (California) almost unique in the public funding of child care" (Grubb and Lazerson, 1977, p. 24).

The decision to commit California to subsidising child care was made, according to Grubb and Lazerson (1977), for three main reasons. At the end of the war the child care sector was large with many interested and committed advocates who were prepared to lobby the state for ongoing funding. Also, Californian women had a unique role in the economy. The post war Californian economy was strong and growing, with 22.7% of women in the paid labour force. Prior to World War II women's participation rate had been 14%. So the demand for formal child care services was high. Finally, industry pressured the state to maintain child care subsidies – particularly the growing defence and aircraft industries. They wanted to retain their wartime trained female workforce. Kerr (1973) also argues that California agreed to continue subsidising child care because of strong lobbying from broad coalitions. These coalitions were

from often divided groups: social reform and community groups, education professional and “... day-care’s natural constituent – the working mother” (p. 97). At the time, to the detriment of child care services nationally this was a rare coalition.

Nevertheless Californian child care subsidies post World War II were initially seen as emergency support – six million dollars was provided in 1949. The ‘emergency support’ was to be in place until women left the workforce and returned to domestic duties. Californian women, however, did not return to the private sphere. Consequently the biennial and temporary funding arrangements created financial insecurity and crisis in child care services. Eventually though the Korean War experience (in the early 1950s) provided the State of California with the impetus to secure subsidy funding in 1957. State funding, however, was never generous and centres were constantly under financial pressure.

Prior to 1957 the State of California sought alternative strategies to fund child care services and the extra resources they were demanding. In 1951 California legislated to allow school districts to levy taxes to pay for child care improvements. School Districts, however, were reluctant to do so and by 1960 only six School Districts had levied the taxes and local revenues only accounted for 7% of child care costs (Grubb and Lazerson, 1977).

Even though the state funded child care subsidies generally received community support they were challenged. Dissatisfaction peaked in the 1950s and was centred on the role of early childhood services as either meeting the needs of mothers or providing early childhood education, and was linked to the impact of evolving subsidy policies. In 1947 child care subsidies in California had become means tested on a sliding scale. This measure impacted the type of families using the centres. More single parent families began to use the services and in 1947 44% of all users were single parents and by 1951 60% were. Child care was now repositioned (again) as a welfare service supporting the ‘deserving poor’ to remain in the workforce and stay off welfare. This was a difficult position for child care advocates to be in with political implications both positive and negative: “They thus argued that centres preserved families by allowing mothers to work and stay off welfare, *in addition to* preparing children for school” (Grubb and Lazerson, 1977, p. 25). The goals of subsequent state funded child care centres reflected these mixed ideologies.

These inadequate funding arrangements remained in place until the 1960s. In the 1960s the federal government was focused on the ‘War on Poverty’ under which there was an infusion of funds to early childhood programs that “... dramatically altered the context within which the centres functioned and gave them a prominence once barely thought possible” (Grubb and

Lazerson, 1977, p. 26). Initially, Californian centres resisted federal subsidies fearing loss of autonomy and further entrenchment of child care as a welfare service for the poor – affecting child care’s image. However once funds were accepted by California centre quality improved, though the federal funds also affected the profile of parents using the centres. Parents were now current or potential welfare recipients who were usually participating in a ‘War on Poverty’ programs: “Almost all the federal money was tied to the poverty program ... Children’s Centres were being locked into welfare orientated goals by federal requirements” (Grubb and Lazerson, 1977, p. 26).

Michel (1998a) notes that the 1962 Social Security Amendment Act and the 1967 Work Incentive Program mandated mothers receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to participate in education programs. Provision was made under this program for child care subsidies. This was a significant policy initiative because it assumed that not all mothers had a right to care for their own children and poor mothers’ place was not in the home. Though it did represent government recognition that child care was a necessary support for women’s labour force participation and economic independence. In this context Government used child care subsidies as a mechanism for compelling women to work; “... the fact that it (child care) was embedded in public welfare amendments meant that publicly supported child care inevitably became associated with efforts to reduce poverty” (Michel, 1998a, p. 45). These were the first of a number of workfare programs that included Greater Avenues to Independence (GAIN) in California in the 1980s and CALWorks today. Under these programs federal funds are made available to the Californian Department of Education to subsidise the cost of care for workfare participants.

By the 1970s child care centres were the fastest growing area in the education sector. In the 1970s there were efforts to legislate at a federal level for universal child care. Shirley Chisholm, a United States Congresswomen, poignantly summarised the situation:

For several years Congress has tried to legislate a comprehensive program of child care services in the United States – a program that would allow parents and community groups to work together to create healthy and full environments for children whose mothers and fathers work ... As a member of Congress and of the House Education Committee, I have participated in endless discussion of possible day-care programs and have heard the gamut of clichés that accompany criticism or the denial of the need for child care – clichés that were summed up in November 1971 when President Nixon vetoed one legislative plan that would have given the United States a

beginning of sound and progressive national policy toward the health of its children and their families” (1973, p. ix)

However, in the 1970s Congress passed some relevant acts. In 1974 Title XX of the Social Security Act again linked child care funding to workfare. In 1976 Aid to Day Care Centres increased funding to improve quality in publicly funded centres. In the 1980s the Reagan administration reduced child care funding with a 20% cut under the 1981 Omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act, Title XX, and created a child care block grant. In 1982 the Job Training Partnership Act cut child care funding further. According to Michel (1998a) “The overall impact of Reagan-era cutbacks on both funding and regulation of public child care was devastating” (p.48). As direct financial support for child care decreased indirect mechanisms of support increased. This shift dramatically changed the number and profile of child care services in California. The Dependent Care Assistance Plan Provisions of the 1981 Economic Recovery Tax Act provided “... tax cuts for individuals and tax breaks for employers – was intended to facilitate parental choice and spur child care initiatives in the private sector” (Michel, 1998a, p. 49).

The figure below is a section from the Child Care Directory, Santa Clara County, California, 1989 edition. It provides a snapshot of the range of child care centres that were established in California in the 1980s, partly in response to the policy initiatives of the 1970s and the 1980s. The SS abbreviation in the FT (full time) tuition column signifies the centre has child care slots that are subsidised by the Californian State Department of Education. In this section the number of subsidised slots compared to full fee paying slots is quite low. The names of the various child care facilities listed below is indicative of the variety of service providers active in the child care sector at the end of the 1980s; and include private enterprise, churches, and educational and non-profit organisations.

Plate 3: Santa Clara County Child Care Programs, 1989.

SANTA CLARA COUNTY CHILD CARE PROGRAMS						
NAME & DIRECTOR	ADDRESS & PHONE	AGES	HOURS	MEALS	CAP	FT TUITION
Ellis Afterschool Pals Dir: Lisa Koppen	550 E Olive St Nr Fair Oaks (408)723-2876	5 yrs to 10 yrs	1:30pm to 6:00pm	PS	25	SA \$2/hr
F.U.M.C. Christian Day Care Center Dir: Patricia Switzer	535 Old San Francisco Rd Nr Fair Oaks/Wolfe (408)739-0828	2 yrs to 5 yrs	6:30am to 6:00pm	AS, BL, PS	18	PS \$65/wk
Gavello Glen Preschool Dir: Nina Carine	853 Gary St Nr Wolfe Rd (408)737-0740	2 yrs to 5 yrs	6:45am to 6:00pm	AS, HL, PS	40	PS \$82/wk SS
Little Rascals Child Development Center Dir: Sharon Illi	494 South Bernardo Nr El Camino Real (408)730-9900	3 mos to 8 yrs 11 mos	6:00am to 6:30pm	BR, AS, HL, PS, DI	184	IN \$130/wk PS \$90/wk SA \$59-74/wk
Rainbow Montessori Child Development Center Dir: Spyroula Rodenborn	675 Gail Ave Nr Old S.F. Rd (408)738-3261	3 mos to 12 yrs	6:00am to 6:00pm	BR, AS, HL, PS	388	IN \$102/wk PS \$84/wk SA \$77-80/wk
Sunnyvale Elementary School District Child Development Center Dir: Robert Lungaro	777 San Miguel Ave Nr Duane Ave (408)738-8271	2 yrs 9 mos to 7 yrs 11 mos	6:30am to 6:00pm	AS, HL, PS	176	PS \$94.25/wk SA \$52.30- 60.60/wk SS
Sunshine Christian Day Care Dir: Jihan Batmani	445 South Mary Ave Nr El Camino Real (408)736-3286	2 yrs 6 mos to 10 yrs	6:30am to 6:00pm	AS, HL, PS	150	PS \$295/mo SA \$220-295/mo SS
YMCA Sunshine Co - De Anza Dir: Amy Ballenburg	1196 Lime Dr Nr Remington/Hollenbeck (408)773-8870	5 yrs to 12 yrs	7:00am to 6:00pm	AS, PS	51	\$185-220/mo
YMCA Sunshine Co - San Miguel Dir: Mike Loya	777 San Miguel Ave Nr Fair Oaks (408)730-6949	5 yrs to 12 yrs	7:00am to 6:00pm	AS, PS	50	SA \$185-220/mo

Source: Community Coordinated Child Development Council of Santa Clara County, 1989, p. 53

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore the history of and interests associated with the development of child care subsidy policy in Australia and California. I chose to focus on the role of women in this policy development process. I have used a critical feminist framework to theorise about women's involvement in this process and also to explore the role of the state in using child care financing policy as a site for the expression of patriarchal power. I have found Nancy Fraser's (1989) politics of needs interpretation particularly useful in this process.

I have found that there was little literature that focused specifically on the history of child care subsidy in California and the efforts of feminist Californian women to influence child care policy development. However, I do not assume that this literature does not exist or that feminist women in California did not contribute to the development of child care subsidy services. On the contrary I assume that feminist women have been and continue to be active in subsidised child care services and policy initiatives in California. For example, the child care subsidy

agency in California, where I undertook much of my research, was established in 1974 “... when six women marched on City Council and said, ‘We want the City to acknowledge and provide high quality, affordable child care!’” (Director, The Agency).

It is grass roots community activism that has provided creative and excellent (if insufficient and inadequately funded) subsidised child care services for women in California. Nancy Naples (1998) provides some useful comment about the reality of women’s community activism:

Most significant, however, is the persistence of the community activists ...
These women wage campaigns for social justice and economic security, and against abuse, in diverse settings and often under extremely adverse conditions. Along the way, they challenge deeply rooted patriarchal and heterosexist traditions, confront the limits of democracy in the United States, and, in some instances, experience sharp disapproval from other members of their communities (p. 1).

My review of the literature has led me to conclude that women have played a central role (often in the adverse circumstances described by Naples) in the development of child care subsidy policies in Australia, America and California. Comparing the histories of these two countries has foregrounded the importance of early feminist activism in shaping future child care policy directions. The willingness of feminists to engage with the state to meet the cost of child care has been both effective and problematic. As child care moved to the terrain of the social it became vulnerable to rival needs interpretations. Nevertheless, in Australia the existence of activist women working within receptive governments, who were part of effective alliances, has meant an on-going government commitment to semi-universal subsidy provision. In contrast the lack of sympathetic federal administrations, a divided feminist community and an absence of critical alliances advocating universal child care has led to inadequate, intermittent and localised child care subsidy provision in California (Michel, 1999).

PART THREE: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In the following chapters I will present the qualitative data I gathered for this study and draw conclusions from that data. There were two sources of data: semi-structured interviews and the contents of official documents. I do not intend to present only the data, but also to make sense of the data within a critical feminist theoretical framework. I will structure the presentation of the data to reflect the aims of the thesis, and also to highlight themes I had not anticipated in the formulation of the original research goals. I have selected data that best exemplifies the emergent themes (Evans and Gruba, 2004).

In the first section, *Struggling Over Need*, I use critical feminist theory as the basis for a theoretical discussion relevant to the findings. I have focused on theorising about need definition and the current neo-liberal social context. I intend in this section to extend my initial theorising, and also to emphasise the benefit of tying together theory and experience. Simply to present the experiences of everyday life without reference to the ideological structuring of these experiences would be to provide an incomplete vision of these lives, and at worse collude with the status quo. Thompson (2001) argues that a failure to recognise the role of domination in the construction of experience leads to an inability to recognise ways in which women resist domination. Theory informs our understanding of experience and conversely experience informs theory: “Distancing oneself from the everyday world... threatens to divorce intellectual work from human concerns. Hence, theory must visibly tie to experience” (Thompson, 2001, p. 49).

The theoretical discussion provides the context for and frames the presentation of the thesis findings. These findings are presented in three chapters. In the first of these chapters, *Critical Realists: Two Women’s Biographies*, I provide insight into who the respondents are. These biographies set the scene. In *Chapter Five: Child Care Choices in ‘Everyday/Everynight Lives’*, I have chosen to use the three dominant child care issues, access, quality and cost, to organise related findings and to emphasise the impact of differing child care subsidy policy contexts on women’s choices in these critical areas. In *Chapter Six: Responding to Conditions of Domination*, the underlying assumptions of child care subsidy policy are exposed and critically examined. Finally, in *Chapter Seven: Summary and Conclusions*, I will summarise my interpretations of the data presented in Part Three, linking these new understandings to the original research aims.

Struggling Over Need

Need is also a political instrument, meticulously prepared, calculated, and used (Foucault in Fraser, 1989, p. 161).

In the first chapter of this thesis I referred to Nancy Fraser's critique of Habermas and his post-war theorising on the welfare state. Fraser argued that the possibilities of Habermas's theorising were not fully realised because he naturalised the gender subtexts of social institutions. Fraser (2003) has attempted to reconceptualize and build upon the insights of both Foucault (the state as disciplinarian and punisher) and Habermas, by resituating distribution within welfare state theorising. Her focus is on the politics of needs interpretation: "The effect is to replace the distributive paradigm ... with a deliberative-democratic paradigm, which construes the interpretation of needs as a political stake" (Fraser, 2003, p. 9). Her intention is to revive a politics of redistribution in combination with a democratic construction of recognition (identity politics) in an age of neo-liberal hegemony.

Nancy Fraser (2003) argues "... neo-liberalism has emerged triumphant at the (20th) century's end" (p. 1). Within this neo-liberal hegemony, pervasive in Australia and America, the focus is on the individual and their ability to make rational, individual choices. Life outcomes are dependent upon these choices: "This accountability is imposed in extremely contradictory economic, social and individual landscapes where everything is open to change but at the same time, old practices of gender, class, race and sexuality remain entrenched" (Baker, 2003, p. 5). Neo-liberalism gives women the message that they have control over the direction of their lives and also obscures women's ability to articulate their oppression or any sense that their circumstances are unfair by "...overstating agency and understating constraints" (Baker, 2003, p. 5). Thompson (2001) also refers to this ideology of individualism where the interests of powerful groups are presented as the interests of all members of society: "Where better to hide the dominating nature of relations of ruling than in the depths of the individual psyche? ... If it constitutes the very roots of identity, it can not be seen as systematic" (Thompson, 2001, p. 43). Relations between individuals and their society become the product of personal choice rather than adherence to the rules of domination. The ideology of individualism defines what is possible and what is not possible for the individual – what they can and cannot achieve; "... it defines any challenge to current relations of power as impossible, meaningless or non-existent, as beyond the sphere of individual action and responsibility because it is not available for debate" (Thompson, 2001, p. 46). However in recognizing neo-liberal ideology, where privilege and oppression are unacknowledged, I do not claim that the individual is a passive victim of circumstances that are beyond her control. Thompson (2001) refers to Hoagland's concept of moral agency under oppression:

Moral agency is simply the ability to choose in limited situations, to pursue one possibility rather than another, to thereby create value through what we choose, and to conceive of ourselves as ones who are able to and do make choices – and thus as ones who are able to make a difference for ourselves and each other in this living... (p. 48).

The findings presented in the following chapters rely on the comments of a variety of respondents, and official documents, though I have privileged the experiences of women service users. I will argue that the various positions from which the respondents view child care subsidy influences their conceptualisation of the service. Nancy Fraser (1989) in her chapter *Struggle Over Needs: Outline of a Socialist-Feminist Critical Theory of Late Capitalist Political Culture* provides a framework for theorising about the nature and purpose of these differing vantage points. Fraser (1989) focuses on "... the politics of needs interpretation" (p. 163), and I have explored this approach in the introduction to this thesis and also the literature review. The contested nature of needs interpretation is also relevant to this section. Fraser assumes that the interpretation of need is political and problematic. Who interprets and defines need is important – what interests provide the context for these interpretations? Current needs discourses are framed in a neo-liberal context (Thompson, 2001; Baker, 2003) and therefore I cannot assume "... that the socially authorised forms of public discourse available for interpreting people's need are adequate and fair..." (Fraser, 1989, p. 164). Neither should the social and institutional processes of need definition remain unchallenged. Where are need interpretations developed and what are the social relations of those engaged in this conversation?

The interpretation of need is a political act and "... functions as a medium for the making and contesting of political claims; it is an idiom in which political conflict is played out and through which inequalities are systematically elaborated and challenged" (Fraser, 1989, pp. 161-162). From an early point in my research, as I collected and interpreted the data, I noticed that the purpose of child care subsidy was contested. Central to this was the interpretation of the need met by subsidy services. These interpretations varied by group - service users, service providers and policy makers. Nancy Fraser's critical feminist approach to needs interpretation provides a framework for making sense of these various interpretations.

Fraser (1989) argues that women conceptualise and define their own needs within the 'institutions of daily life'. Women indirectly challenge the state definition of their needs, the meaning of state provided benefits and what needs those benefits meet: "They may reject state sponsored therapeutic constructions of their life stories and capacities for agency and insist instead on alternative narratives and conceptions of identity" (Fraser, 1989, p. 178). These

alternative self-constructions are positioned within the boundaries of a conservative neo-liberal context (Thompson, 2001; Baker, 2003). Both of these assumptions have led me to ask particular questions when examining respondents' interview data: What identities have the respondents constructed of themselves? Do these identities differ across countries and across categories? What are respondents' narratives – what stories are they telling about themselves?

CHAPTER FOUR: CRITICAL REALISTS: TWO WOMEN'S BIOGRAPHIES

In this chapter I have presented the biographies of two women who receive child care subsidy. I have chosen one Australian and one Californian respondent – respondents that are in many ways typical of their group. When presenting the comments of these women I have altered names and places to preserve their anonymity. It is also my intention to approach the telling of respondents' stories with respect and humility: "Writing about another person's life is an awesome task, so one must proceed with a gentleness born from knowing that the subject and the author share the frailties of human mortality" (Nagel in Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 171). My intention is to explore complex social phenomena rather than to undertake an explication of individuals.

I argued in the introduction to this thesis, that women's voices have been isolated and individualised, subsumed in neo-liberal rhetoric. The intention of this thesis is, therefore, to seek the reflections of women service users and explore how their lives are shaped by child care subsidy policies. How do they construct their lives in response to their particular policy contexts? These stories challenge the essentialist construction of 'women' by revealing the complexity of their contexts and by asking 'which woman?' (Hesse-Biber and Yaiser, 2004). I highlight the women's constructions of both themselves and their child care need. I also focus on their resistance to domination.

A Resourceful Woman: Vera (California)

But the good mother – the mother that goes out and works, shows her children that you can be economically and socially at a disadvantage, but you do this and this and you have a successful life. You can have a successful life - you can have the same thing as the well-kept family...

(Vera)

The interviews with Vera were undertaken in the first part of 1999 in the San Francisco Bay Area. Vera met with me twice in my home and brought her youngest son with her to the interview. Our children were similar ages and we found common ground discussing our parenting dilemmas. I recorded my impressions of the interviews and noted that Vera commented a number of times on the large size of our apartment and how expensive accommodation is in this City. I wrote: "Even though I was in my jeans I still felt I came over as the white, middle class academic type". Nevertheless in both interviews Vera was warm, friendly, relaxed and keen to talk about child care subsidy.

The San Francisco Bay Area has a population of 6.7 million with three large metropolitan Centres, San Francisco, San Jose and Oakland, and nine counties (Metropolitan Transport Association, 2003). The Bay Area is the home of Silicon Valley and the major industries of this area are computers and electronics, and telecommunications (The Bay Area Marketing Partnership, 2004). The City referred to in this thesis is located in Santa Clara County – there are 15 cities in this County. The table below provides some Bay Area demographic information taken from Census 2000 data (Metropolitan Transport Association, 2003). People are distributed unevenly by ethnic identity across the San Francisco Bay Area. African Americans form over a third of the population in Oakland but only 2% of the City that was the site of this study. This demographic information provides some context for Vera’s experiences (in this section), and also the experiences of the other Californian respondents.

Table 6: Demographic Information for Selected San Francisco Bay Area Sites

Demographic Information*	San Francisco Bay Area	Santa Clara County	Oakland	City (The Site of this Study)
Total Population	6.7 million	1.6 million	399, 484	58,589
White	58.1%	53.8%	31.3%	75.8%
African American	7.5%	2.8%	36%	2%
Hispanic	19.4%	24%	22%	4.6%
Median Family Income (US \$)	\$71,333	\$81,717	\$44,384	\$117,574
Poverty Level	8.6%	7.5%	19.4%	4.8%

Source: Metropolitan Transport Association, 2003

*Not all ethnic groups are included

The child care subsidy program administered by the City in this study, provides subsidy funding for people who are living and/or employed in the City and are working or undertaking an educational activity (Appendix 8). The purpose of the program is “... to provide the opportunity for children to have a safe and healthy child care environment that will enhance their development while the child’s parent(s) or guardian(s) are working or attending school or job training to attain self-sufficiency and improve their family life” (Child Care Subsidy Program, 1999, p. 1). In 1999 the program provided subsidy to 40 families with children in 20 different child care facilities. There were 37 families on the waiting list for subsidised child care. Of those receiving subsidy 75% were from ethnic minority groups. The table below summarises selected demographic information for the Californian subsidy users who participated in my study.

Table 7: Demographic Information for Californian Respondents who Receive Child Care Subsidy

Respondent's Name	Demographic Information
Elena	Elena is a divorced Hispanic woman with a nine-year-old daughter. She works in a temporary part-time job and her daughter uses before and after school care.
Vera	Vera is an African-American woman with three children, aged 24, 14 and eight. She is a single parent working full-time. Her youngest child uses after school and vacation care.
Jane	Jane is a divorced white woman with two school-aged children, ten and nine, and two pre-school children, four and two. Jane works full-time and her youngest children are enrolled in a day care centre.
Olivia	Olivia is an African-American woman living with her partner. She has two children, six years and nine months. Olivia works full-time and uses after school care and family day care.
Donna	Donna, an African American woman, has twins aged ten and two other children, 17 and six. She works full-time and uses after school and vacation care for her youngest three children.
Michelle	Michelle is an Hispanic woman working part-time and studying at a Community College. She has a ten-year-old child who uses after school care.

A Personal Narrative

In this section Vera provides a personal narrative. She gives a snapshot of herself at the time of the interview, and discusses how she came to be receiving child care subsidy and her child care experiences before the subsidy. I chose those parts of Vera's narrative to present and in doing so I wanted to highlight Vera's construction of herself and her child care need. Vera has developed strategies for negotiating her complex social world and her resistance to a "state-sponsored therapeutic construction" (Fraser, 1989 p. 178) of her life is emphasised in this narrative.

I asked Vera to tell me about herself:

Well I'm 43 yrs old, I have three children, one that is 24 in May, one that's 14 and G he is eight. I have a granddaughter who is going to be two – she was born Sept 23rd which is my birthday – so I'm very happy about that. I work for the federal government. I've worked for them for 19 years – soon will be 20. I work in the human resource department. I have 11 more years before retirement. I have been divorced for the last five years. My ex-husband moved to Mississippi - so my children don't see their father or hear very much from him. He does not pay child support, so it's just me

supporting the three of us. So sometimes it's very difficult, but for the most part we have a pretty OK life. We live in the subsidised housing over there. We have been there for 14 yrs.

Vera went on to discuss how she came to be receiving subsidy and her day care situation prior to accessing the subsidy service:

Well unfortunately for me it wasn't a happy situation - where I had to find out about the subsidised child care. About 14yrs ago my ex-husband, he was an alcoholic, we got in a fight and I was holding my C, my 14 yr old, and he hit my child. So ultimately my child was taken away from me and I had to go to these parenting classes and then I had to have day care for him when he came home from the foster care.

Well before G went to (the City Child Care Agency) I had someone who watched him in their home – which caused him a lot of health problems because, not to my knowledge, the person was smoking, which caused him to have asthma real bad.

Vera had a clear understanding of the challenges of accessing subsidy and how she should negotiate these challenges:

Well I think that if you're not a very resourceful person and you don't know that there are other options out there then you don't know and you have to find the first thing that is available. Especially if you have a job and you have to be back to it. I pride myself in being knowledgeable about what is in my community for me to use as resources. But if you don't know that then you're lost and if you don't get hooked up with someone that is going to tell you then you are even more lost. You know because people are afraid – not afraid but ashamed even to ask for help.

Vera defines the need that child care subsidy meets in her life:

I actually enjoy being at work. When everything in life has failed me that's the only place I can go and have some stability and some security, knowing when I leave there, you know, I go home to my family and what happens at home is a whole different world. You know that when I go there (to work) everything is regimented and pretty much predictable, I feel safe. I don't have to worry about anybody coming there, violating me or doing anything that's going to make me feel inadequate...

Living with Social and Community Exclusion

Listening to Vera talk about her experiences of exclusion from both her local community and her society reminded me of Patricia Collins' (1991) discussion on *Learning from the Outsider Within*. Vera refers to her marginalisation from two perspectives, as a single black woman receiving a welfare benefit and as a black woman in a largely white community. These are views from the margins – “on the edge” (Collins, 1991, p. 36) and refer to the view of someone who is present but not allowed to participate. This outsider within status provides a unique perspective; “... a special standpoint on self, family, and society for African American women” (Collins, 1991, p. 35). Vera continues:

Society already has an image projected on a single parent to begin with and you know sometimes it is very difficult to extend your hand and ask someone to grab it and to help you along the way. Well I see – I think for the most part they have this image – I don't know about other ethnic groups but for myself being a black woman – that you know that we have all these kids without support and looking for the system to take care of us and that type of thing. But even though I was married I have always worked, I have always tried to do the best by my children by taking care of them myself and asking for very little help. But it gets to a point where what you make is not even enough, you know. And the way the system works as far as child support – it is very difficult. Even though you have a court order it is very difficult to get what ever you're supposed to get because there are all kind of loop holes and holes in the system and it doesn't always work for the single parent.

... there is nothing that has really drawn me into this community – that's wanted to make me be more a part of the City – there's nothing there that has drawn me out – to say we embrace you in our arms – come on let's be a part of this. Maybe it's social, ethnic – I don't know. It's just hard to really be here and fit in here.

The Motivations of the Powerful

Vera's comments on the motivations of the powerful convey a sense that whiteness and politics are connected. Vera locates power to make policy with the highest levels of the United States government and she identifies reinforcement of their own powerful positions as their primary motivation. A shared understanding of poverty and deprivation between powerful and poor people, provide the possibility of altruistic motivation.

... I don't want to say the American way but they're white - the political aspect.

Well I'd like to be able to say it is because they have the interests of the children in hand but I know that's not true because money motivates everybody. And even though they subsidise day care – also a big thing for [President] Clinton and everybody else that is concerned. Subsidised day care, child credit – it's all, I think, politically motivated.

I think also the politicians always during campaigns make all these big promises and then once they're in there they do very little of what they promised. They're so involved in this one and that one you know that everything falls by the wayside. You get a new group in 4 years and it's the same thing. It's like a cycle, you know. And probably I don't – you know I would like to say that during my years of voting and maybe this young man that we have in there now has probably been second to best because I can remember that when Kennedy was in. My mother just loved John F Kennedy, and I can remember when he got killed how people felt that everything was doomed and everybody was doomed because there wasn't anyone else that was really interested in the poor except him, you know. Then we got Clinton and he seems to have done a fairly good job- in spite of his personal problems. He's young and I'm not quite sure of his family history, but what I do know about it is that he was also a very poor child, you know. And was raised with a step-father and that type of thing. So it's not like he doesn't know what it is to be hungry. Because he rose up in power without, you know without everything else that everybody does have – I'm sure he is well educated. He didn't come from a structurally sound family like Bush.

Vera has good grounds for identifying race and class as implicit in the motivations of the powerful. Her assumptions are formed in a context of 'welfare reform', which has created "... a low-wage workforce of women of color with no safety net" (Krajcer and Delgado, 2002, p. 222). Krajcer and Delgado (2002) argue that it is the government's agenda to proceed with "... colour blind" policies that promote the free market and "... increase the acceptance of racial inequality" (p. 222).

The Way Things Should Be

Vera's vision of how child care subsidy and other welfare services should be is informed by making connections between personal experience and the system that creates and administers policy. Vera challenges the state's tendency "to construct gender-political and political-economic problems as individual, psychological problems" (Fraser, 1989, p. 155). She provides an alternative needs interpretation.

Well I think it was more of a caring about people, not a systematic thing ... Before, people cared about whether their children had milk or fresh fruit and stuff and now there's nobody concerned. Because they feel like they're doing you a favour by giving you this money, and if you don't have these things then that's too bad. It's not a caring situation anymore I don't think. Where you were more than just a case number, you know, because I, when I was on it (welfare) I had a rapport with my social worker or caseworker. She knew who I was, maybe because I was from a small community, I don't know, but it's not like that now.

I think that if everyone would qualify for child care (subsidy) regardless of their social background whatever you want to call it, I think it would be better because most people that look at people that are on welfare they think they want to be there; they don't want anything, they don't want to be nothing, they want to get their cheques every 1st or 15th of the month. But that's not always the case. Are those people that are standing out there begging for food or money, that isn't always the case. Nobody ever wakes up and decides I'm going to be poor today, I'm going to grow up and have a whole bunch of babies and get on welfare. Nobody wakes-up - circumstances cause people to be in those particular situations.

Conclusions

Vera is a resourceful woman who negotiates a complex social world with pragmatic skill and an awareness of her own disadvantage. She challenges state definitions of herself and her child care subsidy need – appropriating state services to meet her self-defined needs. Patricia Collins (1991) argues that "Afro-American women create and pass on self-definitions and self-valuations essential to coping with the simultaneity of oppression they experience" (p. 43). Vera's life is shaped by oppression based on sex, race and class. She is a single, black mother solely responsible for caring for her children, receiving no child support from a violent ex-partner. She lives in a context where mothers such as herself are not honoured, but rather are stigmatised, humiliated and harassed by the state (Fraser, 1989). Vera's consciousness of this

oppression is not only shaped by her critical reflections but also by how her life is lived and the “... actions taken on behalf of (her) children” (Collins, 1991, p. 46). Where other forms of activism are not possible (or not permitted) the reconstructing of a self-definition different from the externally imposed definitions provides the possibility of active resistance to domination in a context of multiple oppressions: “They are retaining a grip over their definition as subjects, as full humans and rejecting definitions of themselves as objectified ‘other’” (Collins, 1991, p. 46).

A Private Preference: Joanna (Australia)

So then, I rang every child care centre in Townsville. And there were no places at any of them and so then I rang family day care and they were a little bit casual – they’re like, “Oh you’re not going back to work for a month!” And I was like, “Oh my God – I’ve got nowhere for my baby!”

(Joanna)

The interviews with Joanna were held in 2002 in Townsville, North Queensland. We met at my workplace – a quiet and private location. I recorded my reflections on the interview in my PhD logbook, noting that Joanna was relaxed and communicative. She focused on the complex challenges of finding quality care for her infant and dealing with a large bureaucracy when applying for subsidy.

The Townsville region is situated on the northeast tropical coast of Queensland, Australia. It consists of two regional cities, Townsville and Thuringowa, which rely on a variety of industries such as pastoral, mining, tourism and defence. The Townsville region has, in recent years, recorded strong population growth, with 31.6% of the population aged between 25 and 44 years (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003). Of the population of Townsville and Thuringowa 11.5% were born overseas (32.3% of these in the United Kingdom) and 5.1% were of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage. Table 4 provides selected demographic information taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics 2001 census data. These data provide some context for Joanna’s experiences and also the experiences of the other Australian respondents.

Table 8: Demographic Information for Selected Australian Sites

Demographic Information	Australia	Queensland	Townsville Region
Total Population	20.07 million	3.8 million	145,879
Overseas Born		22.3%	11.5%
Indigenous Decent*	2.2%	3.1%	5.1%
Median Family Income (Aust \$)		\$46,800	
Poverty Level	16.9%	18.1%	16.2%

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003

*Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

As previously discussed child care subsidy is administered and allocated by the Commonwealth Department of Families and Community Services (FaCS). The aim of FaCS child care support group is to contribute "... to stronger families (emphasis in the original) by helping families to participate in the social and economic life of the community through the provision of support for child care services" (Family and Community Services, 2005, p. 1). Women in the Townsville region receive child care subsidy to use a variety of child care options: long day care, vacation care, before and after school care and family day care. Table 9 summarises selected demographic information for the Australian subsidy users who participated in my study.

Table 9: Demographic Information for Australian Respondents who Receive Child Care Subsidy

Respondent's Name	Demographic Information
Chris	Chris is a white single mother with a seven-year-old child. She works part-time and her child uses after school and vacation care.
Susan	Susan has three children – ten, six and two. She is a white married women and a full-time student. Susan's children use family day care and vacation care.
Joanna	Joanna has a 12 month old baby. She is a white married woman who is working part-time. Her baby is in an infant program within a child care centre.
Robyn	Robyn is a white student living in a de-facto relationship. She has four children and uses part-time care at a child care centre. For her school aged children she uses after school care.
Anna	Anna is an Aboriginal woman with two children – seven and two. Anna is engaged to be married, works full-time and uses a child care centre, after school and vacation care.
Sheila	Sheila is a white married woman with two children – an infant and a four-year-old. She works full-time and both her children attend the same child care centre.

A Personal Narrative

In the following section Joanna provides a personal narrative – a snapshot of herself at the time of the interview. Reinharz (1992) notes that using transcripts from interviews is particularly useful for this purpose: “Transcripts of the interviews ... familiarise readers with the people who were studied and enable the reader to hear what the researcher heard” (p. 39). As with Vera’s narrative, I have chosen parts of Joanna’s narrative that show how she accessed subsidy, and also highlight her construction of herself and her child care need.

I work in an office. I’m half Human Resources Co-ordinator half administration. At the moment I work five hours a day from 9.15 am to 2.15 pm. Starting the 2nd December I go back to my normal work hours which are 8.00 am in the morning until 4.23pm in the afternoon. I’m married, my husband’s a scientist. At the moment he’s on a boat somewhere, I don’t even know where he is – it’s very sad. So yeah he’ll be away for about two weeks, we think! I have one daughter Ellen, she’s one year and two weeks.

Joanna described how she heard about the child care subsidy and the complicated process of applying for the subsidy:

When I was in hospital – when I had her they gave us a whole stack of information about what you can get from Centrelink (Centrelink is the Commonwealth Government Agency responsible for distributing child care subsidy funds to parents.) Which was good because there were other things - like when she was born you got a payment, like a bit of money from the government, which was good because I didn’t know anything about that.

It was a huge application form, it was like pages and pages long – I couldn’t believe the amount of information that they needed. I would think basically they need to know my name, my partner’s name, our tax file numbers, our income and what the day care place is. I would think that that is basically it. Because I don’t think that I’m particularly unintelligent or incapable of dealing with this sort of paperwork but it is really complicated! I even sort of got to the stage where I said to my husband “I hope this is right!” I haven’t got a clue what they want from me! It just seems really, really complicated!

Joanna had found locating and organising quality child care challenging:

We had family day care. I had her name on waiting lists everywhere since

just after she was born last year and when I went to go back to work I had initially had a child care centre ring me up and say we've got a place for you. The reason I wanted a child care centre is I just thought it would be a little bit more structured. They rang me up and said we have a place for you – so I had a talk to them about it and I said ok when does it start and they said the beginning of October and I said that's fine. They said come in and pay your deposit in September and that way the place will be yours. So mid September when I was due to make the payment I rang up to work out how to pay it, and found out that they'd given it to someone else because someone else came in and paid money! I was just devastated - I was just so devastated! Now I had no child care and I was due to go back to work.

This experience highlights a number of issues. Locating infant care was a difficult and complex task for which Joanna assumed sole responsibility. She was not only responsible for locating the care but also for assessing the quality of care her infant would be receiving. In the end she was relieved not to have to use the child care centre that did not hold her booking.

It was a private centre. I just really got the impression it was all for the money and we don't really care anything about you. Since having that experience I've heard really bad reports from three people about that centre - so I'm so glad that it happened now. At the time I was just, I was a wreck, but now I'm so glad. Like I've heard of one of their staff hitting a child. I'm just so glad she wasn't there. To be honest they were quite rude to me when I went in there in the first place.

Joanna's desperation to locate child care meant she initially had to compromise on the quality of care.

So we found a place with a lady that was school hours only because she didn't have enough car seats to have them when she did the school run. And that was ok, it was ok, it wasn't perfect. At the time it was, I know that you're going to look after her, and that was all that counted, because I had nowhere else. I had no choice really. I'd only been back at work a couple of weeks and a child care centre rang me on Tuesday and said we have a place starting on the following Monday. It was all a big stress then. But when I had originally gone to that child care centre I'd come home and said to my husband I really liked it – it's privately run but it's run by a family and the staff were just lovely. You know you walked in and they didn't make you feel like you were another person putting your name on their list.

Joanna defines the need met by subsidised child care:

I think to provide care for a child when the parent is not able to, so that could include a range of things aside from working – obviously it would depend on the family situation but it could include things like exercising. If you're – when my husband is away if I finished work at 4.00 pm and I wanted to go to the gym after work it would be nice to be able to leave her at the day care centre where I know she's settled and I know she knows them. And I also think it's really good for social interaction with the child. I think even if I didn't work at all. I think that even if you were not working it would be very important to have some options of part-time day care because if you're with the child twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week you're eventually going to go nuts! It's just too much – you need to have a break. You need to be able to be yourself for a while and anything that's good for you as a person is going to be in the long run good for the child!

A Sense of Entitlement

Joanna did not experience a sense of exclusion from her community based on her class or ethnic background. She views her access to child care subsidy as an entitlement. Joanna defines herself as a worthy person who has earned this benefit by paying tax. This sense of entitlement may be linked to the semi-universal nature of child care subsidy provision in Australia. Graycar and Jamrozik (1993) claim "... that making benefits available to all fosters egalitarianism and eliminates stigma" (p. 64).

I don't know if there's a stigma but then I wouldn't care if there was! It's all bullshit. I pay taxes, I'm entitled to it! Come on. I think a lot of the time if you feel that stigma it's because it's how you perceive it yourself ... and whereas because I don't care what people think about it, I'm less likely to notice if they do have negative connotations. Not that they're less likely to have them - I just might not notice it. And I think if you've been in a situation where you've been judged for being a recipient of welfare you're more likely to notice other people doing that to you as well. Whereas, I wouldn't know.

Motivations of the Powerful

Joanna locates the power to make policy with the federal government and its bureaucracy and believes the motivations of policy makers are other than those publicly stated. Controlling women is tentatively explored as a possible motivation. Clearly, Joanna argues, the welfare of women and children is not a priority. Joanna's assumptions about the government's disinterest in women are supported by Anne Summers (2003) in her book *The End of Equality*. The federal government, she argues, has withdrawn funding from organizations that monitor and promote women's equality; "... the Government no longer publishes reports that measure women's progress, and there has not been any inquiry into any aspect of women's equality for at least ten years" (p. 6).

I'm a bit cynical. I think a lot of it's for votes. Look at what we're doing. I think that if it was really to provide the services to their constituents that there would be a lot less bureaucracy. It just doesn't seem very, aside from not being user friendly, it doesn't seem very transparent. It seems to be very secretive - which I think that's a lot to do with the whole bureaucracy - things tend to get sucked into rules and how it works. And I find that very strange! I don't know - maybe the government's hoping to keep all women in the workforce and less people on unemployment benefit - which is obviously going to be of benefit to somebody - society hopefully! I don't know that they're going the right way about it.

I don't think they care about our children at all. I don't think that's where their focus is. And I think that's not just child care benefit I think that comes through into education and health. If they had that commitment to women and children you wouldn't have the waiting lists in hospitals. You wouldn't have the lack of budget for state schools. You wouldn't have lack of funding for the universities. No I don't think there's any commitment to - I don't know what they're committed to, but it certainly isn't women and children!

Conclusions

Joanna, like Vera, is a resourceful woman who negotiated the complexity of accessing subsidy and locating child care, with a strong sense of personal responsibility for this process. Joanna's experience is not defined by disadvantage related to her class and ethnicity. She is a white, middleclass, tertiary educated, married woman - the group of women most likely to use child care services in Australia (Jamrozik, 2001). In many respects these characteristics position

Joanna as an insider in contrast to Vera's outsider within status. However, her apparent advantage may hide a less visible disadvantage, where the illusion of choice obscures women's ability to articulate their oppression; "... overstating agency and understating constraints" (Baker, 2003, p. 5). The old assumptions about women as mothers shape Joanna's experiences – that women are primarily and independently responsible for their children.

Current Australian child care policy context reinforces these assumptions. Brennan (1998) discussed the implications of a change in child care policy – from viewing child care as a public good to assuming child care is a private interest; "... the shift in direct subsidies to individual 'consumers' ... such policy mechanisms encourage parents to think about services simply as matters of private preference" (p. 226). The impact of this policy context on the material lives of women is implicit in Joanna's narrative. Child care and subsidy entitlement have been defined by the state as an individual need (and gender neutral) and is consistent with the neo-liberal emphasis on individualism. It is difficult for women in this context to construct their engagement with child care as anything other than selecting a private service.

Learning From Experience

I have provided a context for the findings chapters that follow by presenting the personal narratives of two women who receive child care subsidy. I wanted to give a sense of who these women are – not just dislocated quotes in the findings chapters of a thesis. The intention of this chapter was also to challenge the essentialist construction of 'woman' by revealing the complexity of their contexts (personal and geographic) and asking 'which woman'?

Both Vera and Joanna are pragmatic and resourceful women, critically aware of the landscape in which they strive to do the best for themselves and their children. They are critical realists. Vera was in many ways typical of the Californian respondents who were most likely to be low income, single mothers from minority backgrounds. They live in the San Francisco Bay Area where the population is distributed in part according to ethnic identity. This group of respondents live in a City where only 2.1% of the population are African American and the average income level is very high. In this context Vera felt herself to be an outsider, acutely aware of her disadvantage based on her class and ethnicity. Joanna, in contrast, lives in a regional city in Australia where she is a member of the majority white, middle class community. She was also in many ways typical of the Australian respondents, though they were a more diverse group than the Californian service users. The Australian respondents' incomes ranged from low to high, they were single and married, and they worked full and part-time and were most likely to be from non-minority backgrounds. Joanna's experiences were not defined by feelings of exclusion but by pressure to assume personal responsibility for finding quality care,

as though she were a consumer purchasing a service. Neither Vera nor Joanna identified that their experiences were impacted by sexism. This speaks to the strength of current child care discourses and the deeply invisible nature of sexism. In a neo-liberal context where individual choice is privileged the experiences of women are depoliticised, their gendered disadvantage is obscured.

In this chapter I also explored the women's constructions of their child care need and the ways they resisted domination. I argue that the various positions from which the respondents in this study viewed child care subsidy influenced their interpretation of the need the service met. Vera and Joanna viewed child care subsidy from the position of service users. They are service users in two very different and complex contexts where the impact of disadvantage on their lives is both explicit and implicit. Nevertheless they both interpret the need as their own; a woman's need. Vera saw child care accessed via the subsidy as an opportunity to create a safe space for herself and Joanna saw the child care made affordable by subsidy as a mothering support. In doing so they have indirectly challenged the state construction of their need. Their conception of themselves as making pro-active child care choices provides them with the possibility of moral agency under oppression.

CHAPTER FIVE: CHILD CARE CHOICES IN ‘EVERYDAY/EVERYNIGHT’ LIVES

Yet, the realities are not about choices or making them but about balancing constraints (Hertz and Ferguson, 1996, p. 275).

In this chapter, Child Care Choices in “Everyday/Everynight” Lives (Smith, 1999, p. 97), I specifically explore how the material lives of women are shaped by child care subsidy policies. I have introduced each section of this chapter by providing a summary of the relevant child care subsidy policies and service contexts in California and Australia. I have also integrated into these sections recent child care subsidy research literature.

Smith (1999) claims that exploring women’s experiences in everyday/everynight lives means proceeding differently from accepted social research practice. The task of the researcher is not to explain the reasons for behaviour but rather to start from the experiences of women and ask what do these materialities of life tell us about ruling relations?

Thought, the social forms of consciousness, belief, knowledge, ideology are as much actual socially organised practices as cutting the grass in the front yard, taking place in real time and in real places, and using definite material means under definite material conditions (Smith, 1999, p. 49).

To place the experiences of the women service users at the centre of my analysis is to provide an account from a particular position – these women are positioned as insiders in the world of subsidy provision. This is a unique position that gives a sense of immediacy to the events of the subsidy world that a more conventional policy analysis does not: “The methodology of the positionless account relates us differently to what happened than the engaged, involved account given by the witness” (Smith, 1999, p. 51). Of course the policy makers and service administrators enter the subsidy world every day and their comments provide the possibility of description beyond the women’s particular point of observation. In this chapter I have explored how the policy makers and administrators’ accounts differ from the service users’ accounts, and also what they know in common. However, my central focus is on the women’s experiences of the subsidy world – a world located at the nexus of women’s participation in the public and private spheres (Bennett, 2001). This women centred exploration is about “... beginning where people are, in their lives, who are not among the makers of discourse or the participants in ruling” (Smith, 1999, pp. 68-69).

Child Care Subsidy Provisions in California and Australia

Child care subsidy policies in California and Australia differ in their funding mechanisms, service delivery systems and the parents to whom the subsidy is targeted. In this section I will summarise these differing subsidy provisions.

California

In 1996 the United States Federal Government initiated welfare reform by passing the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA). This Act emphasised employment and linked welfare-to-work programs to child care funding - funding for child care subsidies increased and the Earned Income Tax Credit was strengthened (Henly and Lyons, 2000; Meyers, Han, Waldfogel and Garfinkel, 2001). PRWORA replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Aid to Needy Families (TANF): “The 1996 law reformed and expanded funding for child care assistance to low-income families by combining several categorical programs into a single block grant (The Child Care and Development Fund or CCDF) and by authorising states to transfer funds from TANF to CCDF” (Meyers et al., 2001, p. 33). States were authorised to administer and fund child care according to self-defined need. They now had the flexibility to set eligibility requirements, define application procedures and the level of coverage provided by child care subsidy funds. California responded by changing their welfare requirements – requiring single mothers to become work active once their children reached the age of 6 -12 months. This dramatically increased the need for child care.

Federal and state child care funding tripled between 1996 and 2000 (Mezey, 2003). This increased funding level did not, however, keep pace with the increase in demand for child care. Henly and Lyons (2000) comment that low income parents are more likely to receive subsidies, but the percentage of parents receiving subsidies is low; “... in 1990 18% of working-poor families’ child care was subsidised, 12% of working class and 3% of middle class families” (p. 685). Post 1996 studies suggest subsidy use still remains low and varies greatly between states. Meyers, Heintze and Wolf (2002) estimate that only 10 – 15% of subsidy need is being met. Since 1996 spending on child care in California has increased by \$12 billion with an extra half a million child care slots created. However, the increase in child care slots has not been consistent across counties – Santa Clara County has lost ground (Whitaker, 2002). In 2000 The Women of Color Resource Center estimated that there were 200,000 families on waiting lists for subsidised child care in California, while in 2004 the estimated number of children or families on waiting lists had increased to 280,000 (Schulman and Blank, 2004). A Santa Clara County subsidy service administrator, who participated in this study, made the following comment about the waiting lists for her service: “There are a lot of people out in the County that are eligible for

these services ... the waiting lists are huge – could be 5000 people on our waiting list” (Subsidy Program Co-ordinator).

In California there are up to seven different child care subsidies parents can apply for. The major provider of these subsidies is the Californian Department of Education: Child Development Division. The Division disperses funds via 2,000 contracts to “... approximately 850 public and private agencies state-wide to support and provide services to more than 584,000 children” (California Department of Education, 2004, p. 1). In 2003 \$12 billion was allocated from the state budget to child development programs (a 12% decrease from the previous year) - 53% of these funds were State and 47% were Federal. Services are available to specified target groups, via public waiting lists or are available through particular programs. Meyers, Heintze and Wolf (2002) comment that the child care subsidy context in California is large and complex: “Assistance (is) provided through a variety of mechanisms, including direct services (for example public pre-school programs), vendor agreements with non-profit centres, and vouchers and income disregards that reimburse families for the purchase of private care” (p. 167). These services are highly variable across counties.

The Child Development Division funds five major subsidy programs: alternative payment; CalWORKS, Stage 2; CalWORKS, Stage 3; General Child Care and State Pre-schools. In Santa Clara County, the site for this study, two non-profit agencies and one private company contract with the Child Development Division to provide subsidy services. They have multiple contracts to administer alternative payment programs and/or CalWORKS programs. Child care centres and state pre-school programs also receive money from the State to fund either all or a portion of their child care slots. The following statement is an example of the funding terms and conditions that guide these programs:

Eligibility for our subsidy programs is determined by the guidelines set by the California Department of Education, Child Development Division and the local Child Care Planning Council. Parents must meet income requirements and have a need for child care while they work, look for employment or attend training. Parents who are incapacitated, who have children at risk of abuse or neglect, or have children with special needs may also be eligible (Choices for Children, 2004, p. 2).

For this study I spoke to subsidy service providers who administer a range of programs: alternative payment, CalWORKS, a state-preschool program and a fully subsidised child care centre. I asked a worker from a non-profit child care resource and referral agency to comment on how the subsidy services provided by her agency compared with similar services provided

by other agencies: “We all pretty much do the same thing, when it comes to determining eligibility and why they need child care. We all need to follow the State funding terms and conditions.” She went on to provide some insight into the uncertainty of their funding (contracts are renewed annually) and what that means for subsidy recipients:

We try to get them (subsidy recipients) not to take it for granted – like it’s owed to them. This is like a perk, and it’s not a guaranteed perk. At any time funding can be taken away from us and we would have to terminate child care for all our parents (Subsidy Program Co-ordinator).

This comment provides an insight into the underlying ideological assumptions of child care subsidy policy in California. In this account the subsidy service receipt is positioned as a privilege and not a right. The subsidy co-ordinator has accepted the role of a voice for the state – her duty is to remind service users of their position. She urges them not to become dependent on the subsidy program, on which of course, considering their vulnerable financial position, they are fundamentally dependent. For users of this service their access to child care subsidy exists in a context of constant uncertainty – reinforced by the State’s annual funding cycle protocol. Nancy Fraser (1989) argues that: “These programs do not in any meaningful way position their subjects as rights-bearers” (p. 152).

Australia

The Australian child care subsidy program is comparatively much less complex, and according to Deborah Brennan (2002) is “... relatively generous” (p. 96). It is now a single subsidy provision funded by the Federal Government. On July 1st 2001 the Federal Government changed the child care subsidy provisions. Previously, subsidy had been provided to parents as Childcare Assistance and Childcare Cash Rebate, and to non-profit centres as an operational subsidy. All of these subsidies were replaced by a single benefit, the Child Care Benefit (CCB) that aimed to increase the number of parents accessing the subsidy and also to increase the affordability of child care (Commonwealth Department of Families and Community Services, 2002). An Australian policy maker made the following comments during an interview for this study:

CCB aims to simplify the kinds of payments we have for families ... to get families to maximise their benefit and at the same time address some of the affordability issues. And part of it is that it can be paid now to the family rather than only being able to be paid to the service ... there’s been a sense that we’ll even it up so families can have a choice.

This is an assumption about what choice means. In this context the policy maker assumes that the criteria for adequate child care choice are met by providing subsidy funds directly to parents so that they can ‘choose’ their preferred service. This particular choice rhetoric focuses attention on the choice activities of parents and away from the financially diminished services from which they are choosing. It also averts our gaze from the implications of this restructuring for the child care sector (community based and for profit) and the quality of care provided in this altered landscape.

All Australian parents who use approved child care are eligible to receive Child Care Benefit on a sliding scale according to their income. Parents on the Jobs Education and Training (JET) program are entitled to additional assistance with child care costs not met by the Child Care Benefit. The Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FaCS) initiates a range of child care support services, of which CCB is one, which: “... contribute to stronger families by helping families to participate in the social and economic life of the community through the provision of support for child care services” (Commonwealth Department of Families and Community Services, 2003). FaCS subcontracts with the Family Assistance Office to deliver Child Care Benefit payments. Family Assistance Offices also provide families with information about their subsidy entitlements. Five hundred and sixty offices are located across Australia at other Federal Government Program sites: Centrelink, Medicare Offices and the Australian Taxation Office access and equity sites. In May 2002 there were 732,100 children attending formal child care across Australia – all of these would have been receiving some level of Child Care Benefit (Commonwealth Department of Families and Community Services, 2002). Over the four years from 2001 – 2005 the Federal Government allocated \$6 billion to child care.

The total amount spent by the Federal Government on child care from 2001 – 2002 was \$1,646 million. The majority of these funds, \$1,316 million were used for CCB. The remaining funds were spent on child care programs that provide;

“... targeted assistance for families with special needs, those that support quality, and those that facilitate the provision of child care in areas where the market alone would not deliver services. As well, \$131 million was allocated to FaCS and Centrelink to administer the program” (Martin, 2004, p. 7).

Table 10 summarises and compares child care subsidy provisions in Australia and California.

Table 10: Comparison of Child Care Subsidy Program Elements in Australia and California

Program Elements	California	Australia
Who administers child care subsidies?	local non-profit agencies, school districts etc	Federal Government
Availability of subsidy funds	limited	unlimited
Subsidy payments are made to	child care provider	child care provider or parent
Eligibility	low income families	all families - on a sliding income scale
Availability of subsidized services	multiple and extensive waiting lists	no waiting lists
Participation of child care providers	those willing to accept subsidy	all approved and registered child care providers
Type of welfare service	residual (safety net provision)	semi-universal (primary welfare provision)

Child Care Choices for Women in California

Accessing the Subsidy

The waiting list is pretty long. I mean it takes a while to get in because there are so many people in need (Donna).

In California child care subsidy is targeted to low income parents and aims to "... help parents pay for non-parental care for the child by subsidising the care the parent selects, or providing care directly through public programs" (Waldfoegel, 2001, p. 101). This is achieved through the provision of a number of subsidy programs administered by a variety of agencies and child care providers. For child care centres who contract with the State Department of Education subsidy is provided for a percentage of their child care slots or spaces. I spoke to the Director of a typical centre in which most of their child care spaces were subsidized. This centre receives subsidy funds from the State Department of Education and United Way (a large private charity). Six hundred families are on a waiting list to access these subsidised child care spaces. I asked the Director what people do while waiting to access subsidy?: "Some of them pay full cost. They can't afford it and they go into debt or they do what ever they can – they juggle. New parents don't work ... it's very unstable".

Alternative payment (AP) programs subsidize child care spaces with providers of the parents' own choice, who are willing to accept subsidy funds from an administering agency. AP programs have various guidelines and protocols according to the funding source and target client group. The Subsidy Coordinator of a Santa Clara County non-profit child care agency discussed the reality of one of their alternative payment programs, where forty providers contract with the agency to provide subsidized care: "So the parent can still choose who she wants her child to go with – but it's very limited – it's not every one in Santa Clara County". She estimated that 5,000 families were on their subsidy program waiting list.

In response to federal welfare reform legislation (PRWORA), California enacted in 1997 its implementation bill, The California Work Opportunity and Responsibility to Kids Act (CalWORKs) (Karpilow, 1999). The focus of CalWORKs "... was a 'workfirst' approach to move families receiving assistance into paid and unpaid employment" (Race and Public Policy Program, 2003, p. 1). CalWORKs provides specific child care subsidies for recipients in three stages. These subsidy programs replaced eight subsidy services administered by the Department of Social Services. County welfare departments administer stage one, and stage two and three are generally administered by child care resource and referral agencies across the state (Karpilow, 1999). One of these agencies in Santa Clara County contracts with the state to serve 900 parents. I asked the Subsidy Coordinator if parents shifting into CalWORKs had reduced other subsidized waiting lists? "No – there are a lot of people out there in the County that are eligible for these services".

Determining the total number of families on subsidized waiting lists across California has been a difficult task for child care policy advocates. Families, attempting to maximize the possibility of obtaining subsidy place their names on more than one waiting list, therefore "... simply compiling program waiting lists would lead to significant duplications" (Karpilow, 1999). Acknowledging this difficulty, the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network estimated that in 1998 in Santa Clara County 28,911 children were receiving CalWORKs subsidies; 10,164 were using other subsidized programs; 13,482 were on the local resource and referral's waiting list and 52,557 children were eligible for subsidized care (California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, 1998). According to Schulman and Blank (2004), in California in 2004 there were 280,000 children on child care assistance waiting lists. Schulman and Blank (2002) claim that this situation is not common across other American states: "One third of the states do not provide enough funds to serve all eligible families who apply for assistance and must place many on waiting lists or turn away families without even taking their names" (p. 67). For reasons other than duplication, waiting list length may not always be a useful way to determine unmet child care need; parents are aware of waiting list lengths and

therefore do not bother to place their names on lists (Schulman and Blank, 2002); eligibility requirements are tightened by agencies to exclude more applicants; and limited and /or stretched services do not promote their services (Mezey, 2003).

So it was in this context of complexity and scarcity that the women in this study sought to access child care subsidy. They were women working outside the home and therefore ineligible for the CalWORKS program and its child care subsidies. They approached a locally funded, small service, which in 1999 served forty families. The women were required to complete a subsidy application form (Appendix 9) and also to place their names on waiting lists at local child care facilities. This is a complicated process requiring considerable knowledge of community resources and how to access them. The women in this study discussed the challenges of initially locating the subsidy services. Most did not know that the subsidy service existed:

I didn't know about this service – at the beginning I was paying full cost
(Michelle).

The low visibility of the subsidy service in the community is consistent with Mezey's (2003) argument that services that have limited funding are less likely to engage in active community outreach. The Agency Director's comments confirm this:

Because the money is so limited we don't do a big push for publicity. The waiting list is long enough. There's that balancing between putting all of that information out and being swamped and saying 'well we have no money and we won't ...'

Jane's comment shows the level of resourcefulness needed by the women to access the service:

I think we educate ourselves in subsidy and I think you really need to be a good player, a good player and educated player ... Being that I live in the City and it was available for City residents, I think that's how I acquired the information. I don't think it was advertised well because it's very hard to find. You have to be very aggressive when you need help and I have found you have to do a lot of the footwork, but it is out there – everything from subsidy to grants to low cost housing (Jane).

For this group of women locating and accessing the subsidy was a challenging process requiring considerable resourcefulness. The women needed to demonstrate a high level of individual initiative to locate their community resources.

Locating a subsidy service was the first access challenge for this group of women. The second challenge was negotiating the waiting list. Only one of the respondents in this study received a subsidized child care place without having her name on the waiting list. Michelle was looking for part-time after school care for her seven year old child, a relatively easily located, low cost child care arrangement. For most women it was a much more complicated process. Receiving subsidised child care relies on the simultaneous availability of subsidy funds and a child care slot. Jane describes the process:

You still have to go on a waiting list ... the money has to be available. You have to seek your own child care, they give you the funds or the funds are available to you, but you have to go and seek out your own childcare. You have to get on the individual facilities' waiting list and once the facilities say yes we can take you and the funds are there... (Jane).

Vera's comment provides some insight into what it means to have the subsidy and child care become available at the same time:

Lucky – extremely lucky. Extremely, you know because I guess you have to be in the right place at the right time. Sometimes they (the subsidy provider) don't have any money. Sometimes they have an abundance of money. Sometimes they have money and a spot for your children. So you just have to be in the right situation at the right time (Vera).

The women also believed they could effect the length of time they were on the waiting list by calling the agency regularly and establishing an active relationship with the subsidy administrators.

I do remember calling a few times – that was a good year ago. Just to make sure you know, that all my papers were in. There were so many forms and papers and registering and trying to get him to school and everything. So yeah I do remember calling just to make sure everything was okay (Olivia).

The Subsidy Coordinator agreed with the women's perceptions that the ability to navigate the system successfully was an advantage. She provided an example of the difference individual initiative can make:

I know people fall through the cracks. She came in and she was really on it. I explained to her that there might be a program out there that doesn't currently receive subsidised kids. But might be interested ... and she actually found a family child care provider that didn't receive subsidy and liked this mother and child and wanted to serve her. Even though her income and

family size put her at the bottom of the waiting list – because we had money available and she found a spot. She got the subsidy before the person who had been on the waiting list for a year and a half and hadn't found a child care spot.

Though the subsidy administrative staff try to be as pro-actively helpful as possible:

That's the trickiest part – helping those parents that are shrinking violets. Seeking care takes a big step – for the parent to go out there and say I need help. We try to be overly nurturing and be like, 'Come on in – we love your children and we love you' (Subsidy Program Assistant).

The Agency Director highlighted the consequences of not finding the subsidy service and successfully negotiating the waiting list:

For some people they never get served – so kids are either not in care or left to their own devices ... They can't afford child care – so if they're not in a situation where they have alternative forms of care then it means not working. And that safety net for welfare moms is not in place – its only there for a very short time.

The Director's comment shows her awareness of the inadequate welfare context within which the subsidy service is situated. This context means that for women who miss out on the service the negative consequences are much greater than if adequate social services were in place.

From these data I conclude that this limited subsidy service provision has meant a less well-advertised service that women found challenging to locate. The women had to devote time to researching possible community resources that would assist with their child care costs. Once the service was located accessing the subsidy also required a great deal of individual initiative and dogged determination. Potential subsidy recipients were therefore required to have a variety of excellent social skills in order to locate and successfully access this limited subsidy service. This led me to conclude that less skilled and more vulnerable women, due to factors such as English as a second language, homelessness or domestic violence, may be less likely to access this valuable service.

The barriers to subsidy access described in this study are for many women so great that subsidy access is not even considered a possibility. Shlay, Weinraub, Harmon and Tran (2002) focused their research on the reasons subsidy eligible parents in Philadelphia did not access the subsidy services entitled to them. Respondents' reported the following as barriers to subsidy access; "... hassles associated with the application process, beliefs of long waiting lists, misunderstandings

and concerns over the type of child care that would accept a subsidised child, and prior unpleasant experiences with other public assistance programs” (Shlay et al., 2002, p. 2).

I provided feedback about my findings to the Agency Director (of the subsidy program the respondents in my study used) who then decided to alter agency protocol:

I think that there are more steps we can take so that the subsidy program really reflects the community. And frankly I hadn't even thought of it until you raised the issue. It appeared that we were serving a larger part of the community than we really are. The people who feel the most comfortable about talking are usually the more empowered. Even if you take that into consideration it doesn't matter what colour you are, what language you're speaking – if you are empowered like that and know the system then you are not the one I would try to reach out to. There's a whole group of people who would probably benefit more who are the silent folks ... so we can really look at the effectiveness of the program – the families we are reaching (Agency Director).

The Director's ability to quickly change agency procedures in response to service user experiences highlights the positive side of community-based services – they can be responsive to the unique needs of their communities:

It is easier to stay in touch with the realities of what is going on around you when you are not locked into a system. It's so easy to do nothing when things are done way out there – 'Sorry can't do anything...' (Agency Director)

Choice and Quality

You can't choose the facility you want to choose (Jane)

In California the narrow targeting of some child care subsidy programs to specific child care providers diminishes women's ability to select from the full range of child care options. Smaller alternative payment programs contract with a limited number of child care providers. Parents are free to choose only from this particular group of providers. State pre-school programs and child care centres that contract directly with the State Department of Education to provide subsidized care are not common and therefore provide a limited option. Parents receiving child care subsidy from CalWORKs and larger alternative payment programs are able to choose from a wider variety of child care providers. However two factors may impact the reality of this broader range of child care options. Firstly, in some subsidy programs child care providers need

to meet program quality standards to receive subsidy payments. This was the case for the Agency used by the Californian women in this study. The child care facility had to be accredited or in the process of gaining accreditation with the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). This enhances the quality of care provided by the Agency affiliates but it may also limit the range of provider choice available to subsidy recipients. The Subsidy Program Co-ordinator provided an example of a child care provider who wanted to be an affiliate: “... because she feels like her group is getting a little too upper class and white – but I really questioned if she could afford this”. So the cost of accreditation was prohibitive for smaller child care providers.

Secondly, providers may also be unwilling to participate in subsidy programs because of past negative experiences with the administrative process. There may have been delays in receiving payments from agencies administering subsidy money. Pearlmutter and Bartle (2000) found in their qualitative study that women moving from welfare to work in California were particularly concerned that state agencies were not paying child care providers in a timely manner. Schulman and Blank (2002) confirmed this finding on a national level. Providers in all but three states are reimbursed for child care services already provided, and these reimbursements are often delayed; “... which strains their budgets and discourages them from offering care to children in families with subsidies” (p. 69). Delay in payment may not be the only issue. The City Child Care Coordinator (a policy maker) comments on the willingness of full child care centres to accept subsidised parents:

It is very important to me that the subsidy money is made available in as many programs as possible. I think it is very important that parents have a choice... Not all centres want to deal with the Agency because of the paperwork involved in receiving the (subsidy). Also, all the centres are full so there is little incentive for them to accept subsidized parents – in reality parents’ choices are limited. If you take away the Agency programs there are really only a handful of providers that accept the subsidy money.

Child care choice is also impacted by the general supply of child care. In Santa Clara County child care demand is higher than child care supply. The California Child Care Resource and Referral Network (2003) reported that in 2002 there were 49,125 licensed child care slots in Santa Clara County and 181,495 children with working parents: “Licensed child care is only available for 27% of children with parents in the labour force” (p. 2). Child care supply is also impacted by geographic location and by age of children served. In Santa Clara County infant care is least likely to be available – with “... licensed centre-based care available for 10% of infants” (California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, 2003, p. 2). Welfare reform

requirements have expanded demand for child care particularly in low-income communities where child care resources tend to be less than those available in more affluent areas (Schulman and Blank, 2002; National Women's Law Centre, 2003). A subsidy administrator claimed that the state is responding to this increasing demand by encouraging parents to consider using informal care which is exempt from state licensing requirements – quality of care she argues may not be the priority:

The availability of child care and funding are two different things. But you have to look at the quality of child care that is out there. A lot of CalWORKS parents are using exempt care. They (the County) are making sure they understand they can use a relative ... Maybe Grandma is not the appropriate person.

In fiscal year 2000-2001, according to the Growing Up in Poverty Project researchers, 57% of CalWORKS participants used their child care subsidy vouchers to reimburse care given by friends and relatives. The researchers questioned if this "... shift toward public support of unregulated care is wise, given its uneven quality and whether it detracts from building a stronger center-based infrastructure for working families" (Fuller, Chang, Suzuki and Kagan, 2001, p. 28).

The women in this study faced two challenges; scarce subsidy services and insufficient licensed child care options. These limited choices impacted women's possibility of choosing quality care:

It traps you ... looking for subsidy, you are looking for certain types of care. I have watched it become a game and I have watched it become very hard to make a decision, because at one point I was very angry with the Director and I wanted to remove them (her children) but I knew that I couldn't. I couldn't in reality remove them (Jane).

Jane's comment highlights the strong link between child care choice and quality. For all the women in this study high quality care was a priority. Quality of care was also a priority for the women who participated in Henly and Lyons (2000) research. Their mixed method study, undertaken with a low income, racially diverse group of mothers in Los Angeles County, found that safety and quality were the criteria women most likely (57%) used to select child care. At a national level Henry, Werschkul and Rao (2003) comment on the vulnerability of low-income working mothers (a group similar to the respondents in this study): "Low-income working families, in particular, find affordable, reliable, high-quality child care extremely difficult to acquire; and for many low-income working women, that difficulty becomes a near

impossibility” (p. 1). However, the Growing Up in Poverty Project researchers found that centre care used by the CalWORKs’ participants in their study was “... of reasonable to strong quality” (Fuller et al., 2001, p. 26), though the lower availability of care in Santa Clara County, they argue, may be contributing to the overall higher quality of care. In Pearlmutter and Bartle’s (2000) study, parents on CalWORKs were also concerned about the quality of care their children were receiving. One woman commented: “Some of the day care’s not safe; they either nasty, or kids come home with diarrhoea and everything” (p. 162). Recently I attended an Institute for Women’s Policy Research (2003) conference in Washington, DC and at a public forum a CalWORKs mother raised concerns about the quality of care she was ‘forced’ to use because alternative care was not available: “Do you know what it is like to have your child come home with bruises?”

If women in this study were dissatisfied with the quality of child care the lack of alternative subsidised care made choosing another care arrangement difficult. I asked the respondents what they would do if they were dissatisfied with the quality of care their children were receiving?

Donna’s comments were typical:

I would report your complaints to the centre director there and if you feel it’s still not being addressed you would go to the people that funded it and complain to them and see what they would do. If they wouldn’t come up with the proper answer that would satisfy my complaint I could get on the waiting list probably for one of the centres, but it would probably take forever, I can say that ... If it was me alone I would just – if they wouldn’t do anything about it and it was really something that I felt was very negative I would probably end up taking my kids out, because I doubt it would be easy to get them into another place, very difficult, very difficult to get funding to go somewhere else.

Nonie: So what would be the repercussions?

Oh I would have to work but I would probably have to take a drop in pay and get off work when the kids get out of school. That’s probably what would happen. It would make it worse for my family, but if you care for your kids ... If it’s something – according to how serious what was going on was. If it was something they’d get by and would not be hurt physically or mentally damaged in the future I would probably go ahead and accept it. But if it was something very negative I would suffer the consequences of it. I would have to, I would not want to leave my kids there (Donna).

The Agency Director in this study believed the subsidy program was structured to provide sufficient choice for recipients:

The goal of the program is to provide the same opportunity the wealthy have to people who are not able to pay for quality – and quality care is expensive. We instil in families that they have as much right to quality care as anybody else – that if they're not in a good match for their children it would never jeopardise their subsidy as far as we're concerned. We feel we can provide enough choices in the community that that shouldn't happen.

However the Subsidy Program Coordinator's had an alternative experience of the reality of that choice:

Even though we say parents have a choice they don't always ... I do get a lot of calls from people – 'this happened, that happened' – what can I do? I can't solve their problems, but I can guide them in the right direction. It's hard with so few spots. If you're unhappy – like what can you do? (Subsidy Program Co-ordinator)

These data indicate that though quality was the women's highest priority in reality their child care choices were restricted by subsidy availability. Their ability to locate alternative care, if dissatisfied with the quality of their current care, was limited. These limitations, imposed by an inadequately funded program, meant in order to remain employed the women were less able to choose quality child care than women who were on higher incomes and therefore free from the constraints of child care subsidy programs.

The Agency Director (a policy maker) believed that the service did provide recipients with a good range of choices. However, the subsidy program administrators and the service users did not share this view – sufficient choice had not been their on the ground experience. There was a lack of fit between the views of the policy makers and the views of service administrators and users. This theme has recurred throughout this research and it has been present in both the Australian and Californian contexts. What this 'lack of fit' theme also highlights is the potential for women's experience, often inconsistent with official program goals, to challenge the 'authoritative' conceptions of policy and services.

The Cost of Subsidised Child Care

If we had our way we would subsidise anybody who needed that subsidy.

We don't have enough money to do that (Agency Director).

Helburn and Bergman (2002) argue that: "There is an urgent problem with the affordability of child care that the country needs to remedy" (p. 16). Affording quality child care is an issue for parents across the United States. Many are accepting sub-standard low cost care or cobbling together informal arrangements. Low and middle-income parents are the groups most likely to be affected by the high cost of care and many women are choosing not to work. In the United States parents either meet the entire cost of formal care or they receive public funds through a variety of subsidy programs (including dependent care tax credits) (Levy and Michel, 2002). However subsidy programs are consistently under funded and only partially meet the child care cost needs of low-income parents (Helburn and Bergman, 2002). The Children's Defense Fund noted in their 2001 Child Care Basics Report that: "Currently, no states serve all families eligible for assistance (child care subsidies) under federal guidelines. Nationally, only 12% of eligible children who need help are getting any assistance" (Children's Defense Fund, 2001, p. 2).

Child care costs between \$4000 and \$10,000 per year: "Yet, one-quarter of America's families with young children earn less than \$25000 a year" (Children's Defense Fund, 2001, p. 1).

According to the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network (2003) the cost of child care in California is far above families' ability to pay. In California the combined costs of housing and full-time child care for a pre-schooler exceeds the "... annual salary of a family on minimum wage" (p. 2).

Table 11: Proportion of Family Income Needed for Housing and Child Care by Wage Level in Santa Clara County, California

Family Income Level	Proportion of Income for Housing	Proportion of Income for Child Care
\$14,040/year (Minimum wage)	136%*	65%
\$30,000/year	64%	31%
\$81,717/year (County median)	23%	11%

*Cost of housing exceeds minimum wage

Source: California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, 2003.

Snyder and Adams (2001) calculated the actual costs of child care for families on different wage levels. In California high-income families were paying 7.2% of their salaries on child care and low income families were paying 18% with more than one third of these families spending over 20% of their earnings on child care. These data indicate that parents' actual proportion of child care expenditure was less than they could be potentially paying. The high cost of care may mean parents are using low cost options, including informal care. Subsidy payments may also be lowering child care costs.

In their 2003 Child Care Portfolio the California Child Care Resource and Referral Network gave the average annual cost of full-time licensed care for a pre-schooler in Santa Clara County as \$9,189. Table 12 provides the average cost of care in Santa Clara County for formal child care.

Table 12: The Average Cost of Child Care (per month) in Santa Clara County (California) for Child Care Centres and Family Child Care Homes by Age Group of Child in 2002

Age Group of Child	Child Care Centre Average Monthly Cost	Family Child Care Home Average Monthly Cost
0 – 1yr 11mths	\$1079	\$719
2 – 5yrs	\$706	\$654
6yrs & older	\$537	\$568
Before & After School Care	\$386	\$425

Source: California Child Care Resource and Referral Network, 2003.

The Agency Director of the subsidy program used by the Californian women in this study defined the group of women served by the program: “We are only serving the poorest of the poor because the priority of getting the subsidy is based on income eligibility”. Financial eligibility for using the program at the time of the interviews was a family income below 75% of the County’s medium income (\$81,717/yr). The fees paid by the service were calculated on a sliding scale according to income and number of children in the family. Special circumstances, such as a child with a severe disability, were taken into account. See Appendix 10 for details of the fee schedule. This smaller service is more generous than the state funded subsidy programs where financial eligibility is set at 75% of the state median income (\$45,000/yr). CalWORKs’ parents receive a child care subsidy up to the 93rd percentile of child care fees charged in the County (Carroll, 2001, p. 5).

Subsidy Makes a Difference

The Californian women provided detail about the impact of subsidy on their care costs across a range of child care settings. Donna uses after school care for her three school age children. She discussed her monthly child care costs:

\$106 per month for me. Everybody varies – it's according to your income. I should say that's \$106 total. That's \$106 for 3 kids. Now I think it is \$300 and something per child. I think so but I'm not sure. But I recall when I just had the one in there I think it was about \$75/week or so. So it is somewhere between \$200-\$300 per month per child (Donna).

Olivia's son is in a half-day after school care program for five days a week:

Right now I pay like \$405 a month. Without the subsidy it would probably be – I have no idea how much. I know it's expensive. I know that much. I don't know exactly but I know it's a lot (Olivia).

Jane has two pre-school children in child care:

I pay \$550 (per month) for both of them... Without the subsidy, the going rate for where I am, is over \$1,053 a month ... for one child (Jane).

Elena details the full cost of care prior to receiving the subsidy:

In the beginning, I wasn't in the program and I was paying \$200 almost \$300 a month just for the afternoons (four per week). After I got my application accepted then it kind of went down – I had to pay like \$69 (Elena).

Receiving subsidy makes child care affordable for these women. I asked the women what their lives would be like without the subsidy:

It (the subsidy) makes a huge difference – saving a lot of money a month. If they give them a snack that is not extra – I don't have to pay for that.

Without the subsidy I would have to pay whatever – there is no option to that. The options would be if you have a family. I don't have a family here; my family is in Costa Rica. Friends – I don't depend on my friends to take care of my daughter. I'm independent, so I would have no option. If you don't get the program you have to pay the full amount whatever the amount is basically (Elena).

I would not work. I would not be able to work if I didn't have it. It would just be, there would be no realistic way for me to work during the day – maybe at night... (Jane).

The following comment from the director of a subsidised children's centre describes the breadth of loss if the parent no longer receives the subsidy:

What they're losing is more than just the subsidised care – you look at food, grocery bills. I provide breakfast, lunch and snack ... subsidised care affects economics – not in just how much I pay for child care. So there are other ways subsidised child care reduces the economic impact on families (Subsidised Child Care Centre Director).

The subsidised children's centre director also thought subsidy made a positive difference in families' economic well-being:

The State is looking for outcomes – what we did is measure family income. If you give a family a subsidised program – does the family become more self-sufficient economically? Is there an improvement there? ... You can see that over a three-year period – families actually do better. Actually subsidised child care does work – a ten percent increase in income over time. We also know it takes time to see movement. Subsidised child care for one year isn't going to make that huge difference in terms of economics (Subsidised Child Care Centre Director).

These data indicate that receiving child care subsidy substantially reduced the women's child care costs. Affordable child care meant they were able to stay in the workforce and maintain their financial independence. These data also show that even a small inadequately funded service can make a positive difference in women's lives. Additionally, child care subsidies provide less visible (but vital) support – for example meeting part of the cost of food for children.

Employment Advancement

For the women in this study the subsidy also had negative costs – the loss of potential wages through employment advancement. Women had to consider the effect on their subsidy payment if they were to receive a pay rise. Their decision was to stay at their current income level and not seek advancement in their work place. For example – Elena was offered another job:

The money they were going to pay me, it wasn't worth it for me to take the job – with child care it would have brought up my child care payment, so by the time you get taxes and everything else it wasn't worth me taking the job.

Jane had experienced the impact of this negative cost:

Yes most definitely because it is a deterrent to get more taken out of your cheque then you got in increase. So you get a two percent increase and you get three percent taken. That takes food off your table and yeah why should we want to move up, why, why should you want to get or be deemed... Okay it's a deterrent, a very big deterrent and in fact if I would have known what my last raise did to my subsidy and how it increased. I think we talked about this last time, how it (child care cost) increased over \$160 and I got a \$100 raise. With the taxes figured in, it really has taken more out of my pocket now than I had before. I would have probably told my boss thank you very much but please leave me at the same level (Jane).

The subsidy program coordinator agreed that this was a dilemma for women on the program:

We have parents call us – 'If I get this raise I'd get this much. Could you tell me where I'd be on the fee schedule?' It's like; '... if I can just get them into elementary school at this fee rate it will be fine'. It's kind of sad but that's the reality (Subsidy Program Coordinator).

The subsidised children's centre director was able to provide an example from his own experience. A woman using his centre had received a promotion – her salary increased from \$2000/mth to \$2900/mth.

And her child care bill went up \$1000/month – it's a disincentive for her to be able to take a new job ... and the idea that she could get her family to take care of the children – that somebody else could just do this – then you lose sight of all the other things that are happening with that child.

A local newspaper picked up this story and claimed: "Then she bumped into the hard realities of life in Silicon Valley. Because her raise put her above 75% of the State median income, she was no longer eligible for state subsidized child care" (San Jose Mercury News Editorial, 1999, page unknown).

The women in this study found the sliding scale structure acted as a disincentive to employment advancement. For this group of women their choices beyond child care access and quality were limited by the less visible impact of the subsidy sliding fee scale. The structure of the sliding scale is often determined by the availability of subsidy funds. Many respondents in this study, across cohorts and countries, believed their subsidy system could be improved by increasing the income levels used for the calculation of subsidy levels higher. The structure of sliding fee scales is also influenced by the ideological assumptions of policy makers. Gwendolyn Mink (2002) explores the impact of ideological impact in her critique of the United States' Welfare reform program: "Instead of providing a pathway out of poverty... (welfare reform) enforces poor single mothers' economic inequality... assumes that any job outside the home is better than working inside the home if a mother is poor and unmarried" (p. 139). Gwendolyn Mink's analysis of Welfare Reform is relevant to an understanding of child care subsidies which Bacchi (1999) argues: "... constitutes child care as a 'welfare problem' and not as a general right of parents, as different in other words from public education" (p. 139).

The Cost of Providing Services

Child care cost was also an issue for the agencies providing subsidy services. The limited financing by the City of the Agency subsidy program serving the women in this study was a great challenge for agency staff. The City allocated the subsidy program \$400,000/year and has done so since 1974. The City Child Care Coordinator and the Agency Director discussed the difficulties of this fixed funding arrangement:

The City's allocation of funds for the child care program has not increased over time – in general as the cost of child care goes up this amount of money is going to serve less people and yet that doesn't seem to bother anybody. So it is as if the decision was made a long time ago – this is how much we are willing to devote to child care and if over a ten year period we are serving 3/4 of the families we were serving before then that's just the way it goes. So I think again that's a real indication of the lack of commitment or lack of clarity... (City Child Care Co-ordinator).

So that means that the money the City was allotting for subsidy is less – it won't go as far as it did last year... It's a dilemma for us trying to stretch those dollars (Agency Director).

The Agency Director also discussed the additional pressure of rising child care costs. The Agency Board put fees up at affiliated child care centres by 10% with the consequent impact on

the subsidy program: “The higher their fees go ... then we are going to service less kids every year” (City Child Care Coordinator).

The City Child Care Coordinator was also pragmatic about the service:

If child care was brought to the City today for the very first time – I think there are other ways to support child care without spending \$400,000 on subsidies. I love this program, it’s so important but it only serves 60 kids a year – puts me in the position of having to defend the program ... How many people do you serve for what amount? (City Child Care Co-ordinator).

There’s a whole political thing going on. They basically said they would give us more money this year and they haven’t (Child Care Subsidy Assistant).

These tensions and dilemmas are common in this service sector. Child care subsidy belongs to the ‘feminine’ sector of the U.S. welfare system (Fraser, 1989). These services, such as TANF and Medicaid, are funded from tax revenue, tend to be administered by states, and are inconsistently provided and inadequately funded. Women, the group most likely to use these services, are not positioned as ‘rights bearers’ (as are the men who benefit from ‘masculine’ social insurance schemes) but rather in the historical tradition of American child care services as “... clients of public charity...” (Fraser, 1989, p. 152). For agencies operating within this context funding is always tenuous and uncertain.

Child Care Choices for Women in Australia

Accessing the Subsidy

In Australia child care subsidy is available to all parents and guardians to assist with the cost of approved child care (Family Assistance Office, 2004). Because all users of child care are eligible to receive subsidy (on a sliding scale) the subsidy access waiting lists that dominate the Californian subsidy landscape do not exist in Australia. To access child care subsidy in Australia parents must be using an approved child care provider and have their children's immunisations up to date (or have an immunisation exemption). The number of subsidised child care hours that parents can claim is determined by the reason child care is required. If the parent is working, studying, training or looking for work then they are entitled to up to 50 hours of Child Care Benefit (CCB) per week. Parents can apply to claim over 50 hours for additional work, study or training commitments. Regardless of circumstances parents using approved child care can receive up to 20 hours per week per child.

The 20-hour limit (a reduction from unlimited hours) for non-work related purposes was introduced in the 1998 Federal Budget. The Brotherhood of St Lawrence explored child care provider perceptions of the impact this reduced limit had on low income families (Jope, 2000). This study found that the 20-hour limit reduced child care access for low income families particularly during family emergencies when additional care was required. A child care provider who participated in the study commented:

We had a young mother referred from one agency who required more than 20 hours. She had a mental disability as well as substance abuse. It was impossible to try and fit that care within the 20 hours (Family Day Care Co-ordinator).

These activity requirements, initiated in the 1998 Budget, limited subsidy access for non-working parents and reinforced the link between child care use and labour force participation: "So that it has this effect that families started using less child care and the legitimacy of using child care has slightly changed, if you weren't working" (Child care provider in Jope, 2000, p. 7). This is an example of the way child care subsidy policy can be used by the state to reinforce their vision of the purpose of child care – in this case to support the labour market and not the broad range of women's needs. Martin is an employee of the Child Care Policy and Planning Branch, FaCS and his comments indicate the department's support for the positioning of child care within the economic sphere; "... expenditure on child care could be considered as an enabler of economic capacity rather than merely a social outlay, and a prudent investment in creating economic opportunities and activity" (Martin, 2004, p. 30).

The Australian women in this study sought to access a service they were all entitled to receive (Appendix 11). They learnt about the child care subsidy through their child care facility or from the government distributor of the subsidy (Centrelink). Susan's experiences were typical:

I remember when Michael had to go to vacation care – we went and met the vacation care lady and she said to me you're going to have to go to Centrelink and sort out his Child Care Benefit. And I didn't know what she was talking about. But eventually I ended up going to Centrelink and filling out a ream of paper this thick – for all your information. You have to give all your financial information – what you own, what you earn (Susan).

Most of the women found the application process tedious and overly complicated, though Chris who was already receiving a supporting parent benefit found the process simple – Centrelink already had her details:

Easy, very easy! No problem at all. It was basically just fill in this form, hand it in and that was it. I don't think I needed to fill in any income because they had all my income already calculated and then by simply ringing up and just adding the extra, the additional day care centre on. That was just too easy! (Chris)

The child care centre directors interviewed for this study also reported an easy subsidy access process for their parents and the Canberra policy maker claimed it was the government's intention to make the subsidy access process as simple as possible: "So it's about making it a little clearer to families about what they're entitled to so they know this is what the government will pay of my child care" (Australian Policy Maker).

For the Australian women in this study accessing the subsidy was easy, though for some completing the application paper work was onerous. However, locating their preferred child care arrangement was more challenging.

Choice and Quality

In this study the Australian women service users linked child care quality to service access and also to whether the child care facility was community based or for-profit. The women's reflections indicate that community based care is valued and associated with the provision of quality child care. For the majority of women in this study choosing quality, community based care was their priority. Unfortunately this choice was not always possible.

The Realities of Accessing Child Care

Subsidy policy has affected child care supply by increasing some types of care and decreasing others. This has meant women no longer have a wide range of child care options available to them, and infant care appears to be particularly difficult to locate.

On a recent current affairs television program Lynne Wannan from the National Association of Community-Based Children's Services commented: "Right now I think the crisis is everywhere. I think you would be lucky to go to any community in Australia and find that families could get access to child care" (Sunday, 2004, p. 1). One parent who appeared on the program claimed they were on a child care waiting list at their local centre for two and a half years before being offered a place. The then Federal Minister for Children, Larry Anthony denied there was a crisis in Australian child care. He did admit, however, that child care supply is inadequate in some areas:

I do acknowledge, though, that it (child care) is patchy – in some areas there is unmet demand, in the inner city areas, where the costs of establishing child care centres are very expensive. In outer-metropolitan areas there is unmet demand and in some regional communities (Sunday, 2004, p. 1).

The child care subsidy policy changes made in the late 1990s have contributed to the child care access difficulties described by Lynne Wannan. Child care subsidy funding was no longer provided, in part, as an operational subsidy to non-profit community based centres (Summers, 2003). A Community Centre Director interviewed for my study described the initial impact on the centre of the removal of the operational subsidy:

They removed the operational funding – that was worth about \$70,000 (per year) to our centre... What they'd also done was reduce the Child Care Benefit so that child care was unaffordable to parents. So what parents did was use the absolute minimum. What they could get away with. So we had heaps of part-time bookings, which is very expensive administratively. They also put a cap on the number of places. It was a tough time – a lot of people went broke (Community Centre Director).

Bennett (2001) also argues that in the 1990s the Australian federal government "... pursued the marketisation of child care ..." (p. 33) by withdrawing child care provider funding in favour of direct subsidies to parents – from 'steering' to 'rowing'. This emerging emphasis on the privatisation of child care was identified as a concern by Deborah Brennan in 1993 when she argued that it meant the government no longer controlled where centres were established, "... even though it committed in advance to subsidising them through fee relief" (p. 111). The result

of this policy shift is that child care is not always available where it is needed – for example in inner city locations where the cost of land is high.

When \$850 million was withdrawn from the child care sector between 1996-2000 many centres either closed down or increased their fees substantially (Summers, 2003). During this period the Federal Government also reduced the number of new long day care places funded per year to 7,000 (Brennan, 1999; Summers, 2003). FaCS determines how many child care places it will provide subsidy for. This is a mechanism the government uses to exert control over child care supply and subsidy costs. The negative impact of these policies on women’s workforce participation rates led to the partial restoration of child care funding by the government in 2000. Restored funding levels were however still lower per child care place than the funding level a decade before. Nevertheless, the earlier and continued redirection of child care funding represented a “... significant change to the structure of child care provision” (Romeril, 2002, p. 6) leading to the rise of the for profit sector with consequent impact on both the supply and quality of child care (Brennan, 2002).

The following table summarises 2002 child care use data from the Department of Family and Community Services Census of Child Care Services. Interestingly this table also shows that approximately two thirds of children using long day care in Australia are being cared for in for-profit centres.

Table 13: Percentage and Number of Children by Age Group and Type of Service, Australia

Age	Community-Based Long Day Care		Private Long Day Care		Family Day Care Schemes	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
< 3	46682	44	69857	35	38243	41
3 - 4	55890	52	106779	53	29863	32
5	3752	3	12949	6	6014	6
6 +	993	1	11230	6	19330	21
Total	107317	100	200815	100	93450	100

Source: Census of Child Care Services, 2002

Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data indicate that the number of children in formal child care increased from 23% of children in 1999 to 25% in June 2002. Child care centre waiting list data may be an unreliable predictor of child care demand as parents tend to place their children’s names on multiple waiting lists. The ABS, however sought to clarify child care

demand by asking parents "... not using formal child care ... if they would have liked to use it if it were available" (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, p. 5). Parents who were currently using informal care reported that they would prefer formal care for 6% of their children (174,500). This level of demand has not altered since 1999 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003). However, the Centre of Full Employment and Equity Child Care Report (Lee, Carlson and Mitchell, 2001) claims that the demand for child care is higher than the ABS data indicates; "... with 16.3 per cent of 3 year olds and 18 percent of 4 year olds requiring additional care" (p. 8). They also claim that the level of child care need is higher for low income families. The highest level of need was for 3-4 year old children and the study suggested that lack of child care contributed to unmet demand.

The women in this study were searching for child care in Townsville, a regional city. Lee et al. (2001) found that: "Regional families were only slightly less likely than their urban counterparts to be using formal care. 22.5 percent of families living outside the State capital cities were using some formal care, compared to 24.2 percent in the capitals" (p. 6). The Townsville City Council has, according to their Community Services Department, supported local child care services since the establishment of the first day nursery in the city in 1947. During our interview the Manager of the Community Services Department gave the reasons for the Council's support as "... seeing the potential for child care as a way of actually supporting families generically, building relationships, providing information, being there when things get difficult".

For the Australian women in this study choosing quality child care that was readily accessible were their highest priorities.

Geographical accessibility, the quality of care – they are right up there side by side because they're both important. If I can't get to my kids in an emergency you know I'm just going to put myself in a flap, so I need to be close to them and I need them to be close to me. That they know that if I can't get to them they can jump in a taxi and come home or whatever. Something can be arranged and they're close. Absolutely the quality of the care (Susan).

Basically I want to be near them, I like to be near where they are. I don't want to be a long way away from where they are. So as long as they're here I can generally whiz down if they need me... (Robyn).

Child care scarcity, however, meant that this was not always possible. Women with infants faced the greatest access challenges:

Firstly I could not get a place for a twelve month old baby. For Michael (a school age child) it was automatic – vacation care was the only option. I wasn't going to put him in a child care centre with regards to his age. With George (the infant), at the time I could not get a place in a day care centre, there just was no place and I rang out of my way, even out of my transport way. You know I was quite happy to take him to one at South Townsville if I had to, provided I could get care, but I couldn't. I rang four day care schemes... I rang all four of them and the only one I could get was Inner City Family Day Care Scheme (Susan).

I asked Anna "So for your two year old, what made you choose that particular child care centre?"

It was the only one. It was the only one. It was basically the only child care centre that I could get her into which was basically on my way to work in town. So yeah and it worked out perfectly... Yeah, it was difficult because of her age. If she was older it probably wouldn't have been a problem with a lot of day care centres around town. But certainly because of her age there's not a lot of vacancies available and it just so happened that there was a vacancy there (Anna).

Though Anna was happy with her current arrangement it was not her ideal choice:

So basically when I tried to get her into day care it was finding a day care on my route from here into town that I could put her in... A lot of the other day care centres especially just up the road here there's one just across the road from Molly's school and there were no vacancies and that would have been perfect for both of the girls (Anna).

Sheila's area of work meant she had heard of the difficulties of other women with young children, as well as experiencing her own challenges:

I work with some young women you know - like we heard that young women having babies and trying to get back to school – just don't have the vacancies you know ... and as I said I think I started looking in about October for a place in January so yeah I was really, really lucky! Just the right time! (Sheila)

Robyn's reflections highlight one of the impacts of scarce infant care. When a child care place became available, prior to when it was needed, Robyn felt she had to accept and use the place in

order to keep the care to meet her future requirements. This was done at great personal and financial cost:

If they're on the waiting list especially little ones under two it's very hard. I've tried to change days and it's impossible ... It meant that for little babies, even though I had to pay for him to come, I had to pay for the whole day. I wasn't at Uni last semester but I knew I would be this semester but to keep his place I had to have him in to keep that place. Even though it was costing me an arm and a leg at one point, I was very, very poor for a while, to keep that place I had to have him in and sometimes I went for an hour. But when he was only tiny the problem I had placing him, when he was just born I had to book him in and a place came up and I couldn't stall so I had to put him in. He'd only been there for an hour just so the place was there and yeah I couldn't take it. I'd go and say, 'No I'm not putting a tiny baby in there!' I had to make sure I had that place. I had to put this child in there even though I didn't want him in there at that time. I had to keep him in there to keep his place. It was very difficult ... (Robyn)

For the Australian women, locating child care for their children under two was a particularly challenging process. Though quality and accessibility were their highest priorities lack of child care meant accepting what was available not necessarily what was preferred. Infant care was particularly difficult to locate. Robyn described the emotional cost of holding a child care place for her infant before she really needed it. A parent on Channel 9's Sunday Program (2004) had a similar experience: "I was crushed. I didn't really get to enjoy any time at home, because the whole time I was preoccupied with, "Is my daughter to have a place?" (Sunday, 2004, p. 3).

Profit Making Prevails

For the women in this study choice and quality were not only linked to child care availability but also to the type of child care facility – community based or private. Changes to child care subsidy policies in the 1990s encouraged private sector expansion leading to concerns that profits rather than quality are the priority (Brennan, 2002). Half the Australian respondents shared this concern:

And I think in some regards it's a community based centre rather than private you know because it's probably more of a money making venture in the private system. So I kind of feel a little bit more relaxed about that stuff – that she's at a community based organization (Joanna).

Sheila valued the sense of community fostered by parental involvement in the child care centre:

I've got a girlfriend that works in private, and I still know that their centre is a good centre but like I suppose again it comes back to it's got to make money you know ... I know that her as a worker she struggles with some of that stuff too, so I think you know just that community based stuff is. You do the old fundraising all the time and I suppose it makes you feel part of that community too. Chipping in and they have working bees and whatever so I think it's just important to have that bit of a link there too (Sheila).

Robyn described her negative experience of using for-profit child care:

I do find the idea that they're privatised difficult, because profit making prevails. My little boy who is now nine used to go to a childcare centre, it was a private one, so they were less well off than these ones here. They were as nice and the people – but they had to stretch things, they had to water down the paint and I don't know what. There's only so much they can do so the paint doesn't drip away. When they put it on for the kids you've got to do it with real soul. You've got to have real paint, but because they're cutting costs they had about three drab colours. I don't like the idea of privatised childcare and I don't like the idea they're so poorly paid, because of staff problems – it does mean that you'll have a different level of staff quality (Robyn).

The Community Child Care Association shared the women's concerns – they view the "... growth of large corporate child care chains in Australia with some disquiet" (2002, p. 6). Some argue record profits in the private child care sector are at the expense of quality child care:

Over the past two years, the two biggest corporate players – ABC Learning Centres and Peppercorn Management – have seen their share prices rocket seven-fold and nine-fold, respectively. But some parents are concerned that these profits are being driven by ruthless cost cutting – and that shareholders' interests are being put before those of children (O'Brien in Alberici, 2004, p. 1).

Profits for ABC Learning Centres grew 85% in the six-month period to December 31st 2003. There are concerns that federal government child care subsidies, which provided 60% of private centre care income, are funding a private sector industry (O'Brien in Alberici, 2004). A Community Centre Director in this study commented:

The commercial centres have a lot of power and it's concentrated in a few

hands... I sometimes wonder if the government has created a monster – because I realise these people are very powerful and politicians want to get re-elected and if they get lent on hard enough they'll cooperate.

The Community Centre Director discussed an accreditation visit she undertook to a private child care centre. This story highlights the lobbying power of the private child care industry and the possible impact of that power on the quality of care provided:

There were all these toys (on display for her visit) and the kids were asking if they could touch them. It was such a sad place. So I rang the accreditation council and said, "This centre is not good" and they replied, "Don't criticise the staff just criticise the building". And of course the building is state legislation and the quality of care is Commonwealth ... Of course when I did that (complained about the quality) all hell broke loose. They had me by the short and curlies. They went to politicians – it was mentioned in parliament! I just couldn't believe it. I understand now how it works – that politicians are vulnerable to these people because these people have a lot of money. I envisage that this happens with public servants, as well, who go in and check these centres.

Deborah Brennan (1998) argues that the community child care movement was "... born from a public vision of the well-being of children and families" (p. 227). This vision, she contends, "... simply can not be sustained in an environment where the great majority of services are built for the purposes of private profit" (p. 227). I asked a Canberra policy maker what her response was to this argument:

The community based sector was set up as the original way we got child care services set up ... Then we got to a point when the government couldn't keep pace and said to private services, 'If quality is OK then we'll provide your families with subsidies'. For all that time the community services still got operational funding to keep them afloat. The private centres grew and flourished and we said, "You can actually do this and do it very well without operational funding and we need to create a level playing field". I think what we've seen is the community services haven't gone away. They haven't grown but they haven't gone away. We do have a mix and families will choose what is right for them. I suppose from the government's point of view we've got a balance... There hasn't been particularly an attack on the community-based services, but there's been a sense that we'll even it up so families can have a choice.

I concluded from the Policy Maker's response that the Australian Federal Government is content to shift the responsibility of providing child care services to the for-profit sector. I thought her comment assumed the following: that it was acceptable for the government to subsidise a for-profit sector to undertake what had previously been a government responsibility; that a 'level child care playing field' is created by a combination of community-based and for-profit child care providers rather than by addressing issues of quality, cost and accessibility; that the operational subsidy gave community-based centres an unfair advantage; that 'families' construe adequate child care choice as the opportunity to choose between community-based and for-profit child care providers and, further, that in all circumstances the 'market' will ensure that they have this choice. Carol Bacci's (1999) discussion about child care subsidies helps make sense of these assumptions. She argues: "The language of choice in this case also suggests a minimal role for government in 'private' lives, neglecting the way in which this kind of policy creates the conditions which will shape people's lives" (Bacci, 1999, p. 140).

Child Care Costs in Australia

Powlay (2000) compared child care affordability across OECD countries and he found that high and middle income earners in Australia pay a relatively high contribution to the cost of care. Comparatively low-income Australian families fair much better, particularly when considered in the context of other benefits paid to these families. What seems to be uniquely Australian is the provision of subsidy for non-work related care.

In July 2001 the Centre of Full Employment and Equity reported that between 1996 and 1999 long day care for preschoolers became less affordable. Prior to 1996 the chief reason for three and four year olds not accessing care was unavailability of child care places. After 1999 the reason not to access care became cost. The Centre's report also notes that gap fees (the unsubsidised portion of child care fees) increased between 1991 and the first half of 2000: "In July 2000 the introduction of Child Care Benefit restored the gap fee for low-income earners to the 1996 level" (Lee, Carlson and Mitchell, 2001, p. 7). Comments made during my interview with the Manager of the local Council's Community Services Department supported this ascertain:

When I did the planning document ... there were a lot of vacancies and I guess we recognised at the time that the vacancies were not through lack of need for child care but were related to affordability ... and now the Commonwealth has increased the child care benefit and now it's turning around.

Lee et al. (2001) argue that in an ideal world the payment of child care subsidies should reduce the cost of care. However, according to their research this anticipated cost reduction has not followed subsidy provision for three reasons. When the operational subsidy was removed from community-based centres their fees rose and "... private sector fees followed the price rises of the community sector" (Lee et al., 2001, p. 11). Additionally, accordingly to Powlay (2000), child care facilities time their fee increases to coincide with increases in subsidy levels. Brennan (2002) also maintains that child care costs rose because the Federal Government froze the fee ceiling for calculating the subsidy payment: "This change in policy substantially increased the cost of care for low- and middle-income families..." (p. 107).

Researchers (Powlay, 2000; Lee et al., 2001; Cassells, McNamara, Lloyd and Harding, 2005) agree that since 1991 child care fees have risen rapidly – child care now represents a considerable cost for families. Cassells et al. (2005) provides up to date data on child care costs in Australia. They found that though child care costs decreased with the introduction of the CCB in July 2000 they subsequently increased dramatically through to 2004. Child care fees increased during this period by almost twice the consumer price index for the same period.

Cassells et al. (2005) found that the most expensive form of child care was vacation care because of the high number of hours required and because not all vacation care programs attract the CCB. Married, working couples had the highest child care costs and lone parents relatively low costs. This difference was due to the amount of formal care used and the level of subsidy received. This finding was consistent with the data I gathered in my study. Chris is a single mother who works part time and has one school age child. She receives a lone parent benefit. Chris reported that her child care fees were very low – she received 100% subsidy: "Vacation care costs me about \$9.00 for the three days. And after school care, it's only something like a \$1 something an afternoon. So it's not very much at all!" However, for Robyn, also a low-income parent, the cost of care for her two pre-school children was still too much: "Well, I receive the whole subsidy – 100 percent I suppose... When they're both in two days a week it works out \$79 a fortnight. It's a bit excessive for a pauper" (Robyn). Chris's low child care costs contrasts with Sheila's experience. Sheila is married, with both parents working and requiring full-time care for an infant and a preschooler:

Well this is where basically with Mary, we worked out that it might be \$20 a fortnight that we're getting (the subsidy amount), you know. I suppose give or take you'd just have to and at the end of the day I suppose I'm on an income that is probably better for us to receive that income than not receive that income. So at the end of the day we'd have to pay it I think. With the new baby though it will be interesting to see how much subsidy we'll get...

if we don't get very much of a subsidy we could be paying – well in the baby unit you're looking at \$200 a week and then there would be Mary's fees. So, you know what \$175, because she'll be in the next unit so that's \$375 a week (Sheila).

Cassells et al. (2005) also found that the higher the family income the more likely child care costs were reported as a difficulty. A Centre Director who participated in my study agreed that for high income parents child care could be very expensive: "It's almost like having another mortgage – it's huge. Some parents come to the front desk and pay \$700-\$800... I think on a low income you certainly get a good break. I agree child care is quite expensive" (Centre Director).

CCB is a means tested benefit where the amount of benefit received is determined by income level. Currently low-income earners, under \$30,806/year, receive the maximum subsidy rate; ... which for 2002-2003 is \$133 per week for one child in full-time approved care. High income earners – currently those earning over around \$88,000 pa (more for families with more than one child) – are entitled to the minimum rate, currently \$22.35 for each child in full-time approved care (Pople and Martin, 2003, p. 3).

In 2002 the average weekly cost of long day care for one child in full-time care was \$189 for community-based care, \$186 for private care and \$164 for family day care. Average costs differ by state with Queensland having the second lowest cost of care (Pople and Martin, 2003). In Queensland the cost of care in large regional cities such as Townsville was only slightly less than the cost of care in the state capital. The average gap fee (the portion of unsubsidised child care cost) differs according to income level and therefore says little about child care affordability: "For this reason, child care fees are often examined in terms of the proportion of a families disposable income that they represent" (Pople and Martin, 2003, p. 8). In 2002 child care gap fees for full time care represented 9-10% of weekly disposable income for low-income earners and 13% of weekly disposable income for high income earners. At the end of their conference paper Pople and Martin, employees of FaCS, maintain that:

CCB enables parents to access child care on an equitable basis, regardless of family income, while still ensuring that the majority of assistance is targeted towards low income families. The introduction of CCB, which substantially improved the affordability of child care, has been one of the key factors enabling the increases in supply and use of child care of all types since 1997 (Pople and Martin, 2003, p. 14).

The Canberra policy maker supported this assertion and she claimed that: “The child care benefit was introduced to get families to maximise their benefit and at the same time see if we could address some of the affordability issues – there was an intention to improve affordability”.

Cassells’ et al. (2005) data indicates that the cost of child care has not been reduced in the long term by the introduction of the CCB. In my study a community centre director was concerned that the high fees in for-profit centres were fuelling the record profits in this child care sector: “The way you make money in child care is by minimising your staff and minimising their qualifications. The cost is in staffing”. She went on to say that 80% of her budget is spent on staff wages and it was her understanding that commercial centres spent 50% or less: “In commercial centres I think you might be tempted to put quality of care below financial commitments. And I think as a manager there would be considerable pressure”. Robyn, a service user, had similar concerns:

I also understand that childcare workers are very poorly paid, very poorly paid. I’ve often spoken to the staff about their pay because I find it appalling! It’s such a hard job looking after the kids and yet the senior staff are getting \$13 an hour. I’ve done a lot less sitting around doing nothing for \$17 an hour. Looking after little kids is very difficult and demanding and it’s a very important job and to see them getting \$11 or \$9, it must be \$9 but the senior staff who have done all the courses \$13 an hour. I find that revolting and I’ve asked them about that and they’ve said, “Private across the board – they’re actually better paid than the award wage”. So I’d hate to think what that is. And this is another thing I’ll tell you about on the tape. I did Law, last year there was a girl in my class with a brand new BMW that Mummy and Daddy bought her and mummy and daddy also bought her a boob job as well! Mummy and Daddy own childcare centres but while the workers are getting \$10 an hour to look after 50 kids or something, these people have enough money to buy their daughter a top of the range brand new black BMW (Robyn).

In 2001 Anne Summers commissioned focus groups across Australia “... to seek the views of women... to provide... invaluable insights into the reality of Australian women’s lives today...” (Summers, 2003, p. 12). A respondent in Summers’ study claimed:

I always like to take the opportunity for the work but then I think maybe I could work between nine and three because the casual child care centre takes them then and that is \$5.60 an hour, and you are adding up how much that

will cost you for the day, then thinking how much you are going to be paid for the day ... and you think, well, I am only going to clear about \$40 for the day so I don't bother.

Summers (2003) also maintains that working women are disadvantaged by CCB and 'family' policies. Not only does their child care assistance decrease substantially as their income rises but also they no longer receive a variety of family benefits: "In fact, (with) the withdrawal of family benefits and the way the tax system works means a working mother can lose almost half her income in tax" (Summers, 2003, p. 149). Summers is arguing here that child care affordability needs to be understood in the context of the sliding fee scale, family benefits and the taxation system. Further, the child care subsidy is calculated on the income of both parents where other forms of family assistance are calculated on the beneficiaries' income alone. Summers suggests these policies are evidence of the current Federal Government's hostility towards working women: "So the low-paid working woman is not helped as much by the government as the stay-at-home wife of the rich man who is subsidised by tax payers because the prime minister approves of her lifestyle" (Summers, 2003, p. 150).

For the women in this study child care cost was an issue – particularly for the middle-income women. Women are still having to ask, "Is it worth for me to work – will child care cost too much?"

At the moment if we didn't get it (the subsidy) it wouldn't really be an issue. But with the new baby... Well I suppose at the end of the day if we don't get much subsidy we'll probably still have to just cop it on the chin anyway, you know. We don't have a lot of choice (Sheila).

Conclusions

In this chapter I have summarised current child care subsidy policies in California and Australia. I have provided specific policy detail related to the impact of subsidy policy on child care accessibility, quality and cost. Current child care issues, such as the rise of the for-profit sector in Australia, have also been explored. I have also presented recent child care subsidy research to show how my findings are consistent with and add to current research.

The child care subsidy context in California is particularly complex. Child care subsidy is funded by the Californian Department of Education (from Federal and State funds) and dispersed via 2,000 contracts with 850 agencies across California. The annual funding cycles and contract renewal processes required by this funding regime reinforces the positioning of subsidy programs in the 'feminine' sector and within a context of uncertainty – where subsidy is viewed as a privilege and not a right. Child care subsidy funding under the 1996 Welfare

Reform initiatives has been narrowly targeted to welfare-to-work programs – again reinforcing subsidy as a safety net service for low-income women. The Australian child care subsidy provision process is comparatively much less complex and the service is positioned as a semi-universal entitlement. Subsidy funds are paid directly to the approved child care provider chosen by parents via the Child Care Benefit. Approximately 80% of Federal Child Care funds are distributed as CCB. The stated aim of the subsidy program is to encourage a child care ‘level playing field’ by providing parents (rather than services) with subsidy funds, thus enabling them to choose their preferred child care arrangement from a wide variety of service types. This parent-focused construction of child care choice is consistent with neo-liberal rhetoric that elevates “... personal choice over considerations of collective good” (Baker, 2003, p. 1).

For the Californian and Australian women child care subsidy was a valuable service that enabled them to participate in the paid labour force and remain financially independent. The women’s material lives were, however, shaped in different ways by their respective subsidy contexts. For the Californian women, accessing a scarce residual service required them to be highly resourceful. They were not able to choose the child care they preferred, change their child care arrangements if dissatisfied with the quality, or pursue employment advancement because the additional income would preclude subsidy access. The Australian women saw their semi-universal subsidy service as an entitlement. The higher levels of subsidy meant they were more able than the Californian women to choose the care arrangement they preferred. In reality, though, infant and community based care were difficult to access, the cost of care was a significant issue for middle-income women, and the women spent a substantial amount of time and effort locating quality care they could afford.

For the Californian women the scarcity of subsidy services reinforced their position as “... clients of public charity...” (Fraser, 1989, p. 152) and not as rights bearers. The women actively had to locate and access an essential service in a context of inadequate social provision – creating a sense of urgency to secure and keep services that will prevent them falling into poverty. Further, consistent with neo-liberal hegemony the rhetoric of choice permeated the provision and administration of subsidy services in California. The experiences of the women in this study challenged this rhetoric. Their material reality was one of limited choice – they were experiences of balancing constraints (Hertz and Ferguson, 1996).

For the Australian woman child care subsidy is a semi-universal entitlement which did not position them as recipients of public charity. However, the focus of CCB on work related child care need reinforces child care as a labour market support rather than a service to support a

broad range of women's needs. Child care in Australia is now firmly positioned in the economic sphere. Currently CCB provides 60% of private child care centre income where the profit-making goal is inconsistent with quality child care provision. This was a particular concern for the women in this study. The Federal Government maintains that the growth of the subsidised for-profit child care sector promotes child care choice – a responsive market driven child care sector that establishes centres where parents need them and provides quality care at a price parents can afford. This was not the experience of the women in my study. Additionally, despite Australia's relatively generous child care subsidy cost is still an issue. Subsidies appear to be fuelling the profits of private child care rather than reducing the cost of care for women. The Federal Government's choice rhetoric conceals their push to commodify child care and also their conservative position on the role of women in the workforce (the group for whom child care is most expensive). As with the Californian women, it is the material realities of the Australian women in this study that challenge the Government's choice rhetoric – their experiences were also ones of balancing constraints.

Smith (1999) urges the critical feminist researcher to ask what do these materialities of life tell us about ruling relations? The data presented in this chapter have shown that women's position as insiders to social service provision provides an opportunity to challenge government rhetoric and expose concealed agendas. In California and Australia, though the subsidy systems differed, women in both contexts did not experience subsidy policy as a mechanism for enabling child care choice. Their experiences were of negotiating a service, which despite government rhetoric to the contrary, marginalizes the needs of women. Probert (2002) argues that conservative ideologies are submerged under the policy buzzword of choice. In reality the ideological context in both countries, as with the women's experiences, is similar – contexts where the economic rationalist imperative both supports women's labour force participation (as low paid workers) and the for-profit child care industry and conflicts with underlying conservative moral narratives about women as mothers. The result in California and Australia are directionless and contradictory subsidy policies and services that women negotiate at considerable cost to themselves and their families.

CHAPTER SIX: RESPONDING TO CONDITIONS OF DOMINATION

Nonetheless, it remains true that, if domination operates in the sphere of 'everyday/everynight lives' ... it can be resisted there (Thompson, 2001, p. 49).

The biographies presented in Chapter Four provided insight into the complex challenges faced by Vera and Joanna when they accessed and used subsidised child care services in California and Australia. These biographies and the experiences of the other respondents, presented in Chapter Five, led me to conclude subsidy policies shaped the lives of the women in this study in two ways. Firstly their material lives were impacted – how their lives were lived. Secondly, subsidy policies shaped the way the women constructed and positioned themselves in response to conditions of domination. Thompson (2001) urges feminists to focus on the role of domination in the construction of experience and to recognise the ways women resist domination. She argues that there is no "... sphere of personal life which escapes relations of domination" (Thompson, 2001, p. 24). Domination, necessarily obscured, reinforces relations of ruling and is closely connected to ideology. Ideology, Thompson (2001) maintains refers to systematic meanings that "... operate unconsciously, through feelings of desire and aversion. They provide values and purposes and reasons for acting, and operate on every level of human existence. Ideological meanings are whatever makes domination palatable or acceptable or natural, real and unchallengeable" (p. 22).

It is my intention to explore in this Chapter the women's understandings of domination within their particular child care subsidy policy contexts. Consistent with the critical feminist theoretical framework guiding this thesis I have sought to make sense of these understandings within a context of intersecting oppressions (Collins, 2000). I have also assumed that these experiences are theory laden and "To fail to acknowledge the social conditions within which experience is already embedded is to reduce the political to the personal" (Thompson, 2001, p. 34).

The women service users in this study responded in complex ways to the systematic meanings of domination. They both disputed and accepted the ideological meanings that informed their experiences. Fraser (1989) argues that women challenge the state definitions of their need and state constructions of themselves as women, and Thompson (2001) and Baker (2003) remind us that these challenges occur within a context of constraint.

In this chapter I have highlighted the women's experiences of oppression and domination, and also how they have constructed and positioned themselves in response to these conditions.

These experiences have been explored for the Californian and Australian women using the themes that emerged from their interviews with me: class and stigma; racism and exclusion; and sexism, neo-liberalism and choice.

Class, Stigma and Worthiness

Class is about the micro politics of people's lives. It is lived in and through people's bodies and permeates their thinking as powerfully as gender, 'race', age and sexuality (Reay, 2004, p. 145).

Californian women using child care subsidy were keenly aware of the stigma attached to using welfare services. Using the subsidy service foregrounded their disadvantage and the stigma attached to poverty. They responded by constructing themselves as 'worthy' workers needing a helping hand as opposed to 'unworthy' welfare dependents.

The service users saw the initial subsidy qualifying process as stigmatizing. Jane commented: "The qualifying (for subsidy) event is something that puts the stigma directly on ... because you have to make so much ... So right there you are classifying people". Vera went further and described the dehumanizing processes inherent in applying for many welfare services. For Vera the impact of these processes was to create a sense of unworthiness:

If I come to you (the government) and say I need this – they want you to bring your savings account, checking accounts and then give them authorization to check every little aspect of your life. What is the point? I mean it's just like the government's thinking because I don't have a job or I'm asking for help that maybe I'm not a worthy person. You know that's not a good feeling, not at all.

I discussed the service users' perceptions of stigma and worthiness with the subsidy program administrators. The City Child Care Coordinator commented: "The term subsidy is negative ... what is the difference between a subsidy and a scholarship? Scholarship is for the mainstream and subsidy is for the poor people. Nobody wants to be put in the box of subsidised services". The Subsidy Program Coordinator expressed her awareness of the connection between the subsidy service, stigma and worthiness by seeking to reassure a mother that her use of the service was exceptional and therefore valid. She shared a story of a mother who had decided to give up her job to undertake formal education: "One Mom was like 'I really wish I didn't need the state aid.' ... and I said, 'Come on you're going to school, just think of it that way'. You know the stigma of being on welfare it's still there." The view that some service users are more

worthy and therefore less likely to attract stigma was also held by the City Child Care Coordinator:

There is a whole spectrum of people who participate in the program. And some people can't wait to make enough money so they don't need this. They are very proud of the fact that this is the last month that they need to do this. And there is the other end of the spectrum where you question ...

The service users' awareness of the stigma associated with using the service meant they sought to keep their use of the service confidential. They felt confidentiality would shield them from discriminatory treatment by other parents at the child care facility. Donna commented: "... if they (other parents at the Center) knew I was subsidized for child care, I think they would look at you as a lower class person because they are paying full price and you are not." Elena shared this view and again emphasized the connection between social class, stigma and discriminatory treatment: "I don't want anyone to sneer at me because I'm not on the same social and economic level that they are."

So the women showed a strong awareness of the stigma associated with economic disadvantage – with being poor and 'lower class'. Receipt of the subsidy was viewed as a signifier of disadvantage and disadvantage is stigmatised. They feared that this disadvantage could negatively impact upon their children within the child care facility – that parents or children would discriminate against them in some way. Donna commented:

You never know – some people do look down on other people. They would probably do it to me. I don't think they would do it to the kids. But you never know – it just makes you feel more comfortable that everyone thinks you are on the same basic level.

I discussed this need for confidentiality with the City Child Care Co-ordinator and she responded by recounting her experience of meeting a subsidy recipient at a social function: "I felt like I knew something about her that I shouldn't have known. Do they have to be this invisible ... to feel like part of the community?"

The Californian women though recognising the stigma of economic disadvantage also sought to challenge the societal view that they were unworthy and dependent. They constructed themselves as 'worthy' through participation in the paid labour force:

... the type of person and the upbringing that I had, my pride would get in the way (from using federal assistance). So I would do, I would work for myself, I would work at night ... (Jane).

Service users also constructed themselves as worthy by acting in ways they thought signified independence and responsibility – characteristics they did not associate with welfare recipients. Donna's comment shows how she has seen herself as responsible through her pro-active response to accessing the subsidy service. In this comment she also differentiates herself from the 'unworthy' by her independent initiative:

Well I do for myself ... You get on the waiting list and keep in constant contact – but that's just up to the individual. A lot of people don't. In areas where people are low income you'll notice that they're ... not all, but a lot of them don't follow through.

Elena also emphasised the importance of individual responsibility and initiative: "I feel that it is within yourself, if you want to, if you are willing to work and take responsibilities on finding that child care and finding those resources, there should be no problem at all." Elena's comment also implies that difficulties in securing resources are due to a lack of individual effort. Olivia agreed with Elena and Donna and remarked that she viewed the service as a minimal but necessary support for otherwise 'worthy' women. She said she was "... trying to stay off welfare, trying to live a good life, but I need a bit of help along the way".

This construction of themselves as 'worthy' through their individual initiative, acceptance of personal responsibility and participation in the labour force, means that at some level the women accepted as valid the conservative positioning of welfare services. A number of participants voiced negative views about people on welfare and about the level of child care support they received:

I remember – just because I was working – even though my income wasn't enough to pay for child care they gave priority to people on welfare and that always upset me. Because I'm saying you got people here that are working so what do you want someone to do – stop working and get on welfare just to get some help with child care. You would think they would want to keep the people that are working. That's why I think the system a lot of times works against people - because when you try to not be on welfare they kind of make it harder on you. But it's like there are more resources available for people that are on welfare. So that's not fair to somebody that's trying to stay off. I think you're doing the government a favour ... it's not fair. It wasn't an income thing – it's just that they had special funds for people that were on welfare. The funds for people working were very minimal – so my daughters never got in (to child care) (Donna)

The Australian women, in comparison, acknowledged no sense of stigma attached to their receipt of child care subsidy. For this group of women the subsidy was seen as a mainstream service to which all Australian parents are entitled. The universal nature of subsidy provision in Australia, as opposed to the Californian safety net service, seems to remove the imposition of stigma at the point of service qualification. Chris's comment is typical of the Australian women's conception of the service: "I think being on single parent benefits has a stigma attached to it. I don't think the child care benefit has the same sort of connotation ... it's perceived to be more for the general, normal, middle class family". What I thought was particularly important about Chris's comment is that she also draws a link between stigma and class. She assumes that no stigma exists because the service is for the middle class, implicitly acknowledging awareness that stigma is associated with poverty and disadvantage.

A strong sense of entitlement informed the Australian women's conception of the service and their beliefs that child care subsidies should be available only to working women. They positioned themselves as worthy workers who were entitled to the service. In doing this the Australian women, as did the Californian women, showed their awareness and also acceptance of negative stereotypes associated with the use of welfare services. Stigma and worthiness, for this group of women, were attached to participation in the paid labour force. Sheila's comment provides insight into her conception of herself as worthy and the attributes of the unworthy subsidy recipient. These attributes are unemployment, lack of acceptance of responsibility for children and depending on the state for financial assistance.

Not so much for women who probably work ... they're actually putting their child into day care to go to work and I don't know if there is even a stigma attached to that group. I'm not sure, but I know that women who are say unemployed and are given two or three days or whatever a week to put their children into day care and you know that's supposed to be on the grounds of finding employment or whatever else. I know they only pay however much a day to have their child there and it's like – I mean they just dump them there and go home and sleep all day and then come back. I suppose I know some of that stuff is around – women maybe shirking on their responsibilities and using the system to their advantage. And I suppose that flows on from the women just having babies for the money ... I have heard that stuff you know – that they're just abusing the system (Sheila).

Reay (2004) argues that class is still fundamental to women's construction of their social identity. The women's awareness of the importance of class in this study certainly supports Reay's assertion. Edgell (1993) defines class as the "... division of society into a number of

hierarchically arranged strata” (p. 11). Early explorations of class were narrowly defined and based on conceptions of class that related to those members of society participating in the paid labour force (Edgell, 1993). This limited conceptualisation of class “... results both in the marginalisation of women and a neglect of the myriad of ways in which social class differences contribute to social inequalities” (Reay, 2004, p. 140). Reay (2004) found in her qualitative study about mothers’ involvement in the education of their children that “... class remains an integral part of mothers’ subjectivities and continues to powerfully influence their action and attributes” (p. 140). This finding is consistent with the data I have presented in this section. The women in this study drew links between class, poverty and the receipt of welfare payments. What I thought was important about these connections is that class was linked to welfare receipt and the conservative messages that accompany current discourses about ‘dependency’ – these were the signifiers of lower class status. The women made no connection between class status and employment type. This is consistent with a hierarchal construction of ‘lower class’ often revealed in discussions about welfare reform where authors refer to the possibility of welfare recipients moving up from the ‘underclass’ to the ‘working class’ (Berkowitz, 2002).

Racism and Exclusion

For some of the Californian respondents their experiences of social exclusion were not only related to their class but also to their ethnicity. The majority of respondents were from ethnic minority backgrounds – three were African American and two were Hispanic. They were using the child care subsidy program in a community where only 2% were African American and 4.6% Hispanic. From these women’s responses I found that the African American women who participated in this study were prepared to live and work in a community they felt was unwelcoming and racist in order to access quality child care and maintain themselves in employment. Discussing issues of race with a white interviewer was not easy for all respondents. Donna suggested that my whiteness obscured my ability to recognise the depth of racism in the community. She commented to me that if I was in this city “... long enough and be around you would see for yourself... And if you are a minority and you’re doing the study you would really understand”. Donna and Vera were particularly outspoken on the impact of racism on their lives and it is their responses I have focused on in this section. Other respondents referred to racism in more oblique ways. Elena demonstrated her awareness of racial disadvantage by attributing the City’s motivation for providing the subsidy to wanting to help all children, regardless of ethnic background, in the community; “... all Hispanic class, or black, or Chinese or all white. I figure they’ve got to circle around that a little bit”.

For Vera racism existed at the highest levels of American society. She believed that policy makers created a false impression that African American people were welfare dependent and

prone to criminal activity and that their motivations were political, reinforcing white power and privilege:

I read an article three weeks ago that Caucasian people are more apt to get off welfare than any other nationality. And I just thought to myself, 'Where are they really getting their statistics?'... Very interesting about government statistics, you know – if it's government statistics then they're going to say that 99.9% of all black males are on probation or are on death row. But there are other percentages of people that commit as many crimes as we did, but they have their statistics and their guidelines or whatever they want the American people to know... I don't want to say the American way but they're white – the political aspect (Vera).

Donna knew that racism in the City went beyond her own experiences. She had heard that children at the local high school were targeted, called names and harassed by white children: "But I know one Latino girl they were calling her 'ghetto' and 'You don't belong in this school'".

Donna believed that the City lacked commitment to their racial minority groups: "Just from knowing this city from the time I've been around here – if they could have no minority groups they would probably be a lot happier. Truthfully that's the way it is". Donna provided an example she thought was indicative of the community's exclusionary preferences: "And I know - people, little kids - and this happens every blue moon, would say things like, 'You people don't belong here, blacks are supposed to be in Africa'". Vera also thought she was unwelcome in the City:

... there is nothing that has really drawn me into this community – that's wanted to make me be more of a part of the City – there is nothing that has drawn me out - to say you know we embrace you in our arms – come on let's be part of this... maybe it's social or ethnic – I don't know. It's just really hard to be here and fit in here.

The Agency Director agreed with the women's sense of community exclusion. She thought exclusion was based on class and race:

There's too much wealth (in the City) for a low-income family to feel connected. It's been very, very difficult – that building of trust. There's something about this community – on the surface it feels inclusive to those that are included and those that are not included really don't have an

avenue... There is this pseudo-liberal ‘... of course we welcome all people and of course we’re not prejudiced’ – but the reality is it goes on everyday.

The Mayor of the City also agreed:

Economic issues play into behaviour and play out socially. I think some people come here expecting the City to be opening and welcoming and it's not. It's like the right thing to do but we can't go the next step and incorporate these people completely - noblesse oblige (rank imposes obligation).

Funding for subsidy programs is largely linked to welfare reform programs and subsidy services for low income working women are scarce and difficult to access. The women in this study were willing to live in a community they experienced as unwelcoming and racist in order to access a scarce service they thought would benefit themselves and their children. The advantages for her children of affording child care in a rich community were a priority for Donna: “And it’s giving the kids a chance... Whereas over here (in a poor city where she worked) they would never get that chance”. Donna went on to comment “... but if I had a choice I would (live) somewhere else. I just think because of the City itself – so many negative things going on”. Living in a community she felt excluded from came at a great personal cost for Donna.

... I find a way no matter how hard it is – I’ve had to do this for so long. I’m very tired and run down now – at early age... And I don’t like to bring up the thing, you know, about how hard it is for minorities – a lot of minorities say because I’m black I’ll just deal with black right now ... Because so much has happened in the past and I think of course put it behind. A Caucasian is able to get that jump-start – look anywhere you go that is a well to do community and there are a very, very low percentage of minorities. (But) I have tried to do with my life and many wouldn’t have got this far because they wouldn’t just be able to afford child care. Not that I can afford it but I keep pushing and pushing.

The African American respondents’ lives were impacted by racism, which they identified as both structural and personal. Accessing scarce subsidy services meant living in a community where they were vulnerable to exclusion. This was a community that even the Mayor agreed was racist. The women responded by acknowledging the political and structural nature of racism, and adopting a pragmatic but resistant position for the benefit of their children: “I have to tell them over and over, ‘We’re black but we live in the City’” (Donna). Burnham (2002)

draws connections between the vulnerability of African American women to poverty and their consequent contact with welfare services that are “steeped in racist intent” (p. 123). She also links race to class: “The term ‘underclass’ masquerades as race neutral, but from the beginning, concerns about the ‘underclass’ were concerns about ‘ghetto poverty’ or ‘inner-city poverty’ – that is, Black poverty” (Burnham, 2002, p. 123). Burnham’s discussion led me to conclude that the African American women’s experiences of racism, presented in this section, were closely linked to their experiences of stigma and unworthiness due to their ‘lower-class’ status (presented in the previous section). It is as Patricia Collins (2000) maintains – a context of intersecting oppressions.

Australian child care subsidy policies did not appear, in this study, to foreground racism. Racism is however a central aspect of Australian history and current discourse. Jackie Huggins (1998) an Aboriginal activist and historian claims that: “Racism permeates society and is so real that most Aboriginal people perceive it as our primary oppressor, and are both paralysed and challenged by the insidious manifestations it produces” (p. x). In Australia, Indigenous women are particularly vulnerable to racist oppression. In this sense the Indigenous and African American women share experiences of domination – both are less powerful and positioned as ‘other’ by the dominant white culture: “They (black women) speak not from a position of race privilege but from one of racial oppression” (Morton-Robinson, 2000, p. 63).

Unlike the Californian women who chose to participate in this study, the majority of Australian participants were not from minority backgrounds. This reflects the semi-universal nature of the subsidy service, which is largely accessed and benefits the white, middle classes (Jamrozick, 2001). Anna, the only indigenous respondent, did not report that her use of the subsidy service exposed her to racism or community exclusion:

Me being Indigenous it is usually the family that takes care of our children. However, I’ve opted not to do that and put stress on my family, another burden. And it’s good then – not only do I become independent, but independent in a way that family aren’t involved. And it’s great for my kids – it’s about their personal development. I know my girls get excellent care from the day care centre... That’s what I find important with my kids – they can interact with other children their own ages from different races – I’m full on about stuff like that. And basically for the personal development that I cannot give, because I choose to give us a better life.

Anna recognises for many Indigenous families child care is an extended family responsibility. However, the subsidy has allowed Anna to make different choices. She saw the subsidy as

providing her with an opportunity to do the best for her children – to access the benefits of mainstream services. She saw the use of child care as a personal choice rather than a signifier of racial disadvantage. Anna did think, however, that other indigenous people may not choose to use formal child care, because even with the subsidy the cost of care is too high:

I guess a lot of (Indigenous) people look at the money value too because it's not cheap, or they prefer not to pay out money on day care, you know, when they can do other things with the money. However, that's a personal choice...

For Anna the use of child care, allowed by subsidy access, was positioned in a range of personal choices she felt empowered to make about her own and her children's lives. This emphasis on individual choice was shared with other Australian respondents and the implications of 'choice' will be explored in the following section.

I was also able to interview the Director of a private child care centre located in a suburb of Townsville where many Indigenous people live. The Director described the families who use her centre:

I have a high population of indigenous children here at my centre and, you know, you've got your extended families. I have quite a few grandparents that have taken up all the responsibility of their grandchildren. And if the child care isn't affordable I know that they could not probably provide for them the activities and the social interaction they need. Because they're older. I mean I've got one grandma that brings her children here and she's got to be sixty odd, and she's just not going to be able to provide for them in that sense at home. Yes, so I mean we are much more affordable through the subsidies...

The Director's comment is consistent with Anna's understanding of the child care responsibilities of extended Indigenous families. The Director has positioned the child care centre as a support for these caring responsibilities. This affordable support was made possible by the child care subsidy. The Director went on to discuss the credibility of the centre and its services within the local community:

We do have a lot of indigenous families here because of the area we are in. We've been operational here for 27 years... We've had a lot of families that, regardless of where they've moved to, they've told cousins and sisters and aunts, and you name it, and we keep having families come back into this centre.

The Director did not mention that families using the centre felt that receiving the subsidy exposed them to racism. I thought the high and continuing use of the centre by indigenous families, even when they moved away from the area, may indicate a reluctance to use formal child care services in areas where the majority of families were not from their own ethnic background. The semi-universal subsidy allowed Indigenous families to choose child care services in their own communities – an option not available to the African American women.

I found this insight into Indigenous women's relationship with formal child care interesting. For Anna and the Indigenous families using the centre in their community, the subsidy and the access it allows to formal child care services appear to be highly valued. This contradicts Moreton-Robinson's (2000) assertion that: "Unlike white feminists, Indigenous women are not concerned with child-minding centres for working women" (p. 167). Morton-Robinson (2000) argues that the priority for Indigenous women is the right to care for and make decisions about their own children. This claim is made in a context where the reality for Indigenous women has been the forced removal of their children and lack of control over their sexuality and reproductive rights. Nevertheless it does appear, from the small amount of evidence gathered in this study, that indigenous women do value formal child care services. They viewed child care as a welcome family support – made affordable by the child care subsidy. I therefore suggest that the role of formal child care in the lives of indigenous women would be a valuable area of further research.

Sexism, Neo-Liberalism and the Illusion of Choice

The women's experiences of sexist oppression and domination became apparent in this study in two ways. Firstly, for the women using the subsidy services, the structure of the services themselves appeared to obscure their gendered disadvantage. Services were constructed by the state on the basis that they provided the women with child care choice, when in reality the women's choices were limited (explored in Chapter Five) and their primary responsibility for the care of their children was reinforced. The illusion of choice appeared to obscure the women's understanding of their experiences of service inadequacies as an experience of disadvantage common to other women.

Secondly, child care subsidy services in both Australia and California were publicly positioned by policy makers as primarily services for children and their families – they were gender neutral. Policy makers claimed that services aimed to provide 'families' with maximum child care choice. The women in this study, however, implicitly recognised that the services were their own. They challenged policy makers' motivations for service provision and identified them as unsympathetic to the needs of women. When challenged the American policy makers

recognised that their subsidy service was not provided to meet the needs of women. The Australian policy makers were reluctant to acknowledge this. Their subsidy services were strongly positioned within the neo-liberal rhetoric of child care as a private ‘family’ need involving individual choices. The common needs of women were unacknowledged.

Individual choice has been a recurring theme in the responses from both the American and Australian respondents for all groups. Choice it would seem provides the individual with opportunities to take control of the direction of their own lives: “I choose to give us a better life” (Anna); “... there’s been a sense that we’ll even it up so families can have a choice” (Australian Policy Maker). However, critical feminist theorists have raised concerns about the mantra of choice and its neo-liberal context and the implications of both for women’s lives. In my introduction to *Part Three: Findings and Discussions* I argued that the neo-liberal hegemony pervasive in Australia and America emphasises individual choice and obscures structural oppression and mechanisms of domination. Fraser (1989), Thompson (2001) and Baker (2003) argue that the perception of choice can limit women’s ability to articulate their gendered disadvantage. Baker (2003) claims that women have difficulty managing “...their continuing positions of subordination largely without the discourses and knowledge that might assist them” (p. 17) and further that it “... is difficult to articulate the commonality of ... women’s experiences of oppression” (p.17).

The women’s experiences of sexism (visible and invisible) were apparent at four points in the research:

- The women’s experiences of accessing child care services;
- Policy makers’ views about the purpose of the subsidy services;
- Women’s beliefs about the motivations of policy makers;
- Policy makers’ reflections on the views of the women who used the services.

In the following two sections I have used the data from these four points to explore the way women constructed and positioned themselves in response to sexist oppression. The first section relates to the women’s individual experiences and the second to the women’s understandings of subsidy policy construction. Neo-liberal hegemony is influential in both these contexts.

Choosing is Women’s Work

It was Joanna’s experience, explored in Chapter Four, that first alerted me to the possibility that subsidy policies in both Australia and California were providing women with the illusion of choice, reinforcing child care as an individual service and obscuring gendered oppression. I concluded from the women’s experiences that neo-liberalism uses the rhetoric of choice as an

ideological meaning that ensures patriarchal domination remains hidden and unchallenged (Thompson, 2001).

Women's Experiences of Accessing Child Care Services

Though the Australian and Californian women accessed subsidised child care services in very different ways it was a task that all the women assumed as a personal responsibility. Joanna, an Australian service user, discussed choosing child care for her child:

Well, when I chose who I put her name down on the list, a lot of it was I went to the centres, and word of mouth was really big. I'd heard that the (Centre) was really good as well. I've got quite a few friends that have recommended it, so I put her name down there first. She's still hasn't got a spot there so I don't think that will happen... and the one that she had the place – I went in and had a look and it looked nice and clean and all those sorts of things. And its proximity was between where I live and where I work, but when I was there, the woman that was showing me around said, "Well if you do get a place somewhere else you have to ring us up and tell us to take you off our waiting list because we can't be expected to ring you back and you not want the place". I sort of thought – oh ok... So then, I rang every child care centre in Townsville in the phone book... And there was no places at any of them... (Joanna)

I knew someone a few years ago had little ones who attended the centre and I knew they had a baby unit and I thought, 'Oh well I'll just chance it and have a look'. I'd only looked at one prior to that. And the way the centre looked – you walked in and it just seemed really organised, it was really clean – those sorts of things. And I did go down to the other centre which I know has a fairly good reputation. But at that point of time their priority was hospital staff and government workers – so yeah like we were put sort of further on down the list from there too (Sheila).

Joanna's and Sheila's experiences were typical of the Australian responses. They have described a process for which each woman was entirely responsible. Joanna and Sheila are married, yet their husbands have played no part in this complex decision making process. They made no link between their difficult experiences and gendered disadvantage. Such a link could have been made by a comment such as: "I can't believe they make finding child care so hard for women". For Joanna and Sheila their difficulties with locating care were isolated individual experiences.

The experiences of the American women were similar. Jane provides a typical example:

Well I basically stumbled across the subsidy program. I was looking for child care, knowing that I was going back to work, knowing that, and I don't specifically remember how I stumbled across it but I was looking for ways to go back to work in which I could have my children in a quality program. Because I called the subsidy program first – I was calling for Kelly, I was calling around. I actually had Cody in a Montessori pre-school first and I had put Melanie in another centre, and actually she went through about half the year in Montessori pre-school which I loved but it became, it became unaffordable for me having both of them there. So I moved her over to the other Centre...

Jane is a lone parent, though she is living with her extended family. There is no evidence that she received any family support in either accessing the subsidy service or child care facilities. Like Joanna, Jane had not connected her difficulties with gender disadvantage. Nor has she questioned her individual responsibility for this process. She never complains about having to do all this on her own.

I found with all the women that the apparent advantage of accessing subsidised child care services meant that the old assumptions about women as mothers, that they are primarily and independently responsible for their children (the ideology of motherhood), was not visible to the women. As I have previously noted, child care and subsidy entitlement has been defined (both in Australian and California) as a gender neutral need. This is consistent with the neo-liberal emphasis on individualism which creates a context where it is difficult for women to construct their engagement with child care as anything other than selecting a private service to meet a private need.

Child Care is not a Women's Issue

Women have a profound ... interest in the enactment of effective child care policies (National Women's Law Centre, 2002, p. 1).

For this research project I contacted the Office of the Status of Women in Canberra to arrange an interview about child care subsidy policy. The response to my request was surprising – an interview was not possible, I was told, because 'Child care is not a women's issue!' This reaction challenged my own assumptions about child care as a women's service. After all it has been women who have for more than a century established and run child care services, who saw child care as crucial to the liberation of women and it is women who arrange and benefit from child care services. These inconsistent views about whether child care services are services for

women or not represent, I believe, a struggle over need. In the introduction to Part 3: Findings and Conclusions I argued that need definition is political and problematic and "... functions as a medium for the making and contesting of political claims; it is an idiom in which political conflict is played out and through which inequalities are systematically elaborated and challenged" (Fraser, 1989, pp. 161-162).

Policy Makers' Views About the Purpose of Subsidy Services

In Australia and California child care subsidy services are positioned by the state to meet the needs of the labour market, welfare reform, the private child care industry, early childhood education and a gender neutral conservative construction of the 'family'. When I asked an Australian policy maker about the purpose of child care subsidy her response was:

... the actual practicality of what are the issues for families and responding
... child care is often a hot topic for families – we're responding to those needs of families.

A Californian policy maker made a similar comment:

There is a basic understanding that we need to take care of our children. I also think the work ethic – this is something that is enabling a family to make a living...

I have found in this study that though child care subsidy meets a variety of implicit state defined needs, policy makers frame public statements about child care policy within the more acceptable rhetoric of early childhood education and family. This finding is consistent with concerns raised by Michel (2002) who argues: "Child care is one of the most protean of social policies, one that may be deployed by different social actors to achieve a variety of ends... such as child development, poverty reduction, labour shortages or demographic crisis" (p. 333). At no point in my study did policy makers position child care subsidy as a women's service.

However, the women in this study resisted the policy makers' needs definitions and insisted, by the ways they made use of the service, on alternative women centred meanings for child care subsidy. In Vera's and Joanna's cases, discussed in Chapter Four, child care subsidy services met their self-defined needs – access to a safe work environment in Vera's case and as a mothering support for Joanna. For Chris the child care subsidy meant she could work part time and also have some quality time with her son and for herself:

I like to have my two days off. I get to go and do my stuff. Because there is just the two of us I find we have got to have some decent quality time together and I've still got to have my time. That's probably going to sound very selfish – but that's the way my life has gone at the moment... I'm not

even looking at going full-time until Jo's at High School ... If the (subsidy) wasn't there then I would have to work full time and be done with it (Chris).

Policy Makers' Motivations and Their Reflections on the Views of Service Users

The Californian women receiving subsidised child care benefits had strong beliefs about the motivations of policy makers. Generally respondents felt that policy makers were not motivated out of the "... out of the kindness of their heart" (Vera). Respondents thought that there was some reluctant recognition that low-income people lived in this city and the program they were using was initiated in response to community pressure: "I would say it was the community speaking out for it ... I doubt they would do much on their own" (Michelle). Service users also believed that the City Council (who funded their subsidy program) was primarily motivated by the money they would receive from the state for providing child care subsidies (though no such arrangement existed). Donna's comment summarises this attitude: "Well I'd like to be able to say it is because they have the interests of children in hand, but I know that's not true because money motivates everybody". The women's cynicism about the motivations of the City Council was also present when we discussed the policy motivations of governments in general:

I see them just say no because of the political stance... I don't see them saying no that's not a good idea... look how many women we have that are homeless with children. Look how many women we have in bad situations because they can't (access subsidy) – I think it all gets back to and I know I've said it before but I feel so strongly about this, that this country doesn't take care of their own. We not only have to maintain external relationships with other countries, which I probably know nothing about, but what I know is when I walk down Market Street in San Francisco and I see the homeless mothers with their kids in tow, with rags on... The only thing I can think to myself is we don't take care of ours (Jane).

Also, as I have discussed in Chapter Five, Vera conveyed a sense that whiteness and political motivation are connected. Vera commented "... I don't want to say the American way but they're white – the political aspect". Burnham (2002) supports Vera's suspicions about racist policy intent. She claims that,

... certain areas of (American) domestic policy are suffused with racial bias, bear the imprint of a more frankly racist past, are particularly prone to political manipulation on behalf of the preservation of racial privilege, and serve as touchstones for galvanising key elements of a racist consensus (p. 121).

In contrast to the women's views the policy makers and subsidy program administrative staff believed that the City Council was motivated by a genuine commitment to child care services and to the Agency. They maintained that the City had shown its commitment to the welfare of children by its willingness to fund the Agency for the last 25 years. The Mayor of the City commented: "This is a socially progressive area... What has made us different has been our sensitivity to people in the community that do have needs... You will see a large number of services which are directed at women".

In our first interview the City Child Care Co-ordinator also maintained that the City Council was motivated to provide the subsidy service by a genuine commitment to child care. She saw evidence of this in the City's historical commitment to children's services and specifically when the City provided the Agency with aid during a financial crisis. At the end of our first interview we briefly discussed the service users' negative perception of the Council's motivation for providing the child care subsidy service.

In our second interview, upon reflection on the service users' feedback, the Child care Co-ordinator altered her position on the Council's motivation. She explained that originally the program had been established to assist all families with the cost of child care (not low income women specifically). This policy was developed in recognition that quality child care is expensive – the enhancement of the quality of child care was the motivation. As time passed and the funds for the program decreased the client group served by the subsidy program changed and became low-income single women. The fundamental nature of the program was therefore altered. Though the group of service users has changed the Co-ordinator thought that the City Council still believes they are demonstrating a commitment to child care and not low-income women (their actual client group) by funding the subsidy service:

I just don't see any real heartfelt commitment on the part of the City to enhance the lives of women... I think they (the service users) are right on actually. I've been thinking about it a lot since we talked and I think they are right – I think their perceptions are right. The reason that it (the subsidy service) is palatable to the City is that it is with a child care agency (and not a women's service)... The City's allocation of funds for the child care program has not increased over time – in general as the cost of CC goes up this amount of money is going to serve less people and yet that doesn't seem to bother anybody... That's the real indication of the lack of commitment – that's it in a nutshell – the participants have actually verified that with their experience (City Child Care Coordinator)

When I discussed the women's perceptions with the Mayor he also changed his initial position and acknowledged: "The reality is this has been an economically conservative area". He went on to describe community members as; "A bunch of Congregationalists – I'm well off so I'm obliged to help others who are not so well off".

I believe that the City's policy makers' willingness to reconsider policy intention based on service users' feedback maybe related to their close community connection and a less bureaucratic, community specific program. In contrast the Canberra policy maker was less receptive to Australian service users' concerns (detailed below) and continued to adhere to the Federal Government's philosophical position. The Australian subsidy program is a centrally administered, highly bureaucratic, nation wide program and may therefore be less responsive to service user feedback on subsidy provision. This is an interesting contrast and a possible area for further research.

Australian service users had either not considered the motivation of the government for providing the child care subsidy or not thought the service was provided to meet the needs of women. Chris's response was typical of those women who had not considered the motivations of the government:

No idea... I can be very thankful but I've never actually thought of it... I guess maybe to get more people into the workforce. To get more people off benefits – I don't know. They are trying to help out the people that do want to get back into the workforce. Who knows with the government – I don't have a lot of faith in them either (Chris).

Robyn expressed much stronger views about government motivation:

It (the subsidy) is relatively generous but it has been scaled back from the past and I know they've got this policy problem where they want to stick women back in the home but at the same time they want maximum workers. So obviously the government's got a few problems of its own – they're working out what it's going to do with these two policies. They want more workers, more production – but you don't want women working. They want women to stay at home and look after the kids and the sick and the elderly and the infirm and everything else instead of government. So I think that at the moment it is an ugly balance between those two issues actually. I think an ugly balance between maximum worker productivity and trying to keep women back in the home. So it might be a bit generous and that's because it's the workers they're trying to get, and at the same time you can't be too

generous because otherwise you'll have more women going into the workforce... It's actually an issue of paid and unpaid work (Robyn).

A State Government Policy Maker agreed with Robyn and commented on the purpose of the Commonwealth funded child care subsidy policy. Initially she maintained the policy was about keeping "... that ready flow of casual cheap labour for employers" – but she also believed the Federal Government held the alternative view: "Their view was that they (the Federal Government) were going to get women out of the labour force and let the unemployed in". She went on to say:

It is almost an anti-feminist approach, in my view, that's controlled by money at the top. It (the subsidy) is quite a strong tool. They just skip to the whole family thing – 'we're providing money to families'... Giving people choices – it's the latest buzzword! (State Government Policy Maker)

Robyn and the State Policy Maker have clearly articulated the ambiguity of the state's relationship with women. Their view is consistent with Bennett (2001) who argues that;

... child care's political economy appears to reflect the shifting discourses about where women are 'needed'. Is women's place in the home with house and children (yes); or in the paid labour force (sometimes) or as seems to be the case now, on the high wire balancing paid work, child care and housework? (p. 38).

I discussed with the Canberra Policy Maker the women's views that the child care subsidy was not positioned as a women's service. She responded:

I actually see that as a positive progression in that it's seen as a mainstream entitlement for men or women or whatever to participate in the workforce... When you get to that point where it can become a service for the family... While you had those sets of issues – it was an issue for women... so it really has become linked to families' entitlement. I actually see that as a reasonably positive move in that it is a more mature response. It's about children in general and it's linked to your entitlement once you've had children rather than having to push for it as part of a feminist push to enable workplace participation. So I think it's been able to move away from that over the years (Canberra Policy Maker).

I have concluded from the data presented in this section that sexist oppression is supported by current child care subsidy policies in California and Australia. Policy makers use of acceptable ideological meanings about early childhood education, family and choice have acted to make

patriarchal domination palatable, acceptable, natural and difficult to challenge (Thompson, 2001). The apparent advantage of receiving the child care subsidy and the positioning of subsidy services within a neo-liberal context that privileges individual choice has also acted to reinforce the women's primary responsibility as mothers. These contexts have obscured the women's ability to articulate their gender disadvantage. Though difficult to name, sexist oppression was resisted by the women in two ways. Firstly, the women used the subsidy to meet their self-defined needs and thereby challenged state constructions of themselves and their needs. Secondly, all the women in this study were sceptical about the motivations of policy makers and governments – none believed child care policies were created to meet the needs of women.

These findings agree with feminist social policy analysts who argue that welfare policies are forms of public patriarchy (Fraser, 1997). O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver (1999) explore the gender reasoning that underlies social policy in the United States and Australia. They maintain that these countries are stratified by gender – as class and race also stratify them. The key to understanding the expression of patriarchy in child care policy is to focus on the social context in which the policy exists: "A labour market gender sameness policy orientation which does not recognise difference in condition associated with family and class location is a recipe for inequality" (O'Connor et al., 1999, p. 188). O'Connor et al. (1999) identify the United States policy context as one of gender sameness where the "... primacy of the labour market is assumed" (p. 190). They also identify Australia as gender neutral and as a wage earners welfare state where wage regulation is used as a primary tool of social protection:

The implications of a gender-neutrality focus for gender and class stratification depend on the commitment to and the effectiveness of the policies to compensate for gender difference. A weak commitment to and/or low levels of effectiveness implies the continuance of existing stratification patterns (O'Connor et al., 1999, p.197).

I believe, since the publication of O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver's book, the Federal Government's commitment to address and compensate for gender difference has been weak. Summers (2003) supports this view and argues that recently the Federal Government has sought to "... limit women's freedoms" (p. 255). She doesn't hesitate to claim that women's difficulties are man-made and that at the moment there is "... plenty of talk from all the parties about the need for 'family friendly' policies... you don't hear much talk about how women fit into all this" (p. 260).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on the role of domination in the lives of the Californian and Australian women who participated in this study. From the data I have presented in this Chapter I have concluded that domination is expressed in the lives of the women through their experiences of poverty, racism, individualism and sexism. Not all these conditions of domination are easily identified and named. The American women recognised their disadvantage due to their class and race and actively resisted the construction of themselves implicit in these forms of oppression. For the Australian women the semi-universal nature of child care subsidy meant that they did not identify class and race as forms of oppression in relation to their own service access and use.

The Child Care Benefit provided the Australian women with the illusion of child care choice and obscured aspects of the subsidy system that reinforced conservative roles for women. Whilst the residual Californian subsidy service foregrounded oppression based on race and class, it obscured the respondents' ability to conceptualise their experiences as gendered. The experiences of the Californian women were dominated by oppression based on their race and class. These experiences relate to the narrow range of clients served by this and other inadequately funded welfare services – poor African American or Hispanic women; "... a system that overwhelmingly serves women, disproportionately women of colour" (Davis, 2002, p. 147). In a context where a program serves such a narrow group of racially and class signified women it becomes difficult for women to identify service inadequacy as a women's issue.

For both groups of women their gendered disadvantage was also rendered invisible by neo-liberal individualism and therefore difficult to name and actively to resist. Nevertheless and despite these barriers, these women recognised that child care subsidy services were not provided to meet the needs of women. They believed policy makers were selfishly motivated and concerned with maintaining their own positions of power and privilege.

In this chapter I have explored "... just how a particular piece of the social is woven" (Smith, 1999, p. 11). Highlighting women's experiences of domination exposed the oppression implicit in child care subsidy policies and identified the "... ideological codes..." (Smith, 1999, p. 11) active in their lives – codes which are replicated and transmitted by subsidy policy. The women in this study have provided "... new angles of vision on oppression" (Collins, 2000, p. 11).

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

... future research should systematically compare national systems of social provision with an explicit focus on gender relations. This research would be interesting in its own right, but would also be relevant for our larger theoretical concerns with the nature of states, capitalism and male dominance – and the relations among them (Orloff, 1993, p. 323).

In this concluding chapter I will summarise my thesis and draw final conclusions from my data and results presented in *Part Three: Findings and Discussion*. My conclusions will relate to my initial problem statement.

Thesis Summary

In *Chapter One: Introducing the Thesis* I provided the biographical context for my topic. I have worked in child care service planning in California and Australia and the issues and dilemmas faced by women accessing precariously funded subsidy services in both locations concerned and interested me. My topic is embedded in this experience and also in my personal commitment to feminism. This commitment informed my choice of critical feminist theory as the theoretical framework for this thesis.

The intention of my thesis was to use a critical feminist theoretical framework to explore the relationship between government ideology, child care subsidy policies and services, and the materialities of women's lives. I undertook this exploration by:

- Comparing child care subsidy policies and services in California and Australia;
- Focusing on the experiences and accounts of women service users in California and Australia.

I chose child care subsidy policy as a site for exploring the relationship between ideological decision making on the material lives of women for three reasons. Firstly, child care services are positioned at the nexus of women's participation in the public and private spheres and they are, therefore, an indicator of the state's ambiguous and inconsistent relationship with women. Secondly, child care subsidy is the primary mechanism for the public funding of child care services in both Australia and California – it is the point of articulation between child care and the state. Finally, though the United States and Australia are identified as liberal welfare regimes (Esping-Anderson, 1990; O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999) child care subsidy policy in Australia, because of its semi-universal nature, is an exception to the liberal welfare regime category (Michel, 1999). Child care subsidy, therefore, constitutes a possible site of real policy difference within otherwise similar ideological contexts.

Feminist and cross-national research literature has contributed to the formulation and focus of my topic. Ruth Fincher (1996) argues that it is a feminist priority to formulate broad research questions about child care services. O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver (1999) encourage cross-national comparative research that focuses on the welfare state and gender, arguing that the mapping of emerging social policy patterns across national contexts should also be a priority for feminist researchers.

Critical feminist theory has provided the theoretical framework that has informed all aspects of my study. It provided the context for framing the topic, choosing the methodology and it was also the analytical lens I used for the interpretation of the literature and the data. I have undertaken what Glesne and Peshkin (1992) call a 'critical tale' that has been "... fashioned to illuminate the larger social, political and economic issues of the society of which the ... study is a part" (p. 163). For this task I have drawn particularly on the writings of Nancy Fraser, Dorothy Smith and Denise Thompson. I have used their theorising to support my focus on the experiences and accounts of women who used subsidised child care services. These are accounts from a particular position – these mothers were positioned as insiders in the world of subsidy provision: "The methodology of the positionless account relates us differently to what happened than the engaged, involved account given by the witness" (Smith, 1999, p. 51).

My research methodology was also formulated within a critical feminist framework. My study was feminist not because of the methodology and methods chosen but because it was guided by feminist theory. I used research techniques that exposed the political reality of personal experience (Reinharz, 1992). I was particularly concerned with issues of power and difference, and how patterns of domination and subordination are reproduced between the researcher and respondent. I chose a methodology and data gathering method based upon what I wanted to learn: "Different questions have different implications for data collecting" (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 24). The methodology I chose was micro-level, cross-national comparative and qualitative. My study relied on in-depth interviewing as the primary data gathering method. I undertook semi-structured qualitative interviews with three cohorts of respondents in Australia and California. I interviewed women who used subsidised child care services, staff who administer and deliver subsidy and those who were involved in the formulation of subsidy policy.

Undertaking cross-national qualitative research was a challenging research task; "... on-site visits and face-to-face interviews ... are especially resource intensive in the cross-national context" (Mabbett and Boldersen, 1999, p. 55). I lived in California for six months and during this period I was able to conduct interviews with members from each of my target cohorts. The

six-month time limit meant, however, that I could not access heavily scheduled state legislators. Access to federal legislators in Australia was also difficult – though I was able to interview a director in the relevant federal government department. I acknowledge the low number of policy maker interviews as a limitation in this study.

I explored the literature relevant to my research topic in *Chapter Three: Historically Rooted and Interest Bound* and also in the *Part Three: Findings and Discussion*. In *Chapter Three* I focused on the history of and the interests associated with child care subsidy policy in Australia and California. I used Nancy Fraser's politics of needs interpretation as a framework for theorising about the emergence and construction of child care subsidy policy in both locations. I provided a history of government involvement in child care, emphasising the role of feminists over the last one hundred years. I focused on how women conceptualised child care need, saw the role of the state as child care service provider and engaged with the state to achieve their goals. My review of current research on child care subsidy policies, in the findings chapters, revealed a focus (qualitative and quantitative) in the United States on child care subsidies in the context of welfare reform, and on the cost of care and the implications of the rise of the for-profit sector (quantitative) in Australia. In neither country did researchers particularly focus on service users' qualitative experiences of using subsidy services. Also I did not locate any micro-level cross-national qualitative studies with an emphasis similar to my own.

The Relationship Between Government Ideology, Child Care Subsidy Policies and Services, and the Materialities of Women's Lives

I have concluded that there is a relationship between government ideology, child care subsidy policies and services and the material lives of the women who use these services. This study demonstrated that the ideologies that benefit patriarchy are implicit in subsidised child care policies and are active cross-nationally.

Comparing Child Care Subsidy Policies in California and Australia

My decision to compare child care subsidy policies in California and Australia was the result of my work experiences in both locations. This particular cross-national comparison also made sense because child care subsidy policies are a site of policy difference in otherwise similar welfare regime contexts. Additionally, the cross-national construction of this study was consistent with the arguments of feminist theorists who refer to the renewed focus on welfare state research in a comparative context: "Crucial to this reorientation have been feminist critiques of mainstream of welfare states and the combining of feminist and comparative perspectives" (Sainsbury, 1996, p. 1). Specifically, I undertook a micro-level cross-national comparative study that was qualitative and "... contextually rich" (Clasen, 1999, p. 3).

The examination of my topic in a cross-national comparative way is an original research endeavour that offered a unique insight into child care subsidy policy. This type of research is important in a context where countries are pro-actively engaged in examining the social policies of other nations with the intention of transferring them into their own context. For example, much of Australian current welfare reform initiatives are modelled on the United States' Welfare Reform programs.

I have concluded that cross-national comparative research is a powerful tool for identifying policy impact in specific policy contexts. Comparing one policy context with another highlighted what was unique about a particular child care subsidy policy. For example, the comparative process foregrounded the Californian women's experiences of stigma and unworthiness associated with their use of a narrowly targeted residual subsidy service. In comparison the Australian women did not report any stigma or sense of unworthiness attached to their use of the semi-universal Australian subsidy service. It therefore made sense to conclude that the differences in women's experiences related to the differences in their respective child care subsidy programs rather than the attributes of individual respondents. Comparative research can therefore challenge conservative assumptions about 'normal' social patterns that are ascribed to the qualities of individuals and highlight disadvantage linked to specific types of policy formulation.

Critical feminist theorising was also central to my cross-national comparative study. Diane Sainsbury (1999) maintains "... the underlying concern in feminist comparative research has been the conceptualisation of gender-relevant dimensions of variation" (p. 4). In this study I have achieved this by placing women's experiences and activities at the centre of my analysis – placing "... gender relations centre stage" (Sainsbury, 1999, pp. 5-6). For example, in *Chapter Three: Historically Rooted and Interest Bound* critical feminist theory guided my interpretation of literature about the history of child care policy and services. I particularly focused on the activities of women in shaping subsidy policy. I concluded that women played a central role in the development of child care subsidy policies in California (and the United States) and Australia. In the last 100 years the efforts of women in both locations to establish a variety of child care services were challenged and co-opted by the state to meet a variety of (man-made) needs. This historical comparative review revealed the consequences of patriarchal intent as common to both contexts – revealing a pattern of reduced and intermittent service provision where services did not meet the needs of women. The comparison also highlighted the positive consequences of feminist intervention in shaping more generous subsidy policies. In Australia feminist women working within receptive governments had made a semi-universal subsidy provision possible, where the absence of these circumstances had led to a narrowly targeted and

precariously funded and localised service provision in the United States. The cross-national comparison, centralising the experiences and activities of women, highlighted the crucial importance of a strong feminist engagement with child care policy.

My study contributes to policy makers' understanding of the implications of adopting social policies from other countries. I urge policy makers to recognise the impact of local history and interests on social policy development and, also, to explore the oppressive assumptions embedded within policies. Lack of this critical engagement with foreign social policy initiatives intended for cross-national transfer will lead to inadequate and oppressive local policy responses.

The Experiences and Accounts of Women Service Users in California and Australia

I also explored the relationship between government ideology, child care subsidy policies and the material lives of women by focusing on the experiences and accounts of women service users. I asked what do the materialities of these women's lives tell us about relations of ruling? (Smith, 1999). This women centred exploration was about "... beginning where people are, in their lives, who are not among the makers of discourse or the participants in ruling" (Smith, 1999, pp. 68-69).

I concluded, from the women's accounts and experiences, that child care subsidy policy in Australia and California was constructed within conservative ideological contexts and that the conservative character of subsidy policy and provision shaped the lives of women service users in two ways. Firstly, their material lives were influenced in how their lives were lived. Secondly, subsidy policies shaped the way the women experienced and positioned themselves in response to conditions of domination. In the following two sections I have summarised my conclusions according to these two categories of findings.

The women's voices have given materiality to these conclusions and they therefore make a unique contribution to "... the imaginative centring of child care issues..." (Fincher, 1996, p. 166).

Child Care Choices in 'Everyday/Everynight' Lives

I have concluded that child care subsidy services in California do not position women who access the subsidies as rights bearers. The state regards subsidy receipt as a privilege. The women's access to subsidy existed in a context of uncertainty where future funding of subsidy services was not guaranteed. In comparison, the Australian women viewed the semi-universal subsidy service as an entitlement, which they accessed within a context of certainty. In the

uncertain Californian context the women experienced a sense of stigma and unworthiness attached to subsidy receipt; to such an extent that they kept their use of subsidy funds secret. The Australian women reported no stigma attached to the use of subsidy. All users of approved child care are entitled to receive subsidy funds and there was therefore no need to keep their use of the service secret. However there was some evidence that stigma was associated with women using subsidised services for non-work related purposes. This finding speaks to the strength of conservative discourses that link self-worth to participation in the paid labour force in both California and Australia.

In California child care subsidies are scarce and difficult to locate. I concluded that because of this scarce service provision women were often unaware of the existence of subsidies or if they knew services existed found the access process complicated and time consuming; requiring considerable resourcefulness and individual initiative. The current complex Californian service provision structure acts to exclude less skilled and vulnerable women. The Australian women did not share these difficulties with service access. However, the reduction of child care subsidy to 20 hours per week for non-work related purposes has according to Jope (2000) reduced access to child care for low income families seeking care for non-work related purposes.

In California the narrow targeting of some child care subsidies to particular child care programs diminished women's child care options. I found that though quality was the women's highest priority in reality their child care choices were restricted by subsidy availability. Their ability to locate alternative care, if dissatisfied with the quality of their current care, was limited. These limitations, imposed by an inadequately funded program, meant in order to remain employed the women were less able to choose quality child care than women who were on higher incomes and therefore free from the constraints of child care subsidy programs. In Australia semi-universal subsidy access did not, despite government rhetoric to the contrary, ensure that women could always access the quality child care they preferred. I found that women's child care choices had been influenced by recent subsidy initiatives that have withdrawn operational subsidies in favour of a single subsidy payment to parents – bolstering the for-profit sector. The Australian women in my study reported a lack of child care choice; particularly infant care, care in their preferred geographic location and community-based care.

The Californian and Australian women reported that the cost of child care was a significant issue and that subsidy made child care affordable for them. Child care subsidy payments also had a positive impact on family finance beyond the direct cost of child care through, for example, the provision of food at child care facilities. Stable, affordable child care arrangements enabled employment planning and advancement. In California, though, the sliding scale subsidy

reimbursement structure and low subsidy cut off levels acted as a disincentive to employment advancement.

Responding to Conditions of Domination

I have concluded that child care subsidy policies and services are "... an institution of daily life" (Aronowitz, 1989, p. xviii) that can be used by critical feminist theorists to expose historically situated and prevalent mechanisms of oppression (Held, 1980; Fraser, 2003). The Californian and Australian women who participated in this study responded in complex ways to the conditions of domination implicit in the subsidy services they accessed (Thompson, 2001). The women both disputed and accepted the ideological meanings that informed their experiences.

Specifically, I found domination was expressed in the lives of the women who participated in this study through their experiences of poverty, racism, individualism and sexism. Not all these conditions of domination were easily identified and named. The American women recognised themselves as disadvantaged due to their class and race and actively resisted the construction of themselves implicit in these forms of oppression. They constructed themselves as worthy, accepting the conservative values associated with this label. For the Australian women the semi-universal nature of child care subsidy meant that they did not identify class and race as forms of oppression in relation to their own service access and use. It also provided the Australian women with the illusion of choice and obscured aspects of the subsidy system that reinforce conservative roles for women. Whilst the residual Californian subsidy service foregrounded oppression based on race and class, it obscured the respondents' ability to conceptualise their experiences as gendered. For both groups of women their gendered disadvantage was rendered invisible by neo-liberal individualism and therefore difficult to identify and actively resist. Nevertheless and despite these barriers, both groups of women recognised that child care subsidy services were not provided to meet the needs of women. They believed policy makers were selfishly motivated and concerned with maintaining their own positions of power and privilege.

Theoretical Concerns with the Nature of States, Capitalism and Male Dominance

This study has shown child care subsidy is a valuable site for theorising cross-nationally about gender and the welfare state. Recent cross-national feminist theorising has been concerned with the extent to which states are "... women-friendly" and how and to what extent "... they reproduce male dominance" (Orloff, 1993, P. 304). Implicit in Orloff's argument is a recognition of the possibility that states may work in the interests of women as well as against their interests: "In short, social citizenship analysts envision social policy as having emancipatory as well as regulatory potential" (Orloff, 1993, p. 305). The experiences of the

women in this study showed that, though a valuable service is provided in California and Australia, subsidy services exist in policy contexts unfriendly to women. However, I think it is important to recognise the possibility of positive change. The assumption that positive policy change is possible underlies the importance of theorising gender and social policy, because though engagement with the state is often fraught and problematic "... the state may offer important political resources to women..." (Orloff, 1993, p. 304). In this section I will present findings that contribute to gender theorising about the welfare state and also to a feminist understanding of the role of male dominance in the provision of child care services.

I conclude that the experiences of women service users are central to gender theorising about the welfare state. For example, Bennett (2001) argues, "... child care exemplifies the gendered welfare state..." (p. 33) and further that "... the core issue that explains the tensions and ambiguities inherent in child care policy is that it is essentially to do with power relations between men and women" (p. 40). Bennett's contentions were supported by the experiences of the women in my study. The partial and conditional provision of subsidy services, in California and Australia, gave the women inconsistent messages about the state's expectations of them as mothers, workers and citizens. Robyn, an Australian service user, provides the best summary of the women's understanding of this ambiguous relationship:

So I think that at the moment it is an ugly balance between those two issues actually. I think an ugly balance between maximum worker productivity and trying to keep women back in the home. So it might be a bit generous and that's because it's the workers they're trying to get, and at the same time you can't be too generous because otherwise you'll have more women going into the workforce...

Further, critical feminist theorising about gender and welfare state provision showed that women's experiences, the materialities of their lives, can challenge the conservative positioning of welfare services. The women participating in this study claimed child care services as their own. This is a claim with a long historical tradition. My review of the literature on the history of child care led me to conclude, for example, that child care was central to women's concerns about inequality in Australia, America and California. The women service users, in this study, in claiming child care as their own challenged the state construction of their needs. This conception of child care as a women's service conflicted with policy makers' rhetoric about the purpose of child care services. Governments in Australia and California used acceptable 'neutral' ideological meanings about early childhood education, family and choice to conceal patriarchal intent. As Summers (2003) comments, there is "... plenty of talk from all parties

about the need for ‘family friendly’ policies ... you don’t hear much talk about how women fit into all of this” (p. 260).

This study also highlighted the impact of conservative discourses on women’s conceptions of their use of child care services. For example, the current positioning of child care services as a labour market support means that in Australia and California subsidy services are firmly positioned in the economic sphere. So for the Californian women labour force participation provided senses of identity and worthiness and made their use of a service that is still constructed as a ‘charity service’ tolerable. The Australian women also connected subsidy receipt to labour force participation. In general they were reluctant to support the receipt of subsidy for non-work related purposes – concerned in such circumstances women would be shirking their mothering responsibilities. The strength of these conservative discourses has provided a context where it has been acceptable for the Australian Federal Government to reduce the amount of subsidised child care hours that can be claimed for non-work related purposes. It is as Sally Jope (2000) suggests in the title of her paper: *No One Seems Worried*. So though women are capable of resisting the conservative ideologies implicit in subsidy services they also accepted some of the conservative discourses surrounding subsidy entitlement. I suggest, therefore, that relying on experience alone is insufficient – it is important to theorise experience: “To fail to acknowledge the social conditions with-in which experience is already embedded is to reduce the political to the personal” (Thompson, 2001, p. 34).

Recommendations for Future Research

This study highlighted four areas of future possible research:

- I suggest further exploration of the topic I investigated in this thesis. Additional interviews with women service users and policy makers, particularly legislators (a limitation of this thesis), would provide a greater understanding of the relationship between ideology, the policy making process and the material lives of women.
- In this study the community level management of the subsidy service in California appeared to provide the service administrators with flexibility, within budget constraints, to manage the subsidy program in a client centred and responsive way. In contrast the federally administered Australian subsidy service was much more rigid in its provision with little opportunity to respond to the needs of particular communities. I recommend further exploration of the relationship between local or federal administration of subsidies and child care service outcomes for women.

- The Australian women in my study valued the opportunity to choose community-based child care services. In a context of a growing for-profit child care sector in Australia I recommend a qualitative exploration of this changing child care landscape on women's child care choices.
- From the small amount of evidence gathered in this study, it appeared that Indigenous Australian women valued formal child care services. This finding contradicts Moreton-Robinson's (2000) assertion that: "Unlike white feminists, Indigenous women are not concerned with child-minding centres for working women" (p. 167). I therefore suggest that the role of formal child care in the lives of Indigenous women would be a valuable area of further research.

Conclusion

Cross-national comparative research that values feminist theorising has been a powerful tool for identifying policy impact in California and Australia. The comparative process challenged conservative assumptions about individual responsibility and highlighted disadvantage linked to specific types of policy formulation. My cross-national historical comparison, centralising the activities of women, foregrounded the crucial importance of a strong feminist engagement with child care policy to positive service outcomes for women.

I have concluded that child care subsidy policies, in California and Australia, are constructed within a matrix of conservative ideologies. These ideologies support the construction of subsidy services that increase women's vulnerability to oppression based on race and class (particularly for the California women) and sexism for all service users. I concluded therefore that policies that are hostile to the interests of women exist cross-nationally and may, as in this case, only differ in degree rather than intent. I urge feminists, therefore, to continue to resist the de-gendering of services that is encouraged by neo-liberalism and its rhetoric of choice. Once child care services are labelled as women's services the gendered impact of policy and service inadequacy can be foregrounded and challenged.

At a broader level this study reinforced the value of critical feminist theorising about the ideology implicit in the social policies most relevant to women's lives – it revealed the effects of ideological decision making on the materiality of women's lives. This thesis provides a strong endorsement for the importance of feminist engagement with social policy and particularly child care policy. Without this engagement the mechanisms of patriarchal power will remain invisible and unchallenged.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Information Page/Cover Story

My name is Nonie Harris and I am a PhD student at James Cook University (in Australia). I am conducting comparative research on subsidised child care services in Australia and California. I have worked in the child care service planning area in both California and Australia, and I'm hoping that by comparing the two systems new understandings will emerge that will benefit women in both countries.

This interview today will last about one hour. The intention of the interview is to find out some general information about your situation and your understanding of subsidised child care services and policies. The interview will be semi-structured and informal. I will act as a guide to certain subject areas. Please feel free to stop the interview at any time, not to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable or to ask me any questions about the research at any time.

Appendix 2: Research Access Request to Agency Director

Ms

March 4th 1999

Executive Director

The Child Care Agency

3990 Holiday Court

The City, CA 94806

Dear Ms

The intention of this letter is to officially introduce myself and my research to you, and also to initiate a meeting between us to seek permission to research and learn about your agency.

I am an Australian PhD student undertaking my research through the Centre for Women's Studies at James Cook University. The intention of my research is to do a comparative analysis of government subsidised child care services in California and Australia, with particular exploration of the impact of the differing ideological contexts in which these services are formulated, on women using such services.

Personal experience has provided the impetus for my study. I have worked in child care service planning in California and in Australia, and also have been a user of a variety of child care options in both locations. My involvement with a Californian state funded "workfare" program particularly highlighted for me the situation of welfare dependent mothers struggling to enter the workforce without the support of adequate child care subsidies.

I am hoping that a detailed description of your agency a specific provider of subsidised child care services, will provide an example of a larger more complex picture that I will describe at a more general level. I am seeking your permission to undertake this research with your organisation and suggest that we meet to further discuss this possibility.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Yours sincerely

Nonie Harris

Appendix 3: Informed Consent Form

(provided to respondents on university letterhead)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

SCHOOL: School of Social Work and Community Welfare

PROJECT: Comparative Study of Subsidised Child Care Services in Australia and California

CHIEF INVESTIGATOR: Nonie Harris

CONTACT DETAIL: (07) 4781 4898 (work)

DESCRIPTION:

My name is Nonie Harris and I am a PhD student at James Cook University (in Australia). I am conducting comparative research on subsidised child care services in Australia and California. I have worked in the child care service planning area in both California and Australia, and I'm hoping that by comparing the two systems new understandings will emerge that will benefit women in both countries.

I would like to interview you for about one hour. The intention of the interview is to find out some general information about your situation and your understanding of subsidised child care services and policies. The interview will be semi-structured and informal.

CONSENT

The aims of this study have been clearly explained to me and I understand what is wanted of me. I know that taking part in this study is voluntary and I am aware that I can stop taking part in it at any time and may refuse to answer any questions.

I understand that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names will be used to identify me with this study without my approval.

Name: (printed)

Signature:

Date:

WITNESSED BY RESEARCHER OBTAINING CONSENT

Name: (printed)

Signature: (principal Researcher)

Date:

Appendix 4: Californian Respondent Recruitment Letter and Flyers

March 15, 1999

Dear Subsidy Parents,

Enclosed you will find a flyer from an Australian researcher named Nonie Harris. She has asked me to help her get in touch with women who use subsidized child care for a research project she is working on. If you are interested in speaking with her, please call her at the number listed on the flyer. She will meet with you at your convenience and will even pay you for your time! She will, of course, keep your identity and any information you share with her confidential.

Again, it is your decision to call her—you are under no obligation from us to speak with her.

Take care,

Outreach Coordinator



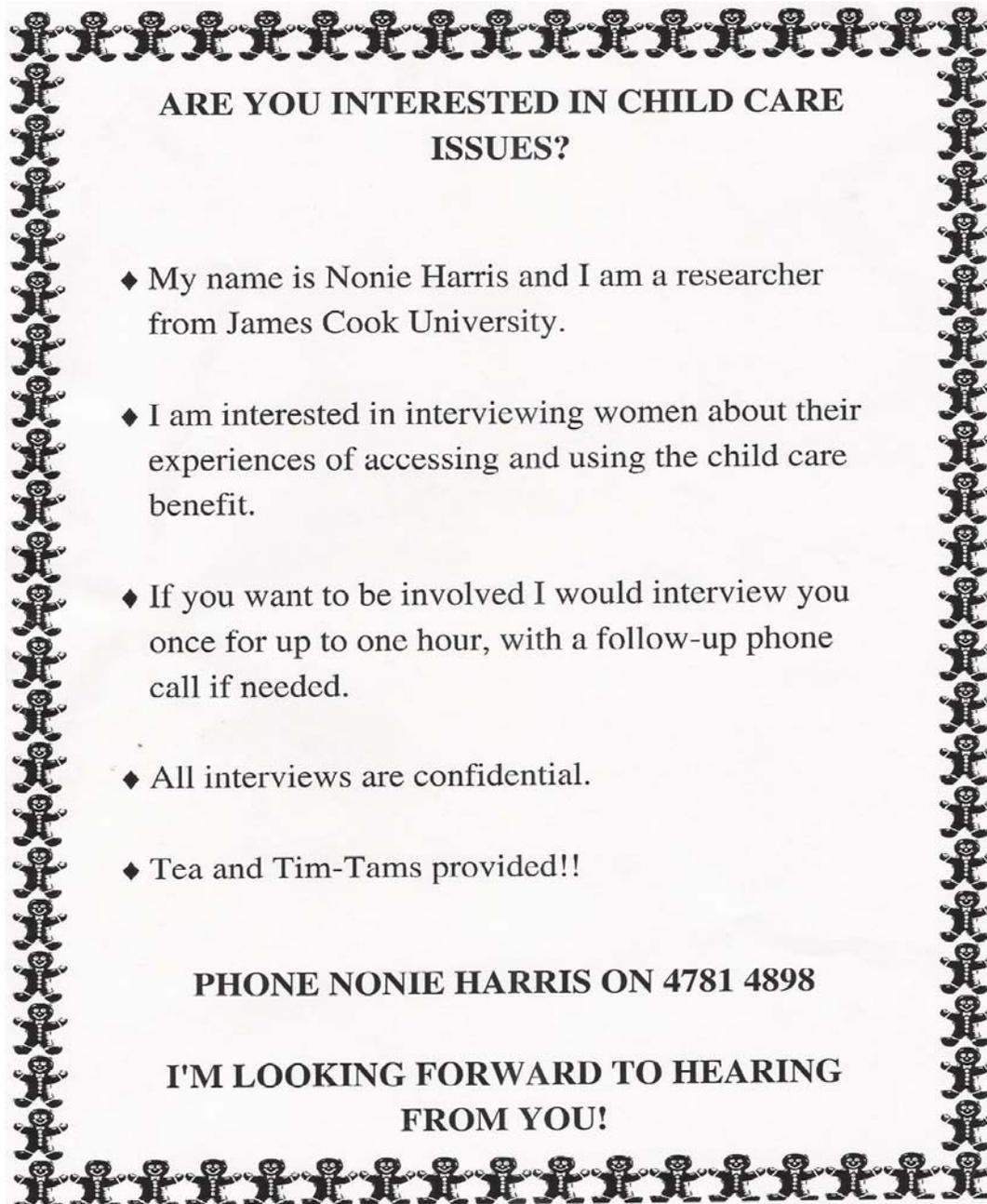
DO YOU HAVE A CHILD IN SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE?

AUSSIE RESEARCHER WANTS TO INTERVIEW YOU!

- ☺ My name is Nonie Harris and I am a researcher from James Cook University in Australia. I would like to learn about subsidized child care programs in California.
- ☺ I am interested in interviewing women who use subsidized child care to find out about their experiences with this service.
- ☺ If you are interested I would interview you twice for about an hour each time. I'm happy to pay you for your time - \$25 at the end of the second interview.
- ☺ All interviews are confidential.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Phone Nonie Harris on (650) 320 8301

Appendix 5: Australian Respondent Recruitment Flyer

**ARE YOU INTERESTED IN CHILD CARE
ISSUES?**

- ◆ My name is Nonie Harris and I am a researcher from James Cook University.
- ◆ I am interested in interviewing women about their experiences of accessing and using the child care benefit.
- ◆ If you want to be involved I would interview you once for up to one hour, with a follow-up phone call if needed.
- ◆ All interviews are confidential.
- ◆ Tea and Tim-Tams provided!!

PHONE NONIE HARRIS ON 4781 4898

**I'M LOOKING FORWARD TO HEARING
FROM YOU!**

Appendix 6: Interview Schedules for Californian and Australian Service Users

Interview Schedule – Service Users (California)

First Interview

- Please tell me about yourself (such as where do you work, how many children you have etc).
- What child care services do you use?
- Why did you choose to send your child/ren to the child care service they are now attending?
- How much does your child care cost/subsidy do you receive?
- How did you learn about the existence of child care subsidies?
- What was your experience of accessing subsidy?
- What were your child care arrangements before you had the subsidy?
- How would you describe the situations of other women who receive subsidised child care services?
- If you could change the subsidy service in any way how would you change it?
- Why do you think the City provides child care subsidy?

Second Interview

- In some countries governments pay the entire cost of child care (such as with public schools) – What do think the role of government is in funding child care here in California?
- We have previously discussed the stigma associated with receiving child care subsidy – how do you think this stigma could be reduced?
- Show article from newspaper “Welfare Recipients Sue” – What do you think this article shows about the values the Government hold about women on welfare?
- Have you ever been on welfare? What sort/how long? What was that experience like?
- How long have you worked in your current job? Has the child care subsidy cut off line affected your career decisions?
- I’m going to give you a scenario and I would like you to tell me you would do if you found yourself in this situation. Scenario: Your receiving child care subsidy for your children’s use of care at a centre and you are very dissatisfied with the quality of care.

Interview Schedule – Service Users (Australia)

First Interview

- Please tell me about your situation (such as where do you work, how many children you have etc).
- What child care services do you use?
- How did you learn about the existence of your child care services?
- How did you learn about child care subsidy and how to access it?
- How much does your child care cost/subsidy do you receive?
- What was your experience of accessing the subsidy?
- Why did you choose your current child care arrangement?
- What would you do if you were not happy with your current child care arrangement?
- If the child care subsidy was not available what would be your options (work and child care)?
- If you were offered a promotion and a pay raise what factors would you consider before accepting either of these?
- What do you think is the most important child care issue?
- If you could change the child care subsidy how would you change the service?
- Why do you think the Government provides the child care subsidy?

Second Interview

- Community based/private owned child care – what are your opinions about these types of child care?
- Other than work, what other purposes do you think child care can be used for? Have you or your friends used child care for purposes other than work?
- In some countries governments pay the entire cost of child care (such as with public schools) – What do think the role of government is in funding child care here in Australia?
- How do you think the federal government views the role of women in our society? Specifically what have they done that leads you to form this opinion?
- In the US the women who participated in this study were concerned about welfare stigma – do you think that stigma exists here in Australia? Is child care subsidy viewed as a welfare payment?

Appendix 7: Interview Schedules for Californian and Australian Service Administrators and Policy Makers

Interview Schedule: Policy Formulators

- Please describe to me your role within this organisation.
- Please describe to me your role regarding the formulation of subsidised child care policies.
- Can you identify the ideologies/values you believe form the basis of these policies?
- What do you think is the intended impact of these policies on the women who use subsidised child care services?
- In your opinion has there been any difference between the intended impact of these services and the actual impact on the women who use them?

Interview Schedule: Policy Implementers

- Please describe to me your role within this organisation.
- Please describe your role regarding the implementation of subsidised child care services?
- What do you believe are the ideologies/values that have formed the basis of the services that you are implementing?
- What do you think is the intended impact of these policies on the women who use subsidised child care services?
- In your opinion has there been any difference between the intended impact of these services and the actual impact on the women who use them?

Appendix 8: Subsidy Program Application Information, California

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Appendix 9: Subsidy Application Form, California

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Appendix 10: Sliding Fee Schedule Example, California

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Appendix 11: Subsidy Information and Application Form (first page), Australia

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