The Politics of Choice:

Difficult Freedoms for Young Women in Late Modernity

Thesis submitted by

Joanne Lesley Baker BA (Hons) *Cardiff*, MSocPol (Hons) *JCU*

December 2005

For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

In the School of Social Work and Community Welfare

James Cook University

Statement of access

I, the undersigned, author of this work, understand that James Cook University will make this thesis available for use within the university library and, via the Australian Digital Theses network, for use elsewhere.

I understand that, as an unpublished work, a thesis has significant protection under the Copyright Act and I do not wish to place any further restriction on access to this work.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

ELECTRONIC COPY

I, the undersigned, the author of this work, declare that the electronic copy of this thesis provided to the James Cook University Library, is an accurate copy of the print thesis submitted, within the limits of the technology available.

_____   _____

Signature   Date

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 Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references given.

_____ _____

Signature   Date

Declaration on ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on research Practice (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Ethics Review Committee (Human Ethics Sub-Committee) (Approval Number H1610).

_____   _____

Signature   Date

Acknowledgements

Abstract

This thesis reports on a study of young women's experiences, aspirations and relationship to feminism in the contemporary socio-political context. It brings a feminist analysis to new social theories about late modernity by exploring the particular relationship that young women have to the social and psychological processes that are associated with this reconfigured climate and the prevailing ideology of neo-liberalism.

A feminist theoretical framework informs all features of the research. It underpins the justification and context for the area of inquiry, the choice of methodology, the use of methods and the analytical lens for the interpretation of literature and data. The research employs a qualitative methodology. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with fifty five young women aged between eighteen and twenty five. The participants all resided in the Townsville/Thuringowa area and represented diversity in terms of race, class, sexuality, parenting status and education.

The growing influence of neo-liberalism and its dovetailing with feminism has ushered in the concept of a modernised, assertive and liberated femininity which celebrates the democratic opening up of choices and unprecedented options for girls and women, particularly in the areas of education and employment. The findings presented in this thesis identify that being female in these conditions is not to experience a simple and unproblematic expansion of choice or liberation from previous constraint, rather that they entail 'difficult freedoms'. Whilst the vast majority of participants report the benefits of these changes and a belief in meritocracy, their experiences and opportunities are strongly mediated by race, class and educational experience, and significantly complicated by primary responsibility for parenting and domestic work. The research found the continuation of many material barriers and circumscriptions in the areas of education, occupational preference, mothering and domesticity and a high incidence of male violence in intimate relationships and family backgrounds. Inequalities that are generated socially are overwhelmingly understood by young women through a 'politics of choice'. A punitive interpretive framework of individualism is strongly endorsed and this is reflected in their assessment of feminism. This study identifies subjective adjustments to this epistemological leaning which include techniques of discounting or distancing themselves from negative interpretations of their own

disadvantage or adversity and the relational consequences of resentment and a chilling of empathy towards others in hardship.

The thesis concludes that young women are located in a changed context of power. The hegemonic operation of neo-liberalism allows subordination to occur covertly within a framework of ostensible commitment to equality, the valorisation of choice and through seductive incitements to individual responsibility and self-management. Liberating processes which are supposed to be freeing for women are actually involved in re-inscribing their subordinate status. The research contributes to contemporary feminist theory and activism and to social policy and welfare practice by restating the relevance of structural perspectives and signalling the necessity of incorporating knowledge of the epistemological and subjective dispositions outlined in this research.

Table of contents

10. Discussion and conclusion

Bibliography   258

Appendices

List of Figures

List of Tables

Chapter one

Introduction

The conception of the research

The area of inquiry for this study grew out of some personal, ethical and scholarly curiosities and concerns. The genesis of the particular focus of this research primarily has its roots in some issues that I continued to ponder following the completion of a Masters research project (Baker 2002). This was a relatively small study of female high school students' ideas about and experiences of male violence in intimate relationships which noted the extent of its occurrence and the ways in which it was minimised and individualised by the young women. The impetus for that research study in turn came from my experience of working in women's organisations in Canada in the late 1990s and being surprised (in my naïveté) at the number of young women who sought support following sexual assault and domestic violence. My astonishment was underpinned by some vague beliefs about the progress of feminism and an assumption that things would therefore 'be different' for younger generations, certainly in the area of violence against them.

Looking back, I can see that my introduction and relationship to feminist thought was a relatively untroubled one. I encountered feminist critiques of English literature at university in Britain in the late 1980s and early 1990s and relished the way in which they uncovered and provided explanations for much of what had been obscured in my social world. A feminist analysis really did just seem like common sense to me. Although I was always aware that my views were not those of the mainstream and were not necessarily shared by my family and friends, my rather serene feminist journey continued undisturbed when I met my male partner who was enthusiastic about and supportive of feminism. My feminist perspective and activism broadened when I became a social welfare practitioner and worked for a rape crisis service in Britain and then for domestic violence services and women's refuges in Australia and Canada. At the beginning of the new millennium, my awareness of young women's continuing victimisation by violence was supplemented by popularised accounts of their disengagement from feminism. This in turn was parallelled by changes in the climate in which women's services were operating. More and more, I was called on to justify the existence of such services for women and the conceptualisation of domestic violence as a fundamentally gendered phenomenon was increasingly and vehemently challenged. It was at

this point that I became aware of the explicitly hostile and unsympathetic environment in which I was a feminist.

At the same time, it seemed that I now held tenuous membership (in my early thirties) of a newly celebrated group; that of young women. The notion of girlpower permeated popular culture. 'Women can do anything' was the catchcry. Girls and young women were encouraged to sing along with a growing number of 'girl bands' such as the Spice Girls and were increasingly targeted as a lucrative consumer group. There was a burgeoning sense that girls and young women were doing well educationally and in the labour market and this certainly fitted with my own experience of school and university. These cultural experiences reflected a profound ideological shift in conceptions of women's position in the world. Women's lives have taken on fresh social and cultural meanings; a newly valorised femininity has emerged in the context of women's apparent liberation. They are increasingly represented and represent themselves as an unsilenced and opinionated group. It is no longer fashionable to talk about female limits and suppression when it is loud and ostentatious celebrations of girlpower and discourses of endless possibility that triumphantly predominate.

These stories of transformed contemporary femininity were tempting. It was refreshing to note the new prominence, apparent self-confidence and modern assertiveness of young women. However, I began to wonder why I wasn't more drawn into the revelry and why, in contrast, I actually felt uneasy about it. I had a budding awareness that the way in which popularised conceptions of girlhood and young womanhood jarred with my own impression that there were more complex, contextual issues at stake. I wondered whether notions of girlpower played any role in obscuring the enduring inequalities experienced by women, evidenced in my own surprise at the extent of young women's experience of sexualised violence. My preoccupation with the tensions between the new glorification of young womanhood, antagonism to feminism and women's services and the daily need that I witnessed for those services therefore provided an impetus for the focus of this study.

The focus and aims of the research

My decision to conduct this research coincided with prominent public debate, both in Australia (Lingard and Douglas 1999) and internationally (Griffin 2000) about the plight of boys and men in changing times. While women are often positioned as the winners amidst social change who have never had it so good (for example Howard and Wilkinson 1997),

there is widespread concern about boys' educational outcomes, male un/employment and men's rights groups have achieved considerable attention for their claims that men are losing out when families separate. A feminist analysis which centres women is therefore somewhat out of vogue with prevailing tastes and concerns. However, it was this apparent overturning of normative assumptions about gendered power that I was keen to explore with young women.

I argue in this thesis that the need to examine young women's social and cultural positioning in current times is compelling and pressing for several reasons. This historical period is unique and significant because of the unprecedented options now available to many girls and young women. It is important, then, to discover what kinds of social and biographical effects these changes have brought. The neo-liberal focus on choice and the individualisation and globalisation of society are key elements of recent social change which are particularly pertinent to young women. Theories of 'late modernity' conceptualise them as newly entitled to reflexively engage with the conditions of their lives (Giddens 1991 and 1992; Beck 1992 and 2002). Not only are they perceived as having been freed from previously constraining social and economic structures and values, they are positioned as exemplars for and metaphors of individually driven success in the new meritocracy (McRobbie 2001). If, as cultural theorists such as Angela McRobbie have suggested, competitive individualism is now the mark of modern young womanhood (2000, 2001, 2004a, 2004b and 2004c), then perhaps this is not an unproblematic transformation.

Although the relatively new experience for women of being told 'you can be anything you choose' is seemingly liberating, it is a message that must be lived up to. If any successes are to reflect the workings of meritocracy then any failures must also be judged according to personal criteria. Critical scholars of neo-liberalism such as Valerie Walkerdine and her colleagues have noted the costs associated with neo-liberalism's reliance on individualism and the promotion of social mobility (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001 and Walkerdine 2003).

Therefore, the focus for this research grew out of the sense that it was important to examine some of these new assumptions about young women, to explore the nature and universality of these new opportunities and whether there were costs attached to them. I entered this research with a combination of circumspection, hope and curiosity about young women in current

times. My intention was to explore young women's views of their lives by talking with them broadly about their experiences and aspirations, with the particular purpose of listening to how they encountered the new female entitlement and the assumptions and requirements inherent in neo-liberalism. I decided to concentrate on their educational and occupational ambitions as well as their experiences and hopes for their personal relationships and child-rearing. I also wanted to talk to them about what they thought of feminism in the light of their experiences and expectations of their lives. I considered it imperative that I explored these issues with a diverse sample in order to determine any differences in the ways in which young women variously positioned by class and race experienced the key features of current times that I was interested in.

The overarching aim was to explore the influence of the social, political and economic conditions associated with late modernity and the prevailing ideology of neo-liberalism on young women's lives. The specific aims that were addressed by this research and reported in this thesis are:

1. To explore the ways in which neo-liberal ideology informs and influences young women's experiences and aspirations.
2. To identify the subjective and material implications of an elevated focus on individuated personhood for young women from differing backgrounds.
3. To examine how neo-liberal ideology influences the politics of young women, particularly their understanding of and relationship to feminism.
4. To consider how understandings of the influence of neo-liberalism can be used to counter its ideological dominance.

This study is therefore a qualitative examination of the micro-effects of neo-liberalism that is situated in the context of contemporary theories of late modernity. This research responds to the need for a feminist inquiry, grounded in this socio-political context, into young women's relationship to feminism. It is hoped that the research reported in this thesis will contribute new insights into young women's lives in the prevailing climate including their relationship with feminism and the significance of late modernity and neo-liberalism.

The title and structure of the thesis
The title of this thesis, 'The Politics of Choice', identifies the importance that choice plays in promoting ideas about individual freedom and transformation from previous constraint. In the

subtitle, 'Difficult Freedoms for Young Women in Late Modernity', the juxtaposition of freedom with difficulty is informed by Valerie Walkerdine's critique of neo-liberalism and captures the tensions inherent in the obligations of reflexivity and choice and assumptions of liberation.

The thesis is divided into ten chapters. This introductory chapter has described the personal and political motivations that led to the selection of this research topic and it locates this topic in some prominent public debates and perceptions about gender and power.

A review of the literature that has informed the focus, aims and analysis of this research is presented in the second chapter. From this examination of pertinent scholarly and popularised works, debates about the nature, extent and conceptualisation of social change are identified as providing a very significant backdrop to young women's lives in current times and the prevailing influence of neo-liberalism is noted, particularly its theoretical reliance on individualism.

The third chapter describes the methodological and theoretical framework of this research. A structural feminist orientation is described, which draws in particular on a radical feminist conception of male domination and its manifestations. Feminism is also identified as the theoretical base on which the methodology and methods of research are based. The specific ways in which the research was carried out are outlined in this chapter, including information about the recruitment and demographics of the group of young women who took part in the research.

'Motherhood and domesticity' begins a series of five chapters which report on the data collected during interviews with the participants. This particular chapter is situated at the beginning of the findings section of the thesis because it was the early experience of mothering, more than any other element, which underpinned a polarisation between the participants in terms of past and current material disadvantage. The participants' current parenting status was strongly associated with their educational and employment experience. It mediated their occupational ambitions and their hopes for and experiences of personal relationships. This chapter reports on strikingly intractable notions of sacrificial motherhood amongst the participants and an enduring commitment to future childrearing by those young women who are not yet mothers.

In the fifth chapter, the data pertaining to young women's educational and employment experiences and aspirations is examined. It describes how, amidst an undoubted opening up of opportunities for girls and young women, their experiences and the parameters of their ambitions unsettle simplistic assumptions of an uncomplicated liberation from previous traditions, segregations and aspirations.

The sixth chapter reports on the theme of young women's relationships and comprises their views about intimate partnerships, friendships with both sexes and the issue of equality between women. It provides an analysis of the elements of change and stasis in young women's expectations and experiences in their relationships with peers and intimate partners.

The seventh chapter is titled 'Politics' and draws together the views that young women expressed about equality between women and men and their knowledge, opinions and beliefs about feminism. The themes that characterised young women's responses in this area largely represented an individualised approach to gender equality and the significant ramifications of this for the currency of structural forms of feminist analysis are discussed.

The final chapter in this findings section takes a step back from the consideration of distinct experiential areas of young women's lives in order to consider them more broadly as neo-liberal subjects. It follows on from detailed descriptions of young women's lives in respect to the 'private' spheres of mothering and personal relationships, and the 'public' world of education, employment and political viewpoints. In this chapter, discussion centres on the ways in which key features of neo-liberal ideology are manifested in subjective and relational ways in young women's lives. The influence of neo-liberalism on subjectivity and the notions of interdependence and relationality are analysed for the implications they hold for social justice and approaches to social welfare practice.

Chapter nine pursues the analysis of the implications of a widespread acceptance of neo-liberal ideology to its influence on social policy in Australia. The experiences and aspirations outlined by the young women in this research are measured against the neo-liberal reform agenda of the current Federal Government in Australia. The focus of this chapter is to provide an analysis of the tensions between the competitive individualism of neo-liberal

ideology and social conservatism and considers the implications of this for young women in light of the views and ambitions that they articulated.

In the tenth and final chapter I consider what the findings contribute to existing scholarly and popularised understandings of young women's material lives and epistemological frameworks. Neo-liberalism is considered to have a hegemonic function in limiting the recognition and articulation of disadvantage and exploitation, which are re-embedded rather than transcended through the processes of reflexive modernisation and individualisation. I delineate what this might mean for feminist theory and activism. I also consider how it might inform social policy and welfare practice and suggest some ways in which the ideological dominance of neo-liberalism might be challenged productively.

Chapter summary and conclusion
The aim of this opening chapter has been to describe the way in which this research project was conceived. It reveals its origins in my desire to closely examine the changed positioning of young women as the inheritors of newly advantaging social and economic conditions. Its genesis was also linked to my increasing experience of hostility to feminism and the questioning of normative assumptions of gendered power and dis/advantage. Following my depiction of the foundation of this research endeavour, the socio-political context of this inquiry was outlined. The significance of the prevailing influences of neo-liberalism and theories of late modernity were drawn on to refine the focus and specific aims of the inquiry. Finally, the structure of the thesis was described, including the order, content and purpose of each chapter.

Through this research, I hope to make a contribution to an understanding of young women's lives in current times, which in turn brings insight and direction to the challenges facing feminism and advocacy for social justice today. The scholarly and popularised representations and analyses of these challenges and their application to young women's lives are now considered in the literature review.

Chapter two

Literature review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to identify and analyse the literature that has informed and refined the focus of this research. Work predominantly from the fields of women's studies, girls' studies, social welfare, social policy, economics, sociology, psychology and education in Australia, Europe and North America will be examined. The chapter begins by outlining the social and economic changes associated with the late modern era and the emergence of neo-liberalism and surveys the literature which examines the implications of such change on young people's lives. Contemporary social theory is centrally concerned with contested notions about the nature and extent of transformation and the relative significance of structural forms of determination and the power of social actors. It is argued that the ways in which women in general and young women in particular, are invoked in these areas of debate provide a compelling justification for a feminist analysis of the lives of young women in current times.

The literature review then moves to an examination of contemporary writing about and research with girls and young women, including the significant body of work about young women's engagement with and understanding of feminist philosophies. This reveals the specific locations and ways in which disputed ideas about gender and power are being played out in popular and scholarly discussions about young women. De-traditionalisation, individualisation and individualism are identified as major influences on the material and subjective dimensions of young women's lives and are established as key concerns for this research study.

Conceptualising current times: Late modernity and post-modernism

The question of how current times might be differentiated from previous eras is highly contentious and has prompted vigorous debate amongst social theorists. The debate encompasses a spectrum of thought about the extent and nature of social, cultural and economic continuity and change in western countries since the 1970s. In general terms, the concept of a discrete late modern era is characterised by its economic and social distinctions from industrial modernity. Industrial modernity was distinguished by a system of industrial capitalism built around manufacturing, centralised government and enduring social ties based

on shared identifications with class and place. In the era following the Second World War, it was associated with the development of liberal welfare states and robust social justice movements. By contrast, late modernity is characterised by complex global capitalist economies and deindustrialisation in the form of the contraction of large-scale manufacturing and the expansion of global communications, technology and service industries. Across these and other industries, full-time, ongoing employment has been replaced by part-time, casual and temporary work. Paralleling these changes and following a neo-liberal agenda, there has been a retreat from state welfare provision to privatised services and a shift from Keynesian economic management to non-interventionist and free market principles. The influence of neo-liberalism is examined in detail later in this chapter.

Opinions diverge about whether these changes signify the beginning of a new epoch or whether it is more accurate to describe them as representing developments within modernity. Thus, the merits of the thesis of late modernity are pitted against the theory of proponents of post-modernity and often centre on contrasting ideas about agency[1] and structure[2]. Post-modernists place emphasis on radical change rather than continuity and contend that these changes have been so great as to distinguish a post-modern era. For example, in *The Postmodern Condition* (1984), Jean-Francois Lyotard declares that there has been a profound alteration in the status of knowledge as societies become post-industrial and cultures enter a post-modern age. The radical pluralist position associated with writers such as Lyotard (1984) and Baudrillard (1988) includes claims that the dominant metanarratives of modernity have lost their credibility and have been replaced by a conceptual move to post modern multi-perspectivism. The widely influential argument that we have entered a new modern epoch in which structural analysis has lost its weight has meant that the validity and usefulness of key explanatory variables such as class and gender are increasingly rejected. Such claims have been strongly disputed by those arguing for the continued salience of structural analysis, including feminists who have criticised post-modern theory for its obscuring of ongoing power relations (for example Brodribb 1992; Walby 1992).

The sociologists Anthony Giddens in Britain (1990, 1991 and 1994) and Ulrich Beck in Germany (1992, 1994 and 2002) have been the most prominent contributors to theories of late modernity. They are more cautious in their interpretation of the extent of change,

---

[1] The term agency refers to personal efficacy and the ability to proactively attempt to shape one's circumstances.
[2] Structure is a systemic "recurring pattern of behaviour [that] has a constraining effect" (Walsh 1998, 33).

contending that shifts associated with post-industrialism do not necessarily signify the end of the modern or the advent of the post-modern. In examining the critical relationship between the modern and post-modern, they both contend that we are living in a time of historical transformation during which former certainties have been disrupted and replaced by a wider range of possibilities. A central focus of their scholarship is the idea that predictability was a feature of modern times which has been replaced by a new sense of danger and contingency. In his theory of late or high modernity[3], Giddens (1991, 1992) develops the notion of reflexive modernisation to describe the concept by which individuals are compelled to reflect upon and navigate increased freedom from the social forms of industrial society. The signposts of how to act that have commonly provided guidance have a lessening presence. Therefore, late modernity is not only characterised by a plurality of choices but a diminishing of direction and an increase in doubt rather than certainty. As societies become more diverse, individuals are surrounded by and have knowledge of alternative ways of living which is reinforced through a global array of media. Under such conditions, it is important for the individual to develop agentic qualities of self-reflection and self-monitoring in order to steer their way through the world.

For Beck, late modernity provides the foundations for a 'risk society' in which global insecurities and economic variability are combined with weakening collective ties and identities (1992). The combination of individual responsibility and accountability on one hand and vulnerability and lack of control on the other results in a heightened sense of insecurity and subjective sense of risk. The idea of the progressive freeing of agency from structure is termed individualisation by Beck (1992). While he stresses that this does not represent simple freedom, individualisation results in the collapse of normal, predictable biographies[4], frames of reference and role models. Standard biographies become elective biographies and this do-it yourself biography is a "risk biography" or a "tightrope biography" (1992, 3).

Giddens takes a largely sanguine view about the social psychological implications of the conditions of late modernity, optimistically suggesting that such conditions create new forms of freedom for people as links to traditions and habitual practice are broken and opportunities for autonomy increase (1991, 1992 and 1994).

---

[3] Giddens uses the terms late and high modernity interchangeably.
[4] The term biography refers to a person's life trajectory involving key features such as educational, employment and relationship experiences and pathways.

Beck (1992) problematises the conditions of late modernity to a greater degree than Giddens, explicitly acknowledging the unequal distribution of risk and expressing concern that as risks become individualised, people increasingly regard setbacks and crises as individual shortcomings, rather than as outcomes of processes which are beyond their personal control. Despite this, he does suggest that " class inequalities and class-consciousness have lost their central position in society" (1994, 8).

These theories of late modernity have been disputed. Some have pointed to evidence for increasing homogenisation in areas such as the fast food industry (Ritzer 1996). There has also been a questioning of whether present modernity is indeed uniquely reflective and whether change and flux do typify society today more than in the past. It can be argued that modernity has always involved differentiation and plurality, the weakening of communal regulation and sense of uncertainty. Historian John Gillis contends that nostalgia about a previous period of apparent stability has recurred throughout preceding eras, that there has always been detraditionalising and retraditionalising and that the fragmentation and uncertainty so frequently remarked on today has been apparent in Western societies since the Middle Ages (1996).

Zygmunt Bauman's (2000) concept of 'liquid modernity' offers an alternative framework in which to address the conceptual and ideological flaws of periodised ideas and epochal splitting associated with theories of modernity and post-modernity. While epochal periodisation is an orderly way to conceptualise technological, market or state formation changes, it is pertinent to ask how useful such an approach is for disadvantaged people and groups. Certain groups are always marginalised in such a profound way that periodisation conceals more than it reveals about their relative powerlessness. The construction of a 'before' and 'after' has limited meaning when the marginalised occupy a subordinated position throughout. Male domination and capitalism remain potent forces and it is therefore problematic to theorise no overall pattern other than disintegration. Some literature provides evidence for the continuing relevance of a concept of class. Where the concept of class encompasses the marginal and excluded, who comprise an underclass or a new poor, it is still an important tool of social analysis (Crompton 1996). The scholarship of John Westergaard (1995) demonstrates that inequality between and within nations is escalating and Jean and John Comaroff (2000) consider that structural membership of a working class has increased.

Although I consider the work of Giddens and Beck to have strong analytic and empirical purchase and impact, my endorsement of their perspectives is qualified. I concur with their theoretical position that although recent socio-economic change has been particularly rapid and has far-reaching implications, it does not represent an epochal shift. However, their work is centrally concerned with the passing away of the significance of the socio-structural and the increasing significance of agency. Therefore, both Beck and Giddens demonstrate a tendency to emphasise (and perhaps exaggerate) changes and underestimate very significant sources of continuity, particularly in terms of the disadvantage and marginalisation of certain social groups. Their focus on the destabilisation of the significance of structural forms of determination and the increased capacity for reflexivity thus presents a theory of the growing power of social actors and the way in which this influential theory has some bearing on contemporary thinking about women in late modern times will now be considered.

The feminisation thesis and female individualisation

The first part of this chapter has described how literature about the features of post/late modernity is concerned with a debate about the relative influence of structure and agency which considers the extent to which individuals are free agents controlling their destinies through individual, wilful behaviour or are sorted and channelled by structural forces associated with class, sex or race, for instance. Any posited lessening of the significance of the socio-structural will have important implications for those groups most disadvantaged by such constraints. Indeed, both Giddens and Beck theorise that destabilising of structural determination and the increasing power of social agency unleashes processes of de-traditionalisation and individualisation. Amidst an untethering from the rules, expectations and norms associated with modernity, "people are being removed from the constraints of gender…men and women are released from traditional forms and ascribed roles" (Beck 1992, 105). Therefore, the conditions of late modernity may benefit women in particular, since there is potential for them, perhaps more than any other group, to experience unprecedented liberation from previous constraints in such circumstances.

The idea that girls and women are particular beneficiaries of the changed conditions associated with late modernity has achieved widespread currency. The Demos Think Tank in Britain is particularly associated with the promotion of the celebratory thesis of a 'female future' in which post-industrial countries are becoming increasingly shaped by feminine

values and traditionally male jobs disappear. *No Turning Back: Generations and the Genderquake* conceptualises a shift in power from men to women as well as dramatically changing values of young people, which constitute a 'genderquake' (Wilkinson 1994). A year later, *Freedom's Children* "overwhelmingly confirmed the depth and extent of change: the rising power of women, the convergence of values between younger men and women, and the rejection of traditional restraints" (Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995, 9). Following this, *Tomorrow's Women* (Howard and Wilkinson 1997) received significant attention as a projection of women's future in the 21st century. It describes how women are to become the majority of the workforce, that society is increasingly shaped by feminine values and that women are now relatively less committed to family.

The perception that girls and women are the winners of late modernity and that boys and men have been unfairly divested of their social and economic power has facilitated a recuperative masculinity politics in which boys and men are positioned as the 'new disadvantaged' (Lingard and Douglas 1999). The idea of a crisis of masculinity in post-industrial or de-industrialised societies has been mooted. It rests on the assumption that the feminist reform agenda has achieved (indeed exceeded) its goals (Yates 1997) and that the educational and employment achievements of girls and women have been achieved at the expense of men. Thus, it is argued that girls and women are preferentially positioned in a society increasingly characterised by feminised values.

In Australia and internationally, much scholarly and popular attention has been paid to the suggestion that not only have girls and young women caught up with the achievements of boys at school, they have overtaken them. Research in Australia suggests that although female students have indeed made some gains, these must be qualified by a more detailed analysis because crude comparisons of male and female performance obscure the ways in which social class, ethnicity and race complicate the picture and remain vital determinants of achievement at school (Gilbert and Gilbert 1998; Lingard and Douglas 1999). More sophisticated reviews of school performance data seem to suggest that the challenge to the success of middle class boys is coming from a select group of academically capable middle class girls.

There have certainly been significant gains for girls in the education arena (Arnot, David, Weiner (1999). Reay, Davies, David and Ball (2001) suggest that although there has been a

decline in gender inequality in terms of the numbers of men and women attending university, there has been no reduction in social class inequality. They warn that the increased scale and scope of higher education and the rhetoric of widening access and meritocracy should not be allowed to distract attention from the continuing social stratification of higher education. Wooden and VandenHeuvel (1999) point out that women's university achievements are still predominantly within lower status, lower paid vocational areas (such as teaching and nursing). Heavily feminised fields such as teacher education and nursing have now shifted to university accreditation, thereby increasing the proportion of women in tertiary education (Alloway and Gilbert 2004). The popularised and uncomplicated picture of girls' educational advantage is further tested by an examination of their post-school outcomes. The limited gains made by some female school students are still not being converted into improvements in jobs, income and life trajectory; women's lifetime labour force participation and earnings profiles are still lower than men's (King 1999; Wooden and Vandenheuvel 1999). This leads to a consideration of the ways in which employment is conceptualised as an area in which women are increasingly advantaged.

The thesis of a feminised labour market suggests that women are to become the majority of the workforce as traditional male jobs disappear in a burgeoning service and knowledge-based economy. Some researchers have argued that young women are profiting in a deregulated and globalised labour market (Joekes and Weston 1994 and Joekes 1995) and some have suggested that there is less occupation segregation (Crompton 1997; Savage 1992). There has, however, been a strong feminist challenge to the feminisation thesis. Lisa Adkins considers feminisation to be an obscuring term (2001, 671) and argues that it is experienced unevenly and denied to some. In their examinations of women and employment, British sociologists Harriet Bradley (1996) and Sylvia Walby (1997) have both drawn attention to the implications of de-industrialisation and globalisation for women. They identify significant change in the system of gender relations in employment, recognising women's increased presence in the public sphere. Despite this, the changes are complex and do not represent a simple improvement for women. Patterns of inequality remain, with women still frequently segregated into a more narrow range of occupations and contained at lower levels. Walby (1997) notes that much of the new employment of women is not performed under conditions to those equal to those of men because their employment conditions are often part-time or casualised and often preclude provision for pensions and job security. Their empirical analyses of labour market data leads each of them to conclude that

14

the contemporary structuring of relations between men and women and between groups of women is characterised by polarisation.

Furthermore, while women's participation in the paid labour force has increased substantially, a body of research suggests that deeply entrenched inequities in housework remain, with women contributing the majority of labour in this area (see for example Bittman and Pixley 1997; McMahon 1999; Pocock 2003). In contrast to assertions of a feminisation of employment that automatically advantages women (Howard and Wilkinson 1997), the nature and extent of women's employment continues to be overwhelmingly mediated by the presence of dependent children. Australian research demonstrates that the labour market remains strongly divided along gender lines and assert that this division is predominantly created by young women's involvement in parenting because their levels of participation are strikingly similar to those of young men otherwise (McClelland and Macdonald 1999; Wooden and VandenHeuvel 1999).

Although the reflexive modernisation work of Beck and Giddens positions women as being at the forefront of social change, both as agents and recipients of de-traditionalising forces, their engagement with feminist scholarship is limited. Lynne Jamieson (1999) has criticised the absence of any systematic review of feminist theory in Giddens (1992) work on the transformation of contemporary relationships between men and women. Angela McRobbie has also found fault with Beck for his respectful but historicised treatment of feminism (2004a, 10). She cites this as an example of the tendency for feminism to be rendered redundant by being "taken into account" in order to be shown to be a thing of the past. There is a general sense that their work has 'moved on' from emancipatory politics towards life politics or, in Beck's terms, 'sub politics' or single-issue politics.

McRobbie uses the term 'female individualisation' to specifically apply the concepts of self-monitoring and increased capacity for life planning freed from old constraints and expectations to women (2004b, 260). Although feminist analysis of the work of Beck and Giddens has been limited, Adkins has considered whether existing theories of reflexive modernisation and individualisation do adequately attend to women's experience. She uses the example of becoming a reflexive individualised worker in a post-Fordist knowledge economy in order to mount a feminist critique of the reflexive modernisation thesis. Adkins notes that under conditions of feminisation, workplace identity and processes are

conceptualised as increasingly stylised, fluid, self-fashioned and mobile and that this has ushered in notions of greater 'gender mobility' (Adkins 2001). The scholarship of post-modern academics such as Judith Butler (1997) has led to identities being more commonly described as mobile and shifting rather than related to categories such as class or sex. Indeed, pro-feminist scholar Michael Kimmel (1994) has noted the ways in which masculinity is increasingly represented in terms traditionally associated with femininity. Conversely, claims about the increased social power of women often suggest that young women are becoming increasingly masculine in their aggressive and hedonistic values and behaviour, (Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995; Wilkinson 2000). Adkins (2001 and 2002) problematises the notion of an easy switch to masculinised behaviour in her examination of reflexive workers. She notes that in the current labour market, it is in men's interests to take on femininity and argues that this is an easier transgression than women's performance of masculinity at work. She concludes that women's labour market mobility seems, in fact, to operate primarily within the genre of femininity. The concept of a convergence or a greater fluidity between masculinity and femininity is revisited in this chapter and throughout the thesis.

In addition to these points, labour market mobility and flexibility are often reliant on the appropriation of women's domestic and child care work and it is therefore possible to argue that individualisation may actually re-embed women in constrained social structures. Adkins' analysis thus disputes simplistic links between individualisation and breaks with tradition and she argues that there is a danger in conflating de-traditionalisation with emancipation for women (2002). Challenges to tradition are not simply liberatory because individualisation does not necessarily transgress gender categories. The theories of Beck and Giddens do not adequately consider how changes such as those in the labour market do not simply transgress but are simultaneously produced or co-constructed with the traditional. They do not pursue any sustained discussion of the adverse consequences of individualisation and reflexive modernity or consider the ways in which the decline of social structures may create new inequalities, which are still be identified and theorised. The requirement for new conceptualisations of women's relationship with modernity, identified by Adkins (2002) and McRobbie (2001) in particular, provide an important focus for this research.

The following section of this chapter is concerned with outlining the nature of neo-liberal ideology and its influence on current times.

Liberalism and neo-liberalism

Liberalism is the historical predecessor of neo-liberalism. Although there is debate about the precise origins and definition of liberal political and economic thought, it is possible to delineate its major features and to identify the principles preceding contemporary neo-liberalism. According to Manent (1996), liberalism developed in Europe through the early modern struggle against the political authority exercised by the Church. Once the political authority of Christianity had been undermined a new politics had to be constituted and it was this challenge that led to the development of liberalism. There was a need to develop a form of politics that was compatible with new conceptions of human nature which was now to be regarded as freed from supernatural and fixed moral frameworks. Macpherson (1962) traces the development of liberalism to the growing significance of individualism to seventeenth century political theory. It rested on the crucial assumption of possessive individualism, the doctrine that "every man (sic) is naturally the sole proprietor of his own person and capacities and owes nothing to society for them" (1962, 270). Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (1986) also locate the emergence of the discourse of liberal individualism to the modern challenge to the authority of tradition. They also emphasise its functional (although not dependent) relationship with capitalism from the eighteenth century and an increasing emphasis on the freedom of the economic actor in the marketplace. It is therefore possible to delineate several generally accepted features of liberalism. These encompass the universal (global and ahistorical) applicability of the individual as a rights-bearer prior to the existence of any state, community or society; rationality; a free-market system and the desire for a limited constitutional government to protect individuals' rights from others and from its own expansion.

Neo-liberal conservatism dominates the political landscape of western liberal democracies such as Australia, Britain, France and the United States. Pratt identifies neo-liberalism as specifically belonging to the possessive individualism strand of liberal theory has contributed to the ideas and values generally grouped together as the 'New Right' (2001: 32). Neo-liberalism's most prominent proponents include Milton and Rose Friedman (1980) and Friedrich Hayek (1960, 1967, 1976 and 1991). They advocate a form of negative freedom which relies on an absence of restraint (Laski 1960) so that the area over which political power is exercised is reduced and allows for an increase in self-interested market activity. The focus on individualism is manifested in the belief "there is only individual justice but not a separate social justice" (Hayek 1967, 175). Neo-liberal scholarship posits that relationships

between government and economy, state and individual and between individuals themselves can be theorised in terms of the major assumptions underlying neo-liberalism. These assumptions are examined below. Neo-liberal theory encompasses economic, political and social philosophy and offers a coherent and consistent explanation of the way the world works (or ought to work). Indeed, although they take issue with many neo-liberal assumptions, George and Wilding identify the robust ideological base on which this political position rests (1994).

The behavioural premises of methodological individualism and rationality underpin neo-liberal ideology. The free market supports such self-interested activity and so a fundamental feature of neo-liberalism is its support of unfettered trade and market supremacy.

Individualism and rationality

Methodological individualism holds that the elementary unit of social life is the individual human action and asserts that all phenomena or entities such as 'society' are reducible to individual behaviour, comprehensible only in terms of the self-interested activities of their constitutive individuals. The concept of rationality is underpinned by this assumption that complex social phenomena can be explained in terms of the elementary individual actions of which they are composed. The theoretical basis of rationality is rational choice theory, in which people calculate the likely costs and benefits of any action before deciding what to do. It is an essential component of an understanding of individuals acting in pursuit of perfectly informed self-interest.

Much of the scholarship that provides a critique of neo-liberalism scrutinises the theoretical foundations upon which it rests. Opponents of rational choice theory argue that it provides an inadequate conceptualization of all aspects of decision making which include the individuals who make the decisions, the process by which and the context within which decisions get made. Scott's (2000) examination of rational choice theory cites three areas in which it is problematic. Firstly, it is unable to satisfactorily explain the origin of social norms such as trust, altruism and reciprocity. Secondly, it is also unable to account for collective action or demonstrate why individuals join groups and associations. Finally, rational choice theory fails to consider the way in which social processes are implicated in the structuring of people's lives because the model of rational choice implies that in any given situation, we would all make the same calculations without external pressures influencing our reasoning.

As methodological individualists, rational choice theorists cannot incorporate structural or cultural influences as entities which have an effect upon decision making. Jonathan Tritter and Margaret Archer have edited a collection of critiques of rational choice theory in response to their perception of its growing influence in the discipline of sociology (2000). The contributors contend that because rational choice is based on notions of atomistic, individual decision makers, it cannot account for decisions made by couples, groups or other collectivities. Furthermore, the assumption of fixed, well-ordered preferences and perfect information renders the theory inadequate for situations of change and uncertainty; features that have been identified as significant to late modernity. Some rational choice theorists have attempted to account for the contingencies and uncertainties involved in choice-making (March 1978, Cook and Levi 1990). However, they are still not able to account for the subjective experience of variously contextualised social actors.

Nikolas Rose (1990, 1996) provides an important critique of neo-liberalism's emphasis on individual responsibility and the requirement of subjects who are free and rational agents of democracy. Using a Foucauldian approach, Rose argues that neo-liberalism is more than a philosophical doctrine based on setting limits to government. Rather, its promotion of the hyper-responsible self is a technique through which to govern and is one of its key inventions and significant resources. It is therefore intrinsically linked to the management and surveillance of populations.

> However apparently external and implacable may be the constraints, obstacles and limitations that are encountered, each individual must render his or her life meaningful, as if it were the outcome of individual choices made in furtherance of a biographical project of self-realization (1990, 12).

Thus, people are governed *through* their freedoms and aspirations rather than *in spite* of them. Such an analysis exposes the largely illusory or at least limited nature of autonomy. The notion of autonomy seems credible, however, because neo-liberal discourses work to convince us that we are shaping or can learn to shape the conditions of our lives. An increased involvement in self-monitoring has manifested itself in the dramatic expansion of self-help literature (Rimke 2000). Intimate lives, feelings and desires and aspirations are experienced as quintessentially personal and are subjected to increased levels of self-inspection and self-rectification.

Neo-classical and free market economics

Critics of capitalism and globalisation such as the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu identify neo-liberalism primarily as a freshly presented but extreme and "unfettered" exploitative economic system; "neo-liberalism is a very smart and very modern repackaging of the oldest ideas of the oldest capitalists" (1998, 34). In his extensive critique of neo-liberalism, Noam Chomsky identifies it as a fundamentally pro-corporate system of economic and political policy which prizes the sanctity of the free market and the freedom for corporations to operate unencumbered (1998). This new presentation of capitalism involves appeals to progress, reason and the (indisputable) science of new classical economics. There is a significant amount of literature that has also noted the packaging of neo-liberalism as a natural condition, an inevitable social and economic order (for example Comaroff and Comaroff 2000, Coronil 2000; McQuaig 1998; George 1999). Australian economists such as Lindy Edwards (2002), John Nevile (1997) and John Quiggin (1996) have also taken issue with the presentation of economic rationalism as a new and incontestable advancement in economic theory. Both Edwards and Nevile argue that although economic rationalists present their policies as the logical consequences of orthodox economics, they are the expression of specific and debatable political ideological views rather than economic doctrine, as "social philosophy masquerading as economic science" (Nevile 1997, 1). It hides its ideological underpinnings in the dictates of economic efficiency.

Neoliberalism brings with it a harsh anti-welfarism and a strong antipathy to collective relationships. Progress and well-being are equated with wealth creation and economic expansion and the ethical dimensions of neo-liberalism are often skirted around. Therefore, in addition to critiques that focus on the theoretical assumptions upon which neo-liberalism rests, much of the literature opposing it concentrates on the unjust outcomes associated with its approach to economic and political policy. Chomsky's *Profit Over People* (1998) conceptualises the neo-liberal agenda as a form of class war, emphasising the way in which it shrinks public services and increases the private wealth of a minority. Other texts in this area are also concerned with exposing the contradiction between neo-liberalism and democracy Naomi Klein (2000) and Noreena Hertz (2003) reveal the corrupt nepotism between governments and corporations and the apathetic and cynical approach to politics in most western countries where the free market is supposed to foster democracy. These commentators have also emphasised how a neo-liberal privileging of individual responsibility and competition closes off opportunities and potential for collectivism and solidarity. They

note that neo-liberal policies which transfer assets and responsibility for service provision from the public to the private realm enhance social differentiation rather than commonality.

Opponents of neo-liberalism argue that insufficient attention is paid to the adverse consequences of cutting social expenditures for the population as a whole and disadvantaged groups in particular in particular and note the problematic coalition of markets and social justice (for example Jamrozik 2005; Lingard 1997; Mendes 2003). Jamrozik 2005 identifies the existence of a post-welfare state where social policy is subjugated to the prevailing concerns with economic rationalism, leaving an increasingly mean residualism and safety net which is evidenced in rises in poverty and homelessness. Loïc Wacquant's scholarship has examined the increase in prison populations due to the growing use of the penal system in western countries (2001). He identifies this as a punitive and paternalistic state response to the social disorder that has resulted from neo-liberal economic policy and the contraction of social welfare which particularly harms disadvantaged social classes.

The literature includes examples of personal exposés of the injustice that results from neo-liberalism. In the United States, Barbara Ehrenreich spent a year as a domestic cleaner to reveal the extent of material division between the wealthy and those who service them (2001). In Australia, Elisabeth Wynhausen took unpaid leave from journalism to spend a year doing unskilled casual work. *Dirt Cheap* (2005) details this experience. Its revelation of economic and social polarisation challenges assumptions about the egalitarian nature of Australian society and outlines the poor pay and insecure conditions of casual workers which are permitted by deregulation.

There is a body of criticism of neo-liberalism that has been centrally concerned with its capacity to transform values held by individuals. Such analyses argue that ethical considerations have been displaced by the economic imperatives of neo-liberalism. Sociologist Richard Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character* (1998) studies the insecurities associated with the new economy. He suggests that, in particular, the labour market demands of flexibility and adaptability are unreasonable and, understandably, arouse high levels of anxiety in people. He expresses concern that the impetus to be mobile and modifiable negatively affects the values held by individuals. For example, he describes how long-term relationships are necessary in order to form trust and that familiarity is required for emotional rootedness, but concludes that such relational longevity is incompatible with the conditions of

economic reform. Sennett is thus concerned with the ways in which the experience and management of risk has distorted the qualities of loyalty, trust, commitment and self-discipline as people adapt to the demands of modern workplaces. Michael Pusey (2003) found that many of the Australian urban middle class were suspicious and critical of the unwanted social consequences of economic restructuring and desired riches other than money. Similarly, Australian economist Clive Hamilton's argument for the principles of eudomism[5] and the harm of materialism in *Growth Fetish* (2003) and *Affluenza* (2005) are also based on a critique of neo-liberalism's predisposition for over-consumption and economic gain at the expense of other values.

Pierre Bourdieu (1998) and Bronwyn Davies (2005) have described the entrenchment of neo-liberalism in people's lives and argue for the need to interrogate what this does to us and how to challenge it. Such views provide support for the micro-analysis of neo-liberalism in this study.

Feminist critiques of neo-liberalism

The literature considered in the previous section regards neo-liberalism as a predominantly classed discourse. However, it has at its basis masculinising logics and visions of citizenship in which paid work is the main identificatory sign. Much of the critique of the various aspects of neo-liberalism is centrally concerned with its polarising and unjust social outcomes for the society at large, concerns that are shared and described by feminist critics. However, many of these arguments neglect or fail to sufficiently address its gendered dimensions. Feminist scholars and activists have taken up the work of exploring the nature of neo-liberalism and the ways in which neo-liberalism is experienced differently by men and women.

The most distinctive contribution of feminist scholarship to the analysis of neo-liberalism has been its identification as an essentially masculinist ideology. For example, Sheila Ruth's analysis stresses the essential congruence between right wing political ideology and the ideology of male domination. She recognised New Right politics, along with fascism and authoritarianism as "three facets of the same reality – unchecked Patriarchy" (1989: 100). Pro-feminist Michael Kimmel has also made explicit connections between conservative political ideology and masculinity and identifies how right wing movements around the

---

[5] Eudemonism is an ethical doctrine that characterizes the value of life in terms of happiness. Hamilton (2003) proposes an alternative political program in a post-growth society that is based on eudemonism, where people are able to pursue activities that are most beneficial to their individual and collective well-being.

world use masculinity as a discursive strategy to explain their position and to mobilise men (2001).

Feminist theorists such as Carol Pateman (1988) and feminist economists have built up a considerable body of work on the masculine character of rationality (for example Folbre and Larson 1994; Folbre 2001; Hewitson, 1994 and 1999; Hyman 1994; Nelson 1992; Nelson and Ferber 1993; Sharp 1995; Waring 1988). Despite this international body of critical literature, Australian economist Rhonda Sharp contends that such perspectives have not been readily found in the mainstream economics texts and journals and argues that although new classical economics is supposedly gender neutral, this would be more accurately described as gender blindness (1995, 27). A pivotal site of feminist scholarship in this area has therefore been to challenge the alleged commitment of neoclassical economics (NCE) to the disembodied universal individual:

> The hidden use of a masculine subject, and the implications of this, must be made explicit. NCE constitutes an androcentric discourse, with a particular rather than an objective view of the world; this view privileges the masculine and actual men, at the expense of the feminine and actual women (Hewitson 1994, 150).

Julie Nelson also argues that neoclassical economics relies on hierarchical dualisms which have masculine and feminine associations (1992). At its masculine core are concepts such as choice, efficiency, independence, self-interest and paid work, encapsulated in Rational Economic Man[6], a self-made, self-knowing, autonomous, unconstrained and rugged individual. Such conceptualisations leave out notions of unpaid work and equity and neglect behaviour that is interdependent or mutually supportive because these are associated with femininity. Mainstream economics is therefore a story of rational, free, sturdy individuals whose relationships are based on competition. It privileges self-interest, public life, paid work, the superiority of activities that can be mathematised and quantified, and the desire to consume. However, feminist analysis contends that power disappears under the assumption of free and equal individuals voluntarily interacting on the basis of self-interest and that a framework grounded in the atomistic conception of the individual obscures the socially constituted values attached to women's work. Issues that are of particular concern to women

---

[6] Rational Economic Man is the rational human being that many economists use to derive and verify their theories and models.

are defined as being outside economic analysis and marginalised in the peripheral arena of social values, preferences and tastes.

Feminist economists have challenged the marginalising of 'women's work'. Nancy Folbre (2001) argues that markets can not function effectively outside the framework of families and communities that are built on love, obligation and reciprocity, for which women have been assigned disproportionate responsibility. Women subsidise the market economy because their 'care economy' is not geared to turnover, profits and growth but to well-being and security. Thus, the market economy is bolstered and nurtured by the altruistic principles of the care economy. In her 1988 work, Marilyn Waring highlighted how neo-classical economic reasoning only provides a partial accounting of its costs and benefits because economic orthodoxies exclude most of women's productive and reproductive work. Feminist theorising has reasoned that there is nothing inevitable or natural about the association of femininity with altruism and caring work. Furthermore, it has also identified that the connection of femininity and nurturance has disadvantaging economic outcomes for women. British sociologist Paula England found that, other factors being equal, jobs that require nurturance are paid less than other jobs, whereas jobs that involve the exercise of authority over others are paid more (1992).

Folbre makes additional assertions about the disadvantage that results from the association of femininity with altruism, arguing that it has served to limit or deny women the opportunity to pursue self-interested activities and to consider themselves as autonomous beings (2001, 18). In her examination of women's differential experience of autonomy, Ann Oakley also concludes that women's sense of identity is perilously bound up from early childhood with the identities of others (1984). Feminist analysis has revealed how concepts of an actively resisting or choosing subject assume a pre-social individual and conceal the fact that western women's wants and desires are formed by the male dominated structures in which they are located. Bronwyn Davies (1991) argues that although one may feel free to choose, a subject is positioned within particular discourses which mediate what actually is 'chosen'. Against such analysis, notions of freely choosing, rational individuals are hardly consistent with the material reality of many women's lives.

Vandana Shiva (1993 and 2000), Susan Hawthorne (2002) and Christine Wichterich (2000) point out that although women are not featured much in the talk about globalisation its effects

are not gender neutral. The work of these authors systematically describes and analyses the varied and uneven consequences that global developments can have for the poor, a disproportionate number of whom are women. The view that women in particular are profiting from world market integration, as it is they who take up many of the jobs in labour-intensive or service industries is not attendant to the complexities of women's new patterns of labour market involvement. Feminist scholarship reveals the situation to be more complicated than this. Wichterich (2000) points out that any competitive advantage they may hold over men in meeting the new requirements of the labour market often results from their position as the cheapest, most docile and flexible workers. Women's status as secondary income earners and their 'impermanence' (because they may require time off to give birth and care for children and other family members) often corresponds with the requirements of flexibility by companies.

A feminist analysis has also been applied to the neo-liberal dismantling of the welfare state, revealing that much suspicion of the welfare state rests on its potential to provide an alternative source of economic support for women and reduce their economic dependence on a male breadwinner. Australian political scientist Marian Sawer shows explicitly how the association of an 'indulgent' 'nanny' welfare state is associated with femininity:

> The neo-liberal upsurge of the last quarter of the twentieth century and the neo-liberal case against the welfare state have gained much of their emotional force from a subtext which is highly gendered. Whereas social liberalism conveyed the promise of more autonomy within the private sphere and more caring values in the public sphere, neo-liberalism depicts the results of social liberalism as a loss of masculinity - through 'overprotection' by the state in the public sphere and usurpation of male roles in the private sphere (2003a, 101-2).

Sawer highlights the ways in which notions of a regulatory 'nanny state' deride emotionalism and attention to the human consequences of market competition which are associated with femininity. The implication is that citizens are 'mollycoddled' by the state and hence unable to develop the rugged individualism and risk-taking required by market liberalism. The metaphoric identification of the welfare state as female helps fuel resentment on the part of those rendered insecure by rapid social change (2003a, 102). Indeed, Sawer cites media writing that links the nanny state to the increased power of women (2003a, 93-4). Any reduction in the welfare state is disproportionately harmful to women and children and its

disparagement is itself based on a hierarchical dualism which subordinates those values associated with femininity.

Johanna Brenner has drawn attention to the implications of neo-liberalism to feminism and relationships between women (2002). She concludes that it is not the backlash politics of the reactionary right but rather the triumph of neo-liberalism that is feminism's great challenge. Brenner and other feminist researchers such as Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild (2003) are concerned that although second wave feminism[7] challenged and overturned a deeply entrenched web of culturally and legally sanctioned exclusionary practices, only some women (particularly those well-placed by their class/race position) have been able to gain favourable conditions with their employers or male partners. Their capacity to do so rests on a large, low-paid pool of other women in the rapidly-expanding service economy. Yet, the accomplishments that women with increased cultural capital and economic resources have been able to attain 'proves' that success is possible. Any dilemmas faced by other women appear as individual problems under neo-liberal conditions and add to polarisation between women.

This section of the literature review has highlighted some specific criticisms of neo-liberalism that have emerged from feminist analyses. A primary concern is that because neo-liberalism does not recognise social context or structural constraint, it is antithetical to any feminist theory that focuses on the conditions of male domination. Neo-liberal belief in the autonomous individual is presented as an ostensibly gender neutral framework but is exposed as fundamentally masculinist in its assumptions and gendered in its nature and outcomes by feminist scholarship. This research study will extend such scholarship by analysing the consequences of its nature and prevalence on the material, subjective and relational dimensions of young women's lives.

Understanding young people's lives in late modernity
This literature review now moves to a more detailed consideration of how young people are located in and experience the social and economic changes associated with late modernity and the ascendency of neo-liberal ideology. It begins with a survey of general youth studies literature and then examines the work of feminist youth studies scholars and the field of girls' studies.

---

[7] second wave feminism is a term which refers to the period of feminist activism between the late 1960s and 1980s.

Dwyer and Wyn (2001) and Rattansi and Phoenix (1997) have argued that the changing nature of young people's experiences, as well as what it means to be 'adult' are often very different from those of previous generations. They suggest that young people growing up after the 1970s enter adulthood incrementally and that this has required a departure from the previously deterministic framework of youth development and a move from the old notion of youth as a transition to adulthood.

In the face of such changes, scholars in the field of youth studies have increasingly focused on a contextualised approach to the study of young people in late modern society and a sizeable body of such work has emerged in Britain, Europe, North America and Australia. Edited collections of research with and about young people which takes their experience of late modernity and risk society as a central theme include European texts from Brynner, Chisholm and Furlong (1997) and Cieslik and Pollock (2002) and North American collections such as Epstein (1998) and Strickland (2002). Many of the changes to the lives of young people in modern industrialised societies have followed from restructured economies and labour markets and the resulting increased demand for educated workers, flexible specialisation in the workplace and social policies that have extended the period in which young people may be dependent on their families (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). In light of these changes, young people today often encounter and manage risks that were largely unknown to their parents, with fewer secure points of reference. Predictable life trajectories and traditional support structures have been replaced by an emphasis on the role of individual strategies, 'good' choices and personal flexibility. Longitudinal research carried out by Dwyer and Wyn in Australia (2001) concluded that young people are shaping new identities and priorities in direct response to the socio-economic conditions they face; characterised by the juggling of multiple responsibilities, job mobility, engaging in lifelong learning and an emphasis on personal development and autonomy.

While young people may enjoy greater flexibility in imagining their life trajectories, increased uncertainty can also be a source of stress and vulnerability. Increasingly, young people must bear the material and psychological responsibility for 'making it' with fewer structural provisions than were available to previous generations. While the majority of this work agrees that new patterns, identities and transitions have emerged for young people, views diverge in the literature over the extent to which these changes have brought

opportunities as well as harm and an increase in social differentiation between young people. While some argue that strong emphasis must continue to be placed on the importance of structure in determining social and economic outcomes for young people, others place greater weight and confidence on the role of individual agency. Peter Kelly (1999) observes that young people have to become makers of their own futures because paths are no longer mapped out for them. Although he concedes that their futures are largely determined by the market, he also draws attention to their own agency as they plan their desired biographies under uncertain and insecure conditions.

Those who express concerns about the new conditions in which young people's lives take place focus on young people's relationship with the state in which there is an increased emphasis on personal responsibility. The growth of consumerism and changes to values and a loss of meaning are also identified as problematic. Those scholars who have examined young people's relationship with the state (such as Giroux 1998 and 2000; Mizen 2004 and Strickland 2002) note the disinvestment in youth and harsh responses to youth crime that have resulted from the erosion of young people's access to and claims for support from the state. Giroux (1998 and 2000) also focuses on the new social and economic conditions of neo-liberalism by positioning young people as a litmus test of society's health. He is highly critical of the "callous indifference" of individualistic philosophy, noting the emergence of an "ethically stripped-down notion of social responsibility, especially as it pertains to how adults define their relationships to young people" (2000:19). Giroux uses the term the 'swindle of agency' to describe neo-liberalism's exaggerated account of individual opportunity.

Australian social commentators Richard Eckersley (1988 and 1992) and Hugh Mackay (1993) have both suggested that social, economic and technological change has resulted in a 'crisis' for youth and point to increases in suicide, substance abuse, crime, social detachment and alienation as an expression of the plight of many young people. Young people are also considered to be adversely affected by changed values associated with late modernity and neo-liberalism. Strickland (2002) and Quart (2003) are concerned with consumerism and the way in which young people are increasingly defined in terms of their capacity to purchase. They are concerned about the pressure for young people to consume and the way in which subjectivity and self-worth is formed and expressed through consumption.

The tensions between continuity and change and the relative influence of structure and agency that characterise debates about modernity are central to studies of young people in late modern society. This is evidenced in the work of Fred Cartmel and Andy Furlong in Britain (1997) and Manuela du Bois Raymond in the Netherlands (1998). These researchers all take issue with the individualisation and reflexive modernization theses articulated by Giddens and Beck for their downplaying of the continued significance of structured determinants. Similarly, du Bois Raymond (1998) argues that it is still possible to identify class underpinning life trajectories. She found that 'normal' biographies, although in decline, are still largely experienced by young people from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds (1998). These normal biographies are characterised by early employment and family formation relative to the transitions of young people from higher social classes, who are more likely to experience a 'choice' biography where the life course is better described as a project based on strategic planning, the need to adapt to changing circumstances and involves extended education and professional employment. Crucially, du Bois Raymond does not consider that choice biographies are based on unconstrained freedom and choice because the experience of options brings with it the obligation of greater reflexivity and justification of decisions.

Furlong and Cartmel (1997) criticise theories of late modernity on the grounds that they emphasise the declining relevance of structured obstacles rather than continuing structured disadvantage. Their study of the social conditions experienced by young people found that, while structures have fragmented, changed their form and become increasingly obscure, the life chances and experiences of young people can still largely be predicted using knowledge of individuals' location in social structures. They suggest that examining the lives of young people is a particularly useful way to examine whether or not structure retains ongoing importance because any abatement should be especially apparent for those at a younger age. Their analysis of the ways in which structure is represented as being of declining relevance leads them to suggest that life in late modernity revolves around an epistemological fallacy which leads to an increased reliance on individualist values despite the continuing importance of social structures such as class in shaping life chances. This idea about a consistent and fundamental error in thinking, which privileges the individual over the social, usefully encapsulates epistemological preferences in late modernity and is a concept which is drawn on consistently through this thesis.

Girls' studies: Writing by and about girls and young women

As recently as a decade ago, the absence of the voices of girls and young women in social research was notable. They inhabited "a landscape that is strangely silent – where girls for the most part are not heard in public or if heard are generally spoken about in the third person" (Taylor, Gilligan and Sullivan 1995, 1). British social scientist Sue Lees also addressed the peripheral positioning of girls in studies of young people:

> When girls do make an appearance in studies of youth culture they are usually seen in ways that are marginal, or which uncritically reinforce a stereotyped image of women (1986, 14).

An early group of key texts aimed to expose the evasions and omissions of an androcentric youth studies focus and, in doing so, reveal the oppression of girls and young women. In Britain, Angela McRobbie (1976 and 1991a) and Christine Griffin (1985) developed Marxist feminist analyses of cultural life at Birmingham's Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies which linked young women's material circumstances with notions of femininity expressed through popular culture. In the United States, feminist researchers Jill McLean Taylor, Carol Gilligan, and Amy Sullivan examined girls' struggles when requirements for them to engage with subordinating notions of femininity increased, typically during adolescence (1995). Now, however, there is a large body of popular and scholarly works, recently categorised under the banner of 'girls' studies', that investigates the lives of girls and young women in an age category that generally extends from twelve to twenty years' old (Harris 2004, xx). A relatively small and specialised field of interest has expanded from its inception as a reaction to the non-existent or negligible scholarly interest in girls and young women to a prolific array of literature focusing on girlhood.

The field of feminist education studies has contributed significantly to the body of international scholarship on the production of femininity (for example Gilbert and Taylor 1991; Hey 1997; Johnson 1993; Kenway and Willis 1990; Proweller 1998; Walkerdine 1990). Writing about young women has also included edited collections which centre girls' voices, such as Karen Green and Tristan Taorino's *A Girls Guide to Taking Over the World* (1997) and Hilary Carlip's *Girlpower: Young Women Speak Out* (1995) and Maria Pallotta-Chiarolli's *Girls' Talk* (1998). This body of literature documents the ways in which the normative beliefs and expectations of girls and young women have been altered. Such changes were reported by Sue Sharpe when she revisited British schools twenty years after

her original research (1976 and 1994). In the 1990s, she found the female students more assertive, confident and supportive of wider options and independence for women than the students she spoke to in the 1970s. However, Sharpe concluded that many of their views indicated an exaggerated sense of what had actually been achieved for women.

Despite the increased interest in girlhood, some girls and young women have been more noticeable than others, exposing the ethnocentrism underpinning much of the girls' studies scholarship (Griffin 2004). Sherrie Inness responded to localised and homogenous approaches to girls' studies with two volumes that take a global view of girls' lives (1998 and 2000). Work such as *Young, Female and Black* by Heidi Safia Mirza (1992), Fauzia Ahmad's (2001) research with young British Muslim women of South Asian origin and Nicola Dibben's (1999) study of representations of femininity in popular culture has exposed and unsettled white, Anglocentric assumptions underpinning concepts of girlhood. In Australia, performer Leah Purcell compiled interviews with young Indigenous women in *Black Chicks Talking* (2002).

Anita Harris (2004) has identified two competing cultural discourses in the literature about girlhood and young womanhood; the notion of girl power and fears about girls in crisis. The following two sections in this chapter follow these distinctions and suggest that each discourse is responding to perceptions about the de-traditionalisation and empowerment of young women which are informed by ideas about reflexive modernisation and individualist ideology. The first body of work, grouped here under the banner of 'girl power', privileges a focus on agency and presents an optimistic view of girlhood. The second group of work, '(girl) power failure' problematises the experiences of girls and young women through a focus on personal issues such as self-esteem and illustrates some ambivalence about the perceived increase in social power of girls and young women.

Girl power: Cultural fascination with female success and achievement
The growth of academic and popular interest in girls and young women reflects the relatively new emphasis on them as beneficiaries and indicators of social and economic progress. It draws on the way in which globalisation and de-industrialisation are assessed as having been more advantageous to young women than young men. This kind of female success and achievement is expressed through the highly popularised notion of 'girl power'. The girl power concept refers to a new social positioning for young women where notions of

passivity, voicelessness and vulnerability are replaced with dynamism and taking charge. It represents an earlier femininity that has been superseded. Rather than being denigrated, femininity is celebrated and so girl power is a concept that can only describe the advantages of being female, not the disadvantages. The growth and prevalence of girl power is complex and far-reaching. It has transcended the English lexicon and is commonly used in Nordic countries, for example (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005).

Cultural imagery increasingly stresses the agency, intelligence and resourcefulness of female characters, like Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Lara Croft, who are progressively more visible as protagonists in central roles and who are commonly engaged in acts of aggression. The female assertiveness and success that is reflected in a prolific array of 'girl bands', female entertainers and artists as well as cartoons and television programs with tough, smart lead female characters also reflects strong commercial interest in girls and young women as a highly targeted consumer group and the marketing pitch for their consumption relies heavily on their portrayal as streetwise and independent and the illusion that they are in control. The cynicism of this approach is revealed in a Fortune magazine exploration of the teenage girl market:

> If you want to sell to the girl-power crowd, you have to pretend that they're running things, that they're in charge (Munk 1997, 135).

The links between consumption and a popularised focus on girlhood is again evident in *The 'Can Do' Girls: A Barometer of Change* (Katz 1997), a report funded by The Body Shop and containing a foreword by Anita Roddick. The survey of around 3000 British girls and young women examined their relationships with family and friends and their educational and employment experiences, aspirations and concerns. The research introduces the concept of the Can-Do Girls, "young women who are willing - and able - to take life by the horns and live it to the full" (1997, 1) and "society had better prepare itself – these girls know that opportunities are there for the taking" (1997, 3). These young women take their equality completely for granted because "gone is the concept of competition with men, or whingeing about unfairness" (Katz 1997, 3). The analysis of the 'Can-Do' girls emphasises their protective factor of self-esteem against "difficulties and competition" and contrasts them with

(naturally) the 'Low Can-Do' girls, who are not found to possess such capability, identifying personal capacity as a primary determinant of girls' achievement.

The discipline of cultural studies has critically explored how this active and newly powerful femininity is represented in popular culture (Driscoll 2002; Hopkins 2002; Inness 2004). Susan Hopkins (2002) argues that cultural icons, such as the Spice Girls pop group who popularised the term girl power, provide images and identities that can become a site of positive experimentation in the negotiation of girlhood. A more critical and less accepting stance questions those aspects of popular culture that simultaneously propose a new kind of femininity whilst continuing to conform quite comfortably to images (albeit updated and sassy rather than demure) that have conventionally fulfilled male gratification including intensive beauty practices, revealing clothes, exposed flesh and slimness. McRobbie comments on the intensification of interest in young women's sexuality, particularly the way in which teen magazines present it as bold and brazen (1996, 177-8). Ariel Levy (2005) describes the inroads of pornography into mainstream culture, which is positioned as feminist sexual freedom for women, exhibited through their apparently willing engagement in activities such as poledancing and the use of pornography. Despite concerns that many cultural manifestations of girl power represent an overstating and eroticising of women and power, young women's experience of (hetero)sexuality is widely regarded as now being more liberated. Whilst there is certainly some truth to this, it is a notion that is again subject to depoliticised, individualistic and simplistically optimistic assertions. Paula Kamen's *Her Way: Young Women Remake the Sexual Revolution* (2000) is such a celebration of young women's sexuality. Kamen uses the term 'superrats' to describe "a superevolved subset of sexually assertive young women, who grow stronger and more common with every generation" (2000, 6). Importantly, they "shouldn't be confused with feminists" because they are not political (2000, 22). Female empowerment is illustrated through young women's "sense of entitlement, and social clout" and gender fluidity is again noted because new generations of women are "sharing more of men's power", often 'acting more like men' and share male values (2000, 3). Kamen describes some concerns that the individualism that characterises the 'post-boomer' generation may leave young women's rights vulnerable to political attack. She also vaguely and briefly acknowledges 'contradictions or inconsistencies' in the lives of the 'superrats' but does not extend this observation and is unwilling to subscribe to a larger political analysis.

Such literature suggests that there has been a shift in the values attributed to young women, characterised by the desire for autonomy and self-fulfilment through work and personal life. This is a reflection of both economic change and the cultural influence of second wave feminism. The nature and extent of these new value systems is debatable, as is their desirability. What divides much of the literature about the lives of young women, including their relationship to feminism is whether or not changes to opportunities and values represent a positive liberation from the confines of traditional femininity. Some consider that it is more accurate to view such changes as the incorporation of young women into the project of neo-liberalism in which individuals must resolve their own economic and social progress and problems. Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody identify the "remaking of girls and women as the modern neoliberal subject; a subject of self-invention and transformation who is capable of surviving within the new social, economic and political system", a conceptualisation which is draw on heavily in the research reported in this thesis (2001, 3). They question the uncritical and celebratory tone of girlpower discourse and its role in downplaying the significance of structural determinants. Their psychosocial analysis of the lives of young women challenges the idea of the demise of class and the rise of the individualised, agentic self, to argue for the continued salience of class.

Anita Harris (2004) notes that the transformation in perceptions of girlhood has been enabled by some feminist ideas about choice, individual empowerment, personal responsibility and being who you want to be which dovetail with the growing influence of neo-liberalism. This uneasy coming together of feminism and neo-liberalism represents an unexpected outcome of the Women's Liberation Movement and Harris argues that it is through 'empowered' young women that the vanguard subjectivity of the West is promoted. Their successful flexibility and self-motivation eases concerns with socio-economic change and confirms the transgression of outmoded constraint. Despite its enabling by liberal feminist[8] ideas, it privileges the depoliticised notion of female rather than feminist success and is most compatible with the concept of post-feminism[9]. Young women's responses to the changes associated with de-traditionalisation require self-invention and adaptability and thus position them as "choice biographers par excellence" (Harris 2001, 131). It is these ways in which girls and young women have become central to public debates about changing times (Aapola,

---

[8] Liberal feminism is generally understood to represent the belief that equality for women can be achieved through legal means and social reform (for example Jaggar 1983).
[9] Postfeminism has two major connotations. The first is that "dreary militant feminist politics" has been superseded by girlpower which combines a pleasurable femininity with ambition and autonomy. The second meaning refers to the incorporation of post-structuralist ideas that challenge much conceptual ground on which feminist theory previously rested (Barrett 2000, 46).

Gonick and Harris 2005). Indeed, Angela McRobbie has identified that young women have become emblematic of and responsible for promoting meritocratic social progress in New Labour's 'New Britain' (2001, 361).

(Girl) Power failure: Too little self esteem and too much aggression

This body of literature problematises rather than rejoices in the experiences of girls and young women. In contrast to the can-do girls (Harris 2004; Katz 1997), the at-risk girl challenges the female success story through transgressions of this new femininity through poor educational and employment 'choices', early pregnancy and aggression. In this discourse, young women are positioned as vulnerable and in trouble and as harming themselves or others. Two key works in this area, by Mary Pipher (1994) and Peggy Orenstein (1995), are explicitly set in the context of (some) girls' educational gains in the United States and discuss the need to address the psychological needs of girls and young women despite media exhortations about their improved school performance. Despite some brief consideration of disadvantaging socio-political conditions, the origins of (and solution to) their problems is ultimately individualised and rendered more palatable in an ultimately narrow psychological analysis.

The focus on girls' low self esteem is paralleled by the prominence of recent media and academic attention to female aggression (Chesney Lind and Brown 1999), representing a shift from vulnerability to meanness (Gonick 2004). The American literature includes Rachel Simmons' *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls* (2002), *Queen Bees and Wannabees* by Rosalind Wiseman (2002) and Sharon Lamb's *The Secret Lives of Girls. What Good Girls Really Do – Sex Play, Aggression, and Their Guilt* (2001). In Australia there is Rachael Oakes-Ash's *Anything She Can Do I Can Do Better - The Truth About Female Competition* (2003). In Britain, studies on bullying in schools demonstrate an increased focus on girls (Osler, Street, Lall and Vincent 2002; YWCA 2002) with the YWCA report concluding that bullying is now far more prevalent among girls than boys. All of these works point to the distinctive nature of these alternate aggressions that are not usually marked by the direct verbal and physical aggression of boys. They all describe the relational behaviours (such as exclusion, rumours, manipulation) that are used by girls to inflict psychological pain on an intended target. Simmons calls these "alternate aggressions" (2002, 3) and, along with the other authors, describes girls' bullying as epidemic and destructive. Her solution problematically positions behavioural norms associated with boys and men as the norms to

35

which girls and women should aspire to. It hinges on the suggestion that girls should act more like boys. This means behaving in more openly competitive and aggressively achievement-focused ways, "giving girls a chance at success means giving them full, equal access to the tools of the game: to the acts of competition and desire required to excel" (2002, 150).

Although Lyn Mikel Brown (1999) has details an explicitly feminist cultural accounting for relational aggression, many of these works claim to be responding to a previous silence on this issue. The elision of the noteworthy work of Anne Campbell (1993) and Janice Raymond's analysis of the obstacles to friendship in *A Passion for Friends* (1986) contributes to what McRobbie calls an 'undoing' or 'dismantling' of feminism, where previous feminist ideas and scholarship are disregarded or given scant reference (2004a, 2004b and 2004c). Jessica Ringrose (2004) is critical of the intentions and consequences of the thrust of this work. She suggests that race and class categories are collapsed so that all girls are positioned as mean and potentially violent, a notion which has gained a powerful hold in the public imagination. She identifies a tendency in this literature to equalise the meanness of girls with male aggression and violence and suggests that much of the research and discussion in this area which places clique behaviour made comparable with boys' physical aggression is underpinned by an equivalency-seeking motive whereby the claim for parity between male and female aggression is advanced. This very visible body of literature unsettles assumptions about the association of care, loyalty and gentleness with girls and women and aggressive behaviour as solely engaged in by boys and men. There are problems with an analysis of relational aggression when it underscores direct physical aggression as the norm and pathologises women's departure from that. There are also quite profound dangers associated with equivalency-seeking which might be used to undermine understandings of sexualised violence as a fundamentally gendered phenomenon.

These publications signal a move in girls' studies to a psychologising of social problems. They focus on changing the girl through educational programs and therapy solutions rather than questioning the broader social context in which she is located and the material differences between girls. This literature is predominantly addressed to parents and the aim of proffered solutions is to get middle class girls back on track to educational success (Aapola, Gonick and Harris 2005, 50). Valerie Walkerdine and her colleagues have also made some observations about the imperative of keeping middle class girls on their paths to social and economic success through expensive therapy approaches (2001). Those who fall outside of a

middle class identity are more likely to be criminalised (Chesney-Lind and Brown 1999). Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) consider the distinction between the private therapy preferred for privileged girls and the state interventions of surveillance and containment experienced by those who are racially and economically marginalised. Furthermore, these authors express concern that an increased focus on the self-esteem or aggression of privileged girls is occurring when conditions for those experiencing socio-economic disadvantage are worsening (2005, 50). The consideration of enduring structural disadvantages that differentially effect girls and young women are side-stepped by a more limited concentration on emotional and behavioural manifestations of problems.

Both the girl power and girls in crisis discourses contribute in various ways to an undermining and depoliticising of feminism. Before examining the ways in which the undoing of feminism is manifest in contemporary feminist theory and debates about young women and feminism, this chapter turns to a consideration of the 'cautionary tales' that are also visible in writing about young women and particularly young women in their thirties.

Cautionary tales

Ambivalence with contemporary assumptions about young women's social and economic position is also revealed in some rather admonitory debates about what an increase in opportunities (and transgression of traditional forms of femininity) might bring. In contrast to girl power, which drops feminism out of female achievement, feminism is more likely to be invoked when changes that were supposed to be liberating for women turn out to be problematic. The claim that it is feminism that has caused women's dissatisfaction has received widespread attention through works such as Christina Hoff Sommers' *Who Stole Feminism?* (1994) and *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman* by Danielle Crittenden (1999) and most recently in Australia *Wonder Woman: The Myth of 'Having it All"* by Virginia Haussegger (2005). Popular works in this area commonly focus on women's disappointments with intimate heterosexual relationships (Maushart 2005) and problems associated with deciding whether and when to have children and fears about leaving it 'too late' (Hewlett 2003). Although they do not follow an anti-feminist argument, Leslie Cannold (2005) and Deirdre Macken's (2005) Australian books about unanticipated childlessness contribute to the popular debates about women and fertility. Indeed, the assertion that young women have rejected the idea and desire to 'have it all' is also represented in the media and popular literature. For example, the British magazine New

Woman reported the emergence of the "don't want it all" generation who are returning to traditional values in preference to trying to juggle competing demands (Ward 2005). In the United States, Susan Shapiro Barash (2004) makes a similar claim following interviews with five hundred young wives, concluding that many confident, educated young women wanted to avoid the stress of 'having it all' by getting married, having children and giving up a career.

Young women's increased social freedom is also manifested in debates about whether they are engaging in behaviours and risks to a greater degree than before. Popular media in Britain is preoccupied with the behaviour of 'ladettes' (Muncer, Campbell, Jervis and Lewis 2001), a term which is now included in the Concise Oxford Dictionary and refers to boisterous, heavy drinking young women whose lifestyle is more characteristic to that of a young man. The binge-drinking habits of young women are subject to concern in both the popular media (Wood and Teutsch 2005) and scholarly literature (Brown, Ball and Powers 1998, Carr-Gregg, Enderby and Glover 2003 and Johnstone and White 2004).

Young women and the undoing of feminism

There is a substantial collection of work that is concerned with examining young women's relationship to the ideologies of movements concerned with power and social change, particularly feminism. In the decades following the zenith of second wave feminism in the 1970s and early 1980s, there has been a steady stream of research and commentary that has considered young women's relationship with feminism. As early as 1981, Angela McRobbie and Trisha McCabe produced *Feminism for Girls: An Adventure Story* which acknowledged the bold and risky nature of young women's identification with feminism given its widespread disapproval and ridicule. The focus of much of this early literature was to identify and challenge the negative stereotypes that are associated with feminism. Christine Griffin (1989) and Sue Lees (1993) recognised the pressures that prevent or discourage women from expressing an explicit allegiance with feminism and reported the lengths that young women went to in order to avoid identifying themselves as feminists at the same time as they expressed feminist sentiments.

The discipline of psychology has produced a considerable number of studies which have examined the factors influencing feminist identification or the degree of support for feminist ideas amongst young people (for example Arnold 2000; Henderson-King and Stewart 1994,

1997 and 1999; Liss, O'Connor, Morosky and Crawford 2001). These have chiefly been carried out with cohorts of students in American colleges and universities. Such studies tend to find the existence of covert rather than overt support for feminism (Burn, Aboud and Moyles 2000) and such support is often linked to the presence of liberal rather than conservative values and beliefs (Lottes and Kurriloff 1992).

Aapola, Gonick and Harris (2005) conclude that young women have largely been considered a problem for feminism because they have failed to reproduce or replicate the feminist movement of their predecessors. They are lamented for their inappropriate disengagement from feminism or for the nature of their feminist politics. Much of this debate in Australia occurred in the wake of Anne Summers' *Letter to the Next Generation* (1994), which admonished young women for their political inaction and historical ignorance of the women's movement and Helen Garner's reflections on young women's responses to sexual harassment at Ormond College in *The First Stone* (1995). Discussion about young women and feminism has often centred on a generational debate in which young women are regarded as complacent about their rights and opportunities and as insufficiently or inappropriately politicised in comparison to second wave feminists. Some young women have countered such censure with their own critiques of feminism. Conservatives such as Rene Denfeld (1995) and Katie Roiphe (1994) describe (radical feminist) second wave agendas as outdated, stultifying and inappropriately concerned with positioning women as victims of male violence and have achieved high media profiles.

The notion of young women rejecting feminism and the spectacle of disagreement amongst feminists has been taken up on a regular, enthusiastic and gleeful basis by the media (for example Gardyn 2001; Bellafante 1998). Catherine Orr (1997) considers that the representation of second wave feminism as monolithic, out-dated and unsophisticated in its analysis has achieved privileged attention in the media and that a questioning of such representation has not received the same profile. Susan Faludi details the particularly antagonistic and critical socio-political conditions in which young women come into contact with feminism and identifies the focus on young women's reviling of feminism as part of the counter-assault on women's rights in response to feminist gains (1992, 14). It is important to be circumspect about the novelty of this debate. Antifeminism has a long history; evidenced for example in the collection of anti-feminist literature in the United States collected by Angela Howard and Sasha Ranae Adams Tarrant (2000) and Rhonda Hammer's

documentation and analysis of attacks on feminism (2002). In Australia, Jane Long (2001) has that suggested there were other historical periods when long-organised feminists expressed disappointment or unease with the politics of younger women. She documents a "steady stream of writing which debated the extent to which feminism was allegedly unravelling along the seams of youth and age" (2001, 8). Therefore perceptions about young women's rejection of feminism have periodically been used to give weight to claims about its irrelevance.

Whilst there is general agreement that many young women experience feminism in a historicised and narrativized form and often don't claim an explicit allegiance to feminism as a social movement (for example Garrison 2000; Sharpe 1994), the literature in this area includes writing that seeks to unsettle the idea that young women are completely disengaged from feminist thought. In the mid 1980s, Australian feminist Jocelynne Scutt had identified the importance of exploring the worldviews of young women who articulate feminist ideals in *Growing Up Feminist* (1985)*.* Also in Australia, *Living Feminism* by Chilla Bulbeck (1997) and *Feminists Fatale* by Jan Bowen (1998) approached the issue of intergenerational conflict by examining the impact and future of feminism through dialogue with women from different generations of their families. The stated aim of several edited texts has been to create a public visibility of young feminist women (Else-Mitchell and Flutter 1998; Findlen 2001; Steenbergen 2001 and Walker 1995). Anita Harris (2001 and 2004) has contributed to the scholarship about the diverse ways in which young women engage with feminism. She documents, for example, the 1990s Riot Grrrl movement which developed in Washington in the United States from a fusion of punk music and radical politics. Riot Grrrls used grassroots media (such as hand-produced zines and technology (such as websites) to circumvent consumerism and mainstream politics.

From things to words to a third wave and popular feminism
This chapter now moves from a consideration of the widely popularised debates about young women's disinterest or rejection of feminism to a closer look at the ways in which the current tensions within feminism reflect the broader debates in social theory about the relative significance of self-determination and social constraint. From the early 1990s, much feminist analysis explicitly sought to challenge foundationalist modern theories. In *Destabilizing Theory*, Michelle Barrett, a former Marxist-feminist theorist, announced her switch of allegiance from Marx to Foucault, from "things to words" (1992, 201). Her critique of

contemporary feminism asserted that the weight ascribed to structural considerations had resulted in the importance of meaning going unrecognised (1992, 202). The cultural turn away from materiality set out to confront what were regarded as the 'false certainties' of second wave structural feminism and to replace a focus on the social or material causes of women's subordination with examinations of the discursive production of key concepts such as sexual difference and binary oppositions. With this shift, structural interpretations of women's experience are supplanted by those focused on personal agency and aesthetics. For example, in her exploration of girl power and cultural icons, Susan Hopkins (2002) explicitly rejects the academic tradition of imposing a moral or political interpretation on popular culture in preference for a consideration of its aesthetic pleasure.

Challenges to theoretical positions associated with second wave feminism have included post-modern scepticism about the category 'woman' as well as critiques of feminist theoretical approaches which centred and universalised white women's experience. The accusation that western forms of 1970s feminism spoke with a falsely unified voice about women was vital in destabilising ethnocentric approaches to women's lives. However, it is also important to note that many second wave feminists with a commitment to structural understandings did much analytical work to account for multiplicity and difference (for example, hooks 1984 and Morgan 1984). Feminists such as Tania Modleski have argued that post-modern contentions about the veracity of the term 'women' have had the consequence of negating structural analyses and de-politicised the emancipatory goals of feminism (1991). She bemoans the undermining of the validity of making generalisations about or claims for women:

> It is not altogether clear to me why women, much more so than any other oppressed groups of people, have been so willing to yield the ground on which to make a stand against their oppression (Modleski 1991, 15).

Within debates about self-determination and social constraint, some have argued that feminism's focus on the exposure, naming and analysis of the structural oppression of women has meant that there has been limited attention paid to women's agency and resistance and much of the contemporary feminist writing by young women, often distinguished as third wave feminism, has followed this shift of preference from the social to the cultural and the collective to the individual (Jensen 2000). Although third wave feminism

is most commonly associated with an age-generation cohort of contemporary feminists (Orr 1997), it also has its roots in feminist critiques of the second wave feminist project, particularly those by women of colour (Garrison 2000). Those associated with the third wave also assert that it represents a more diffused form of feminism that is being renewed, remade and rearticulated in ways that reflect their contemporary worldview and concerns as well as the diversity and fluidity associated with current times (Heywood and Drake 1997). Natasha Walter also believes that young women respond positively to the idea of a "refashioned feminism" because they want to explore issues relevant to their cultural location (2000, 2). Kathy Bail (1996) also offers an optimistic view of the decline of collective feminist activity and the supplanting of feminist orthodoxy by new forms of feminism. Her 'do-it-yourself' or 'disorganised' feminism is celebrated as a liberating form of personal politics for young women and has a strong emphasis on the individual. Other writers also express optimism about the changed ways in which young women understand and are informed by feminist philosophies. Baumgardner and Richards (2001) suggest that feminism is a movement whose very successes seem to render it obsolete. As young women, they speak for a generation for whom "feminism is like fluoride. We scarcely notice we have it - it's simply in the water" (2001, 17). Similarly, Erica Jong suggests that feminism is so central to young women's lives that they don't need to name it (1999). Shelley Budgeon (2001) notes that while young women are alienated from feminism, their identities are informed by intrinsically feminist ideals. She suggests that young women are constructing political agency through the use of liberal individualist politics in the pursuit of individual goals. She takes a broadly optimistic view of this, suggesting that the values of self-determination and individuality offer them a useful position from which to evaluate cultural representations of femininity.

The third wave is often characterised as a break from the past. For example, in *To Be Real*, Walker sets third wave hybridity against what she describes as rigidly ideological second wave feminism (1995). The implication is that second wave analyses have lost their currency and as a result there are dangers in the concept of a third wave of feminism actually contributing to the dismantling of feminism. This argument is also reflected in the literature which makes a distinction between the caricatured politics of 'victim feminism' and 'power feminism', typified by Naomi Wolf's *Fire with Fire* (1994). Wolf's contends that second wave feminism compels women to identify with powerlessness. Her thesis is that women's success lies in them knowing how to end their own victimization and claim power for themselves:

Women are suffering from much subordination for no more pressing reason than that we have stopped short of compelling it to end (1994, 55).

Wolf's approach to feminism is heavily influenced by individualism and she argues that the very meaning of feminism is personal choice and self-definition. Feminists such as Wolf and Natasha Walter (2000) conceive of an empowerment that is measured by pleasure and consumption and consider that women should use their power as consumers. The standpoint of popularised, media-savvy, feminists like Naomi Wolf and Natasha Walter has not been left unchallenged. For example, Liz Kelly, Linda Burton and Linda Regan point out that the use of one's personal power for individual achievement and the denigration of those who are not perceived to do the same is a significant and worrying departure from feminism's goal of ending the systemic subordination of women (1996). Others have problematised the media dominance of their particular feminist standpoint and consider their feminist position to be so divorced from the structural analysis of feminism as to be revisionist and actually contribute the backlash against feminism (see for example Hammer 2002 and Whelehan 2000). In Australia, Shane Rowlands and Margaret Henderson (1996) have noted that mainstream feminist debate is restricted to the discussion of a few key 'blockbuster' texts, often relying on the cult of the personality and reflecting consumerism and style rather than activism and political analysis.

Andrea Stuart was one of the first to consider the concept of popular feminism which found expression at the beginning of the nineties when she noted the wider circulation of feminist values across popular culture (1990). However, the diffusing of (heavily modified) aspects of feminism to a wider and younger population has been criticised by a number of feminist academics and commentators. Beverly Skeggs (1995) has noted the acquisitive and consumerised nature of popularised feminism and laments its disengagement from the collective politics of the Women's Liberation Movement. Similarly, for McRobbie (2000), the emancipatory potential of feminism has been appropriated and commodified and has been used to re-energise the political right. This "free-market feminism" (2000: 211) includes "seductions of individual success, the lure of female empowerment and the love of money" (2000: 212). Michelle Goldberg asserts that what she bluntly calls 'shopping-and-fucking' feminism (2001) is ubiquitous and popular because of its compatibility with consumerism.

Thus, communal concerns for justice and social welfare have been largely replaced by conservative notions of individual accountability and self-centred individualism.

It seems reasonable to conclude that while young women are certainly engaging with feminist ideas, their relationship to feminism as a social movement takes place in a changed socio-political environment which is not conducive to large-scale social movements or collective action (Fraser 1997; Maddison 2002; Trioli 1996). In addition to this, feminist theory has also been the site of post-modern influence which has challenged its previous emphasis on structural determination for an increased focus on agency. Contemporary epistemological preferences and prevailing neo-liberal ideology have actually created a situation in which the fusing of neo-liberal values with a liberal feminism rejuvenates a right wing politics which is "spearheaded" by women (McRobbie 2001, 371)

Chapter summary and conclusion

This chapter has described how the socio-political climate in which young women are located is characterised by its relationship to modernity and the prevalence of neo-liberal ideology. The emphasis on rapid transformation and change has complex and complicated implications for the positioning of young women and assessments of this reconfigured climate have generally emphasised the transformation and liberation of their lives. While the reflexive modernisation theories of Beck and Giddens provide strong accounts of the individualizing nature of social transformation, the particular relationship that women have to the social and psychological processes associated with late modernity has been subjected to some simplified and problematic interpretations and offers scope for further theorising.

The intersection of late modern conditions and neo-liberalism fosters individualised and decontextualised epistemology which is apparent in literature about young women's relationship to social and economic power and their engagement with feminist politics. Ideas about choice and freedom are central to notions of individuality and personal responsibility and a more cautious and critical feminist analysis suggests that current times are replete with opportunity and hazard for young women.

Therefore, this research inquiry into the lives of young women responds to several pressing concerns that are identified through an examination of the literature. It provides the opportunity to examine the relevance of new social theories about late modernity. It is

reasonable to expect that any changes to social order and the waning of social structures will be evident in the experiences and aspirations of young people who are "at the crossroads of the process of social reproduction" (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, 2). Furthermore, the feminist orientation of this research addresses the neglected area of theorising about women's relations with late modern processes. The thesis of reflexive modernisation will therefore be extended in this research to take account of the process by which notions of neo-liberal choice and assumptions about de-traditionalisation and liberation converge to create new modes of subordination.

Chapter three
Theory and methodology

Introduction

This chapter describes the theoretical and methodological foundations of this research and outlines the methods that were used to carry it out. The research reported in this thesis is a qualitative empirical study based on interviews with fifty five young women between the ages of eighteen and twenty five. The broad purpose of the research was to examine the influence of the conditions associated with late modernity and neo-liberalism on young women's lives.

Feminist theory informs all features of this research. It provides the context for the area of inquiry, the choice of methodology, use of methods and the analytical lens for the interpretation of literature and data. My intellectual curiosity and commitment to social justice are fundamentally influenced by feminism and are reflected in the nature of this study. Indeed, my attitude to doing research echoes that of Liz Stanley and Sue Wise, who describe the way in which a commitment to feminism can be manifested in all areas of life, including research:

> We don't see our feminism as something which we simply add into an established way of doing anything, including research. We believe that feminist research should be the doing of feminism in another context (1983, 196).

Notes about terminology

Throughout this thesis, I prefer to use the term 'young women' rather than 'girls' to describe the participants who took part in this research. The respondents were all young adults aged between eighteen and twenty five. The newly popularised word 'girl' has sassy, feisty overtones and is commonly used to refer positively, in a friendly and informal manner, to young women in their late teens and twenties. Indeed, as the literature review to this thesis noted, there is a new and burgeoning field of scholarship referred to as 'girls' studies' which extends the age range of a girl from twelve to twenty. I am more ambivalent about its use, recognising the continuing tendency to use this term (without corresponding use of the term 'boy') to also refer to older women and particularly to denote women in service positions, in ways that signify their subordinate status to men. However, in many contexts for young

women today, 'girl' is not experienced as a diminishing or patronising term. I tended to use the terms 'girl' and 'young woman' interchangeably during my interviews with participants, often following the term that they used most commonly. The respondents who were mothers often preferred to describe themselves as young women – appreciating its indication of maturity and more respectful connotations. The young women who were not mothers largely preferred to talk about themselves as girls, sometimes commenting that 'young woman' was a term that was "too grown up". This distinction foregrounds the many ways in which the respondents' lives differed along parenting lines and introduces the theme of reluctant adulthood which is further explored in the 'Neo-liberalism and the burdens of liberty' chapter.

I also use the term 'race' through this thesis, because although it is a discredited concept, racial categories continue to have political and psychological use. My use of the term is based on the understanding that race is a social construction (Tizard and Phoenix 2002).

The epistemological choice of feminist research

Feminists have argued that traditional epistemologies have systematically excluded the possibility that women could be knowers or agents of knowledge (Harding 1987). Joey Sprague and Diane Kobrynowicz point out that feminist scholarship has challenged positivism's hegemonic epistemological position in scientific discourse (2004, 78). In providing a contrast to the positivist stance, feminist epistemology has been able to deconstruct the post-Enlightenment traditions of conceptualising the human as male and to expose the concepts of objectivity and universal truth to be fundamentally male-biased and obscuring the socially constructed nature of research inquiry.

Feminism is necessarily neither value-free not impartial. The view of research as a socially constructed process means that the identity of the researcher and the methodology shape the knowledge that is produced (Harding 1991 and Reinharz 1992). In contrast to epistemological approaches where the researcher is an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, feminist researchers claim that the researcher should show how she is socially situated. This includes making explicit the links between her experiences and those of the researched, placing her values or politics centrally within the work and making explicit the reasoning behind the procedures selected throughout the research process (McRobbie 1991b;

Ramazanoğlu and Holland 2002; Stanley and Wise 1993). I locate my subjectivity as a heterosexual white woman, who is married with no children and in her mid-thirties at the time of this research. I am an adult migrant from an upper working/lower middle class background in England who was the first member of my family to attend university. My identification of a class origin that straddled working and middle class experience acknowledges my father's working class background and his movement between manual and administrative employment. My mother's desire to maintain and enhance her lower middle class background ensured that the conventions of middle class taste and aspiration were also part of my growing up. The majority of my employment has been in the social welfare field in non-government women's organisations in Britain, Canada and Australia, with a particular emphasis on working with women who have experienced domestic violence and sexual assault. I have recently begun an academic position as a university lecturer in a School of Social Work and Community Welfare. There are privileges inherent in my heterosexuality and my whiteness. In Australia, this is predominantly tied to being white in relation to Indigenous people in the context of colonial and neo-colonial racist oppression. The combination of tentative middle class credentials from childhood and my experience of higher education and professional employment have afforded me the privileges of middle class status as an adult. The social and economic power that derives from these positions specifically has prompted much reflexivity on my role as researcher in this study and is discussed further in this chapter.

Feminists have made a valuable contribution to epistemology by proposing alternative theories of knowledge that legitimise women as knowers. A fundamental and potentially liberating aspect of feminist methodology has been its commitment to giving women space to voice their realities as they experience them. Nancy Chodorow describes this as "one of the earliest articulated and still most important goals of feminist scholarship" (1996, 22). Although the term 'feminist methodology' is widely used, there has been much debate about what it actually means to do 'feminist research' (see for example Oakley 1998 and Ramazanoğlu 1992). Despite this lack of consensus, Marjorie DeVault (1996 32-3) has argued that it is possible to claim distinctiveness for feminist methodology in its commitment to three primary goals:

1. A shift of focus from men's concerns to reveal the perspectives of women;
2. a concern with minimising harm and control in the research process and;

3. the conduct of research that is of value to women through its potential to contribute to social change.

This research closely follows these characteristics. It recognises the intrinsic value of examining the lives of girls and women and the ways in which their lives are shaped by the ideological and material conditions of male dominance. It focuses on what happens in young women's everyday world and how these events are experienced. In doing this, it aims to contribute to the feminist project of emancipatory social change and the improvement of women's lives (Klein 1994, 90). The conduct of this research was informed by feminist concerns about minimising the possibility of causing harm and exerting control over participants.

The commitment to giving women space to voice their realities as they experience them is strongly influenced by feminist standpoint theory. Standpoint theorists such as Dorothy Smith have foregrounded women's socially situated experience and knowledge (1974 and 1987). This has included a focus on previously disregarded aspects of women's lives, particularly in the private sphere. The work of Patricia Hill Collins (1991 and 2000) has also been important in extending standpoint theory by considering the intersectionality of race and class positions in the development of an individual's standpoint. These theorists describe the epistemic advantage of the oppressed as the notion that a member of an oppressed group is better placed to understand the dynamics of the relationships of oppression.

However, there is a tension between the dual feminist commitments of placing women's experiences at the centre of research and "casting wider nets" (DeVault 1996, 33) in social inquiry. Since not all women identify themselves as located in oppressive systems, then their personal interpretation may differ greatly from a feminist analysis. Both the strength and the challenge of feminist standpoint theory is its foundational concept of situated knowledge; that individuals perceive the world the way they do because of their location on it. The potency of feminist standpoint theory is that it has drawn attention to the ways in which women's voices have been belittled or silenced and it has contested the suppression of their distinctive ways of knowing, understanding or thinking about the world which are born from their embodied and socially embedded experiences as women. Standpoint theory has been a useful tool for claiming the existence of knowledge-bearing groups which bring different understandings of situations to the dominant versions that often render invisible the experience of the oppressed and the history of dominant groups' actions in relation to those they oppress. The notion that

we are better placed by reason of our oppression to understand it requires the caveat that such potential for understanding is not always translated into analysis and resistance. Therefore, while women's experiences may certainly lead them to dispute the knowledge claims of dominant groups, the social and cultural contexts in which they are located may also lead them to disregard the existence of oppressive systems or to defend ideas and materialities that feminists consider to be against the interests of them and other women.

Beverly Skeggs (1997) has taken up this line of thinking and argues that feminist standpoint theory's reliance on the claim that all knowledge is derived from experience is problematic because it fuses being with knowing. She argues that we do not have pure experiences, that our experiences are filtered through social practices and interpretations (1997, 28). Skeggs' ruminations about the conflation of ontology with epistemology developed through her ethnographic research with young women. Skeggs (coming from a working class background herself) regarded their lives as deeply affected by their working class positioning although this differed from their own interpretations of their experiences. She drew the conclusion that they did not want their actions interpreted as being driven by class because this was the position from which they wanted to dissociate. Celia Kitzinger and Sue Wilkinson (1997) also discuss the problems that feminists encounter when their interpretations of experience differ from the explanations offered by participants. They highlight the dangers in "routinely validating women's experience" because it can serve to reinforce dominant constructions of women's lives (1997, 573). Liz Kelly, Sheila Burton and Linda Regan (1994) and Mary Maynard (1994) also argue that feminist researchers have an obligation to go beyond merely foregrounding women's experience. It may be necessary to offer an analysis that is not possible from a purely experiential level alone. For Maynard this means taking women's lives seriously as well as taking seriously the capacity of feminist theory to contribute an analysis of women's experiences (1994, 24).

Therefore, while this research is strongly influenced by the feminist traditions of centring women's experiences, this experience is the starting point from which an explanatory framework is built, rather than an end in itself. Individuals do not necessarily possess sufficient knowledge to explain everything about their lives and researchers are certainly not in a position to explain everything about other women's lives; that would be a patronising position to take. However, a feminist methodology requires critical reflection on women's accounts of their experience. A critical feminist approach is particularly pertinent to the

inquiry undertaken in this research. It examines the conditions of late modernity and neo-liberalism in which young women are situated and which provide a significant framework for their thoughts and decisions. A central argument in analysis of this research is that late modern assertions about an untethering of personal agency from structure and neo-liberalism's emphasis on individualism, actually mediate against the identification of external oppressive systems such as male domination or class structures. Its influence is therefore very likely to encourage the disavowal rather than the naming of structural disadvantage and the researcher's interpretation of participants' experience may differ from their own. Indeed, as will be seen, a feature of this research was that participants were overwhelmingly reluctant to have their lives read as disadvantageously gendered in many ways because this was a problematic position for them, holding implications of victimhood and constraining their identities in ways that are an anathema to the fluidity inscribed into contemporary Western culture.

I will now turn to a specific description of the feminist interpretive framework which guides the analysis for this research.

A feminist theoretical framework

It is feminism that fundamentally informs my own standpoint in this research. I am drawn to feminist theory which identifies girls and women as a group who are systemically disadvantaged by social, economic, political and cultural structures and results in their subordinated status in relation to boys and men. I make reference to 'structural feminism' to denote this at times through this thesis. More specifically, it is the radical stream of feminism which best describes my theoretical orientation. I was exposed to radical feminist thought at university and as a worker in women's services and was drawn to its commitment to exposing and naming forms of male domination, particularly that enacted through violence. The scholarship of Denise Thompson (2001) has provided a constructive articulation of radical feminism that avoids much of the obfuscation of the central purpose of a feminist politics which is present in much feminist theory. She highlights the importance of clarifying what it is that radical feminism opposes and identifies this as the power relations occasioned by male domination and it is this challenge to male domination that makes feminism relevant to women who are subordinated in this power relation (2001, 13). It is on the basis of this foundation that she argues radical feminism can be regarded as 'feminism unmodified'.

The concept of male domination is central to Thompson's understanding of radical feminist theory. Throughout this thesis the terms male domination and male supremacy are used in preference to the concept of patriarchy. Although patriarchy is commonly used to refer to men's control of a disproportionately large share of power, the term is rooted in the limited concept of social organisation marked by the legal and economic supremacy of the father in a clan or family. Since a significant focus of this thesis is the (largely unquestioned) misunderstanding, maligning and appropriation of aspects of feminism in a neo-liberal climate, an effective critique of this occurrence requires a robust and rigorous feminist theoretical position. I am, often uncomfortably, aware that uncompromising terms such as male domination are increasingly out of place in a culture heavily influenced by relativism and individualism. Thompson recognises that although the language of male domination is necessarily used in order to delineate what it is that feminism opposes, it is "unequivocal and adamantine" (2001, 8). She proceeds, therefore, to outline a nuanced description of what is meant by the concept of male domination. After all, if male domination were all-encompassing and impenetrable, feminism's identification and condemnation of it could not exist:

> It does not mean that all men are invariably oppressive to all women all the time, nor that women are invariably the passive, peaceable victims of a male will to power. It [male domination] is a social system, a matter of meanings and values, practices and institutions. While social structures are maintained through the commitment and acquiescence of individuals, and can be eroded by the refusal of individuals to participate, they have a life of their own, and can continue to exert their influence despite the best efforts of the well-intentioned. The manifestations of male domination, although they are sometimes horrifically violent and degrading, are also subtle, mundane, ordinary, unremarkable, and, moreover, very deeply embedded in the psyches of individuals, and not just male individuals either (Thompson 2001, 8).

Thompson's description of male domination as a social system that incorporates both meanings and practices means that the material subjective and relational circumstances of women's lives can be examined under this theoretical lens. The theoretical orientation of this research project is committed to identifying the commonalities of male domination in all its avatars and manifestations as well as identifying how these commonalities are experienced differently in contexts that are mediated by class, race and sexuality. The differences between

and among women are a vital concern for this research and have been highlighted in the literature review of this thesis and throughout the presentation of findings and analysis.

Background to the research focus

The political engagement of this research is reflected in the choice of topic to be studied. The decision about an area of research focus for doctoral research was influenced by my understanding of feminist research as a socio-political endeavour which draws on a moral and theoretical framework in order to work for social change (Thompson 2001).

Angela McRobbie (1991b) states that the problems that challenge feminists and the research questions we ask are historically contingent and located. I was certainly motivated to direct my research energies into areas about which I had strong intellectual curiosity and which seemed particularly pertinent to current times. As I have described in the Introduction to this thesis, the issues that most preoccupied me were the challenges to feminist theory and women's services and the new ways in which the lives of young women were being invoked. It seemed to me that the conditions associated with late modernity and the assumptions underpinning neo-liberal theory were a particularly useful area of inquiry. The overarching aim was to explore the influence of the social, political and economic conditions associated with 'late modernity' and the prevailing ideology of neo-liberalism on young women's lives. The specific aims that were addressed by this research and reported in this thesis are:

1. To explore the ways in which neo-liberal ideology informs and influences young women's experiences and aspirations;

2. To identify the subjective and material implications of an elevated focus on individuated personhood for young women from differing backgrounds;

3. To examine how neo-liberal ideology influences the politics of young women, particularly their understanding of and relationship to feminism;

4. To consider how understandings of the influence of neo-liberalism can be used to counter its ideological dominance.

This research study was not funded or commissioned by any body or organisation. The university school in which my postgraduate research is situated contributed $3,000 to the costs associated with postage and telephone calls, the purchase of audio tapes, honoraria for the participants as well as the in-kind support of an office, computer and photocopying facilities.

Having described my reasons for choosing this particular area of investigation, I turn now to my rationale for studying it in the way I did.

The participants in the research: Recruitment and diversity

The methodology of this research is predominantly set within the qualitative paradigm and used interviews to gather data. In addition to this, some of the information gathered in the interviews was appropriate for quantitative analysis. The quantitative methods used were descriptive statistics, graphical representations of the qualitative information and calculations of non-parametric statistical significance. In this section of the chapter I first describe the ways in which participants were recruited for this study and demographic features of the sample and the following section describes the interview processes in more detail.

Following my argument in the literature review that a focus on young women often pre-supposes a white, middle class, academically capable demographic, it was important to construct a sample which consisted of a diverse group of young women. Given that neo-liberal assumptions tend to flatten out the relative advantage or disadvantage of class, race and sexuality, it was crucial that this examination of the influence of neo-liberal philosophy was applied to a broad demographic. Strong efforts were therefore made to recruit a diverse group of participants, including many who are marginalised, and who might not ordinarily have volunteered to be interviewed for a research project because of constraining domestic or employment responsibilities or limited verbal confidence (Weber, Higginbotham and Leung 1991).

Participants for this qualitative research study were recruited through a number of methods. The sample does not aim to be representative of national or regional racial or socio-economic patterns. Instead, the sample was designed to be illustrative of different backgrounds and experiences and to be large enough to provide a relevant range of cases or examples. Therefore, purposive or theoretical sampling techniques were used in order to ensure that a range of young women participated. This allowed me to make comparisons between participants' responses and to develop theoretical propositions. The new insights and explanations about the influence of neo-liberalism reported in this thesis are therefore based on an analysis of a broad collection of circumstances and experiences.

The recruitment of participants began with a convenience sample of fifteen young women that were known to me, friends or colleagues and was added to by nine young women who responded to flyers (Appendix A) that were placed at higher educational settings, sports and social clubs and welfare services. The flyer was designed to be eye-catching and visually attractive to young women. The 'cover story' (Glesne and Peshkin 1992) asked potential participants to contribute their views to an inquiry about what it is like to be a young woman in current times. A particularly successful method of recruitment was snowball sampling. At the end of each interview I asked respondents if they would let other young women know about the project. Fifteen participants took part in the study through this particular method of recruitment and it was responsible for the inclusion of several Indigenous young women, young women with children and young women with limited formal education, who were enabled to contact me by the recommendation of a friend or family member and who, otherwise, might have been hard to recruit. The success of this sampling method reflects the positive interview experience that many of the participants reported and were enthusiastic about extending to their peers.

Purposive sampling was also employed in order to ensure the significant inclusion of young women who were parenting and young women from non-English-speaking backgrounds. This was accomplished through approaches to workers at two parenting support programs provided by separate social welfare agencies, youth services, and a multicultural support group. My social welfare background and knowledge of the agencies and familiarity with some of the workers I approached helped to establish my credibility and trustworthiness and was particularly important in securing the inclusion of young women who were not members of dominant racial or ethnic groups. These workers passed on flyers and additional information about the research to young women they came into contact with through their work. Sixteen young women participated in the research through this means of recruitment.

Fifty five women between the ages of eighteen and twenty five participated in the research that is reported in this thesis. They were all living in the Townsville/Thuringowa[10] area of North Queensland at the time they were interviewed. All of the interviews took place between August 2003 and July 2004. Each young woman was interviewed once, largely due to the prohibitions associated with arranging additional interviews. I consider that this would

---

[10]Townsville (with the connected city of Thuringowa) is the regional capital of tropical North Queensland. The area has a population of about 200,000.

have prohibited the participation of a majority of the young women, for whom finding time for an individual interview was enough of a challenge. The interviews took between one and a half and two hours on average, with some stretching to three hours. I invited the participants to contact me following the interview or after receipt of their transcript if they wanted to add to, remove or alter anything they had said.

Johanna Wyn and Rob White describe how 'youth' as an age category for institutional and policy purposes generally starts at thirteen and continues until twenty five (1997, 1). This research study focuses on a sample of young women aged between eighteen and twenty five in order to capture the experiences of employment, further study and parenting (or parenting aspirations) that commonly characterise this age range. The fifty five participants were even distributed across the eight year range, illustrated in Figure 3.1. There were twenty three participants within the lower and higher age ranges of eighteen to twenty and twenty two to twenty five, with the remaining nine participants all twenty one years of age.

Figure 3.1 Distribution of age of participants
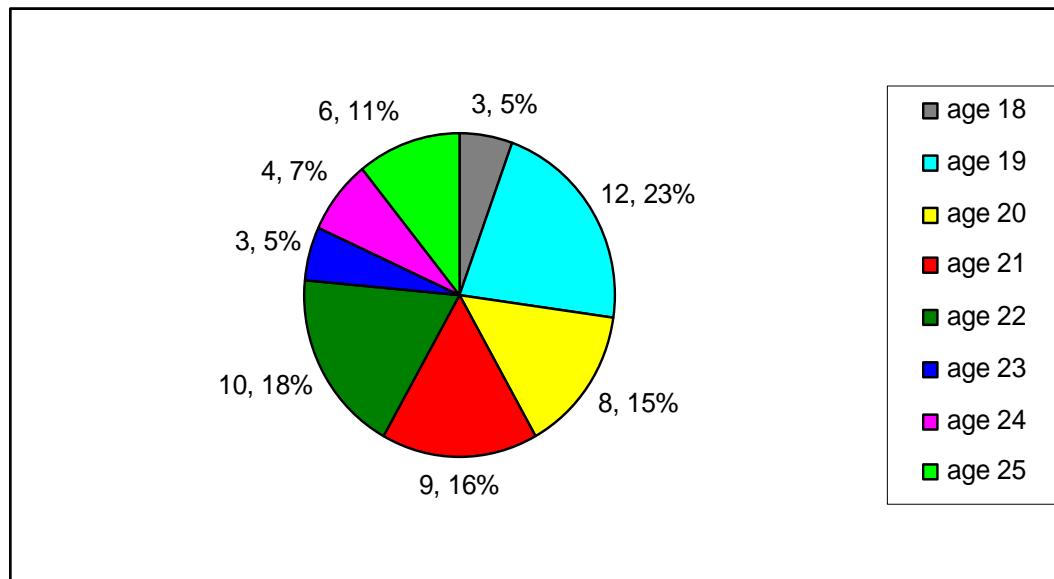
Figure 3.2 represents the participants' racial and ethnic identification. The majority of the participants were white and had European or Anglo-Celtic family origins. Almost a third of the young women were not part of this dominant racial group. A quarter of the participants identified as Aboriginal Australians or Torres Strait Islanders, with one Australian South Sea Islander. Just over 3% of the Queensland population and just over 2% of the national

population identified as being of Indigenous origin in the 2001 Census (ABS 2001). Two participants (from Africa and Indonesia) spoke English as a second language.

Figure 3.2 Distribution of race/ethnicity of participants
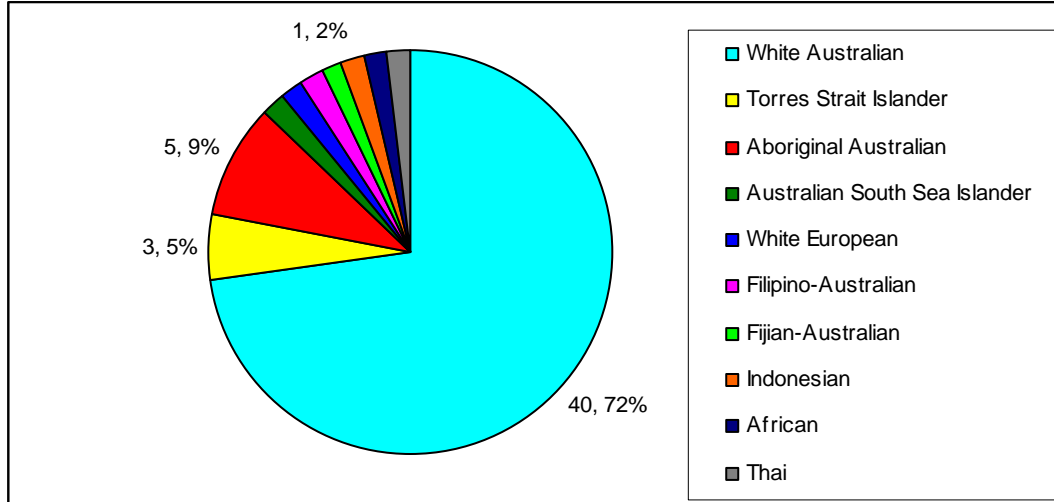
In Figure 3.3, the sample is distributed by primary occupation. This represents the principal occupation or circumstances identified by each of the participants. Where participants identified combined occupations of home duties and a part-time job, this is indicated. 42% of the participants (twenty three young women) were engaged in higher education. Most were studying full-time and many (although not all) had casual jobs but they described their primary occupation as that of student. The young women who identified home duties as their primary occupation (just under a quarter of the sample) all had children under the age of five and were not actively seeking employment at that time. One young mother was engaged in home duties but described herself as unemployed because she was actively (and unsuccessfully) seeking employment and child care. Two young women who did not have children were unemployed.

Figure 3.3 Distribution of primary occupation of participants
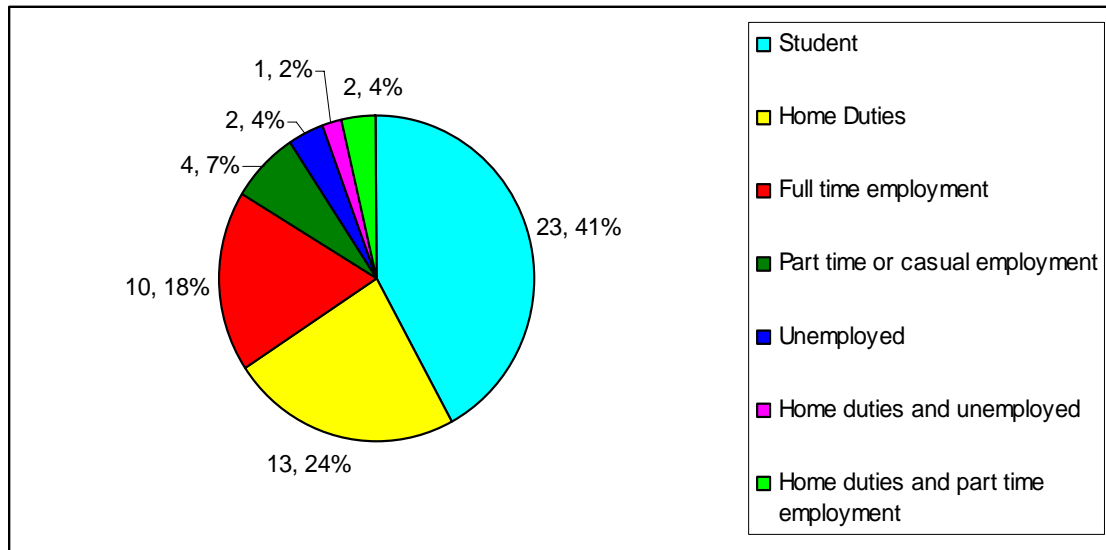
In addition to the demographic characteristics of the sample that have been described, two young women identified as lesbian and a third identified as bisexual and in a lesbian relationship.

Interview procedures

In this section I will describe in more detail the data collection phase of the research, including the rationale for qualitative methodology and the use of an interviewing method. I will recount pertinent aspects of the process of conducting interviews, particularly as they relate to the power dynamics that existed between researcher and participant.

Feminist researchers have questioned whether traditional scientific methods have been able to capture human experience generally and women's experience in particular. They have advocated the use of methods that recognise that women have knowledge to contribute to the social picture. Some of the benefits of qualitative methodology in general and interviewing methods in particular are that they can provide in-depth information about individual experience. In this study, qualitative data was collected by a semi-structured interviewing method. It was a method suited to this area of inquiry because it offered access to the views, thoughts, ideas and memories in participants' own words rather than those of the researcher (Reinharz 1992). The exploratory nature of less structured interviewing provided opportunities for clarification and discussion and allowed me to follow unanticipated directions in conversation. In congruence with feminist standpoint theory, such an approach

requires an acceptance that narrative accounts of life experience can be used as data and that theory can be generated from the views of reality explored by participants (Riessman 1993). Participants are regarded as microcosms of wider structural processes and as such their individual life experiences can be interpreted through a feminist informed framework to expose the intersections between cultural, social, personal and political structures.

Interviewing methods are particularly appealing to feminist researchers, including myself, because they are regarded as a method of gaining knowledge that may avoid some oppressive practices and reduce the hierarchy between researcher and participant. In an interview situation it is often possible to develop a sense of connectedness and talk about sensitive issues in an unthreatening way. In this research study, semi-structured interviewing allowed me to develop an approachable, friendly and non-threatening manner with participants. In the interview setting, the young women who took part in the research were enabled to talk about issues that were important to their view of their lives but which in other arenas might have been met with judgemental attitudes.

The schedule which guided the interviews (Appendix D) begins by establishing the participants' family background, their important intimate and caring relationships, their educational and occupational history and their current occupation. The rationale for the interview guide was developed by considering the expectations for young women that exist under late modern and neo-liberal conditions. This research is based on the assumptions (justified in the literature review to this thesis) that young women live in a climate where there is an ostensible commitment to equality between men and women, where they are now expected to enjoy equal access to a range of opportunities and have the freedom to make informed, rational and self-interested decisions from a significant range of choices. In addition to this, they are required to be transformative, flexible subjects who are capable of re-invention and who take (full) individual responsibility for the outcomes of their life choices. When I talked to young women about their lives for this research, I asked about their hopes and aspirations and about any uncertainties or risks they experience. I also inquired about the choices that have been available to them and how they have made decisions. I asked about external influences on their lives, such as other people, social structures, cultural values and beliefs. I also asked about their assessment of women's equality with men and equality between women in current times as well as their understanding of and any identification with feminist politics.

The decision to stop seeking participants after fifty five interviews were conducted was taken for a number of reasons. I am cautious of an uncompromising concept of saturation, where no new data emerges and there is only repetition (Strauss and Corbin 1998). However, after the completion of forty interviews, there was significantly less new data or information emerging. During the later stages of the interviewing, I was purposefully recruiting young women from ethnically and linguistically diverse backgrounds, young mothers and young women with disabilities (I was ultimately unsuccessful in this last area). Each of the young women who were interviewed in the later stages of the research project had a unique and interesting life story, particularly if they had been parenting at an early age or were from a non-English-speaking background. I am sure that if I had continued to interview young women, I would have encountered distinctive life experiences that would have contributed to the richness of the research. Despite this, there were no new coding categories emerging from analysis of the data from the final ten interviews. In addition to this, avenues for approaching participants had largely been exhausted and responses to flyers had ceased.

Many of the young women commented positively on the experience of expressing their views without interruption or challenge and as a researcher I was pleased to be achieving my goal of collecting rich data. However, there were times when I was wary of the potentially exploitative nature of interviewing those who were vulnerable due to isolation and loneliness (Finch 1984) and aware that willingness to talk is often itself an indicator of powerlessness (McRobbie 1991b). For some of the young women marginalised by poverty and early, difficult experiences of motherhood, the combination of promised confidentiality, 'outsider' neutrality and the opportunity to talk about opinions and experiences without interruption or argument made it (perhaps too) easy for them to reveal intimate details about their lives. As I report in the 'Relationships' chapter of this thesis, it was common for the young women to reveal experiences of violence or abuse in their lives even though this was not a specific focus of the research. Indeed, I took steps to mitigate the prospect of participants disclosing information they may later regret. There were instances when they raised particularly private or sensitive information about their lives where, in addition to responding supportively, I reminded young women that they were not obliged to talk about "everything" and where I offered to turn off the tape recorder. In most of these instances, the participants stated that they wanted to be "open" or that they felt free to say what they wanted under conditions of anonymity and confidentiality.

I do consider that for some young women, the interview did provide a rare opportunity for them to talk about their lives and some did report that they found this helpful. I was often reminded of Ann Oakley's (1992) identification of the interview as a two-way process in which respondents may seek information and her assertion that researchers should productively use their power by offering any information and knowledge that may be useful for participants. Many of the young women who took part in this research used the interview as an opportunity to reflect on their lives and sometimes to get information too. The most common form of information that young women were interested in was discovering how their own experiences related to those of other young women. For example, young mothers were interested in how other mothers coped. Young women who wanted to have children after establishing a career wanted to know how many other young women had voiced similar plans. Other participants asked whether I knew about the availability of work in their particular field of study or interest. They were often seeking reassurance that they were not focusing their energies on areas in which there were few job opportunities. If I had knowledge about their field of interest I would share my thoughts with them and I would let them know if I did not have any additional information to what they already knew or pointed them towards places where they could find relevant information.

At the time of data collection, I did not hold my current position of lecturer and I located myself as a postgraduate student who also worked in the social welfare field. Many of the participants were interested in my student status and questioned me about what I had to produce for my studies, seemingly attempting to identify with educational projects they had undertaken themselves. However, I consider that I was in a more powerful position relative to all of the participants in this research. I was older by a minimum of ten years, often more economically advantaged, nearly always more educationally advantaged and a member of dominant racial and sexual groups. In order to lessen this hierarchical positioning, I considered ways in which the young women could exercise some degree of choice and control in addition to the voluntary nature of their participation. I offered a variety of options for when and where interviews could take place and often provided food and drinks. Some interviews took place in the evening, some early in the morning, in my room at university, at their homes, in cafes and parks. Many interviews took place while women were providing care for their children and we would often take turns in holding babies and providing activities for toddlers and young children. Each participant received two movie passes as

honoraria, in recognition of their contribution to the research. Some participants valued this highly, saying they could not often afford this kind of social activity. Others accepted the honoraria more hesitantly because they said they enjoyed the interview experience and had given their time freely.

I was an outsider to the participant group in terms of age by ten to fifteen years. The young women mostly seemed to regard me as not *too* old to be unable to understand their preoccupations and values. However I was also different enough from them to create the opportunity for them to explain to me, a woman of a different age, what it is like to be a young woman today. Sometimes I made explicit reference to our generational difference in order to seek clarification or expansion of a point. An example of this was the commonly expressed tendency for it to be common to have boys as friends. On several occasions I noted that this was not so often the case when I was their age and this facilitated more detailed descriptions of this aspect of their lives.

All but two of the interviews were audio-taped. The two participants who declined to have their interview recorded in this way both spoke English as a second language. One young woman was originally from Indonesia, the other from Africa. They both asked that I was not more specific with their particular countries of origin in order that their confidentiality was more securely protected. Although their spoken and written English was of a good standard (they were both able to read, comprehend and sign the project information sheet and consent form), they both stated that it would be embarrassing for them to have their "poor" or "bad" English recorded. In these two interviews, I took notes (between 1,500 and 2,500 words) about their responses to my questions, often writing the exact words or phrases that they used when this seemed particularly pertinent (when they were stating an opinion or an explanation rather than relating a factual sequence of events, for example).

Generally, responses to audio-taping the interviews were positive. Even when there was some initial self-consciousness about the tape-recorder, its presence was usually quickly forgotten (sometimes indicated by surprise when our discussion was interrupted by a loud click as a tape was finished, for instance). There was also some evidence that taping allowed participants to speak freely and at a speed or in a style that suited them without being concerned that I might forget something or require them to speak more slowly to aid note-taking:

I just rave on and on don't I? I was thinking, god I hope she tapes it or something because I just rabbit on and on and on (Leanne, 21, White Australian, University Student and Home Duties, 1 child).

When asking for women's permission to tape the interview, I made it clear that only I would be listening to the recording and that identifying information would be changed. In some cases, participants made specific requests about what potentially identifying information should be changed and how. These included requests to change or omit specific details about racial background and occupation. I recorded my impressions immediately after each interview. These predominantly covered the type of dynamic or rapport established during the interview, the nature of their responses and the factors that seemed to encourage or inhibit the discussion of various issues, paying particular attention to power differentials.

All the participants were offered a copy of their transcribed interview. Young women's responses to the opportunity to have a copy of their transcript were varied and provide some interesting insight to their involvement in research projects. Just over half of the participants said they would like a copy of their transcript and five of these made additions or corrections to it. Several young women expressed the desire to have a copy of their interview as a kind of journal entry for their thoughts and feelings at that particular time of their life. Others stated that they would feel embarrassed to see their responses in written form and declined to have a copy for that reason. The majority of the young women who requested a copy of their transcript (although not all did) were involved with further education. All of the young women who made additions or corrections to their transcripts were university students, suggesting that this kind of participant involvement is closely aligned with the skills and confidence developed through higher levels of education. One young woman who was a postgraduate student returned her transcript to me and had corrected her conversational language and grammar throughout. Two young women considered it unsafe to have a copy of their transcript because of the presence of violent male partners who would not approve of their participation. One other young woman who disclosed some details of hardships as a girl and young woman, including sexual abuse as a child and rape as a teenager, was worried that someone else might read her transcript if she had a copy. She also stated that she needed no reminding of what she had said because it was of such great significance and already preoccupied her:

No, I know pretty much, 'cos it stays in your mind all the time. No, 'cos like if I have it, it like repeats and it's there, in your drawer and then people can like look at it (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Within the participant group there were differing responses to the interview process. The style of interaction in the interviews with young women with limited educational capital differed quite noticeably from that of the majority of the young women with experience of higher education. The former group were more likely to respond to my broad questions with stories delivered in an uninterrupted stream of consciousness style, sharing their thoughts and feelings as they occurred to them. Scholars of research methodology have described how research participants may use narratives to relate events in a temporal, causal sequence which has internal logic (Denzin 1989). Catherine Riessman (1993) also notes that during research interviews, participants often hold the floor for lengthy periods and organise their responses into stories. In contrast, many of the young women with more educational capital offered their responses in a manner that suggested a high level of self-consciousness. During her participation in the 12 to 18 Project, a seven year qualitative longitudinal survey of young people and schooling in Australia, Lyn Yates noted the "highly self-reflexive and self-monitoring mode" of the middle class girls that she interviewed (2000, 13 cited in Wyn 2000). In her discussion of the classed nature of the concept of 'clever girls', she noted how they would make ironic comments and be very aware of the interviewer's reaction. This observation reminds me of the increased concern demonstrated by the more highly educated young women in my research to give responses that were 'right'. I was alerted to the particular pressures of educational and personal achievement for middle class young women in particular and their consequent need for self-management and transformation (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001), which is further discussed in the 'Neo-liberalism and the burdens of liberty' chapter.

Ethical procedures, dilemmas and considerations

In the early stages of conducting this study, it was necessary to gain ethics approval for this research involving human participants. An application was made to the Ethics Review Committee (Human Ethics Sub-Committee) at James Cook University, Townsville, North Queensland. This entailed the submission of information about the proposed research, including a project outline, the stated purpose of the project, its methodology and its potential

benefits. An information page and informed consent form for participants were also developed (see Appendices B and C). Provisions for the welfare of participants were also outlined in this application for ethics approval. These provisions included information about free and confidential access to information and support at the local women's centre. Ethics approval was granted on 25th June, 2003. The project was allocated Ethics Approval Number H1610.

A commitment to conducting this research in an ethical manner was a primary concern throughout the process. It has been a source of particular reflection during the writing of this thesis and was at no time more pressing than during the period of time in which interviews took place. Feminists have been particularly aware of the potentially exploitative nature of research. McRobbie suggests that the interaction between the researcher and the researched is "a relationship paralleling in its unequal power that of social worker and client, or teacher and pupil" (1991b, 70). Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002) also question any assumption that research conducted by and involving women is without power differentials, arguing that power relations and the exercise of power in the research process should be made explicit. A central concern of this chapter is to make visible the relations of power that were encountered in this research.

The inequality between my social and economic privilege and that of some of the participants was often striking. I felt discomfort about this, which stemmed from my perception of a disparity between their generous contributions to my research and the limited nature of what I could provide them in return. Karen Crinall (1995) recognised that her research had more potential to benefit the researchers through the achievement of an educational qualification and I think that would be a fair assessment of my position too. However, this is a research project that is motivated by political as well as intellectual and credentialing goals. It does aim to advance the cause of social justice for women through examination of the influence of contemporary socio-political doctrine on their lives.

I turn now to some consideration of power dynamics that were influenced by racial similarity and difference between the researcher and participants. Louise Archer (2002) agrees that women interviewing women is not an inherently egalitarian process, suggesting that a researcher may silence or misrepresent a woman from another race or ethnicity than her own, for example. Feminist scholarship was characterised in the 1980s and 1990s by a phase of

reflexivity. Discussion of the ways in which knowledge is produced exposed some white, western, heterosexual biases. Although I do not think that this should prevent feminist researchers from systematically investigating our own and other women's experience, the single universal of 'women' is used with recognition that it can disguise differences and refer to a dominant, white, heterosexual image. Scholars such as Ien Ang (1995) and Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000) have argued that within a white supremacist culture that normalises rather than examines whiteness, race may be treated as an absent issue for white researchers. It was important for me to be conscious of my racial identity as a white woman of British origin and to consider the ways in which this might affect the interview process. I considered the ways in which it shaped my interactions with women from racial or ethnic backgrounds that were different to my own as well as the ways in which it seemed to influence my interactions with white participants.

I certainly consider that my whiteness allowed the expression of racist sentiments by some of the white participants that they might not have articulated in the presence of an Indigenous researcher, for example. In this interview context, where I had invited young women to speak freely about their lives and views, I made no direct challenge to statements which I understood to be racist. This conflicted with my commitment to anti-racist practice, which leads me to dispute racist attitudes. However, in this situation, my duty to the well-being of the individual participant in the interview and the purpose of the interviews meant that racist comments were not explicitly questioned. My response was to take particular care not to affirm their views with my tendency for head-nodding or encouraging murmurs. If the conversational rhythm required some spoken response from me, I would indicate the absence of any implicit agreement with their views by a neutral statement like, "thanks for telling me what you think about that". Other researchers have written about respondents' expression of racism. For example, Cathleen Armstead (1995) also reported divided loyalties when respondents in her ethnographic research expressed racist views. We both came to similar conclusions, ultimately deciding that our research should express women's understandings of their lives. I considered that the white (mostly working class, mothering) women who made racist statements were constructing their own positions as respectable mothers or deserving recipients of welfare benefits. They did this in part by engaging in a politics of resentment (which is described in the 'Neo-liberalism and the burdens of liberty' chapter) through the disparagement of other mothers or groups who received welfare payments, including using the privilege of their whiteness.

My racial position also affected the participation of the non-white participants. The circumstances of my life as a white girl growing up in (overwhelmingly white) rural Britain in the 1970s contrasted sharply with many aspects of their lives. The young Indigenous women were sometimes candid about their perceptions and experiences of racism at the hands of white Australians. Young women from Asian and African backgrounds described lives that were profoundly influenced by their migration (or that of their parents) to a country where white Anglo-Celtic standards and values remain central. As the researcher and a member of the dominant racial group, I was aware of the potential for imposing my own cultural norms on the interview process and of suppressing a more authentic contribution from the interviewee.

There were several ways in which I attempted to moderate the power inherent in my privileged racial positioning. The first was through the recruitment techniques employed in this research. Several of the Indigenous participants came to the research through various snowball sampling routes and heard about me and the research from a friend or family member. Their participation was informed by the recommendation of a peer and I was told on a number of times by Indigenous young women that it was on this basis that they felt comfortable to take part.

Secondly, the semi-structured nature of the interview schedule and its broad questions offered participants some opportunity to direct the pace and depth of our conversation. Early discussion usually involved more factual descriptions about their family, education and employment. The initial stages of these interviews seemed to provide an opportunity for participants to assess their trust in me in order to judge the level of information about themselves that they wished to disclose. An interview with Rosie, a Torres Strait Islander woman with three children and caring responsibility for her brother and grandmother illustrates this dynamic. She had agreed to be interviewed after a family member had taken part in the research and asked her if she would like to do the same. Her early dialogue was wary and courteous. I sensed that she was hesitant about the degree to which I could comprehend the circumstances of her life. Her initial caution also seemed to reflect her desire not to offend me with criticism about white people's racist behaviour. As an attempt to relieve her from this obligation of politeness, I mentioned that some participants had talked about racism, with the implication being that it was okay if she wished to do the same. I was

also openly reflective about our different racial and family situations in order to acknowledge the ways in which our lives were divided. As the interview progressed, she ultimately shared some very frank views about the gulf in circumstances between Indigenous and white women in Australia and described her satisfaction at being able to do so. As the researcher, I was pleased that the interview had provided some particularly rich data but also reflective about the power that is, nonetheless, inherent in the ability of a white researcher to 'grant' voice to the othered (Spivak 1994).

My racial difference from some participants meant that those young women reflected on their lives with an 'outsider' to their culture. In Britain, Louise Archer's research into the implications of similarity or difference between interviewer and respondent challenges the notion that 'racial matching' of interviewer and respondent is necessarily unproblematic (2002). She found that the race and sex of the interviewer do not exert unitary influence, but vary with the subject matter discussed. Female participants in her research overwhelmingly preferred to discuss intimate topics such as pregnancy, having children and relationships with a female interviewer. Partiality for racial similarity was also expressed on the grounds of shared understanding, although this was sometimes qualified by the idea that an 'insider' to one's culture might potentially wield more power or judgement over respondents. The following discussion considers a particular outcome of my outsider status to the Indigenous Australians in this research.

As I report in the 'Relationships' chapter of this thesis, every one of the nine Aboriginal, Torres Strait and Australian South Sea Islander participants spontaneously raised the issue of the prevalence and severity of domestic and family violence in their lives and/or the lives of other Indigenous Australians and communities. The consistency of this occurrence and the way in which such information was offered seemed, at least in part, to be a function of my racial difference rather than my similarity to them. I do consider that our shared identities as women made it more likely that the young Indigenous women highlighted the issue. It was always clear that they were speaking about men's violence to women. However, when the issue of violence was raised, the intention was often not to share a large degree of personal information about this experience (and I was glad for them that they were able to control what they did reveal in the interview situation). Rather, a commonly expressed message was that they wanted their concern and grief about this issue to be heard by an outsider and reported in this research. The following segment of my interview with Molly illustrates the

way in which such conversations often occurred. Here, the posing of a broad question allows the participant to respond with matters of significance to them. Molly immediately identifies the absence of violence as an aspiration. She briefly personalises this issue but is less interested in pursuing her experience of it with me than in specifying it as a problem that should be emphasised in my research:

> Joanne: What are your hopes for yourself, in your life?
> Molly: More peace, not so much bashin'. Me mum got bashed by me dad and me step-dad. So it's been in me family. And then me, fellas all thought they could do it to me.
> Joanne: You've been bashed by the fellas you've gone out with?
> Molly: Yeah, a lot. That's something to say for your studies. There's a lot of bashin' for black women.
> Joanne: Yeah. Did you want to say what that was like for you? The bashing?
> Molly: Oh, I want to say it's bad and there's a lot. It's bad on the kids, you should put that (Molly, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Home Duties, 4 children).

Research, safety and helping

Feminist researchers have devoted much thought to the ethical dimensions of carrying out research, particularly with those who are disadvantaged in some way. I have discussed the ways in which I located my personal privilege and power as a researcher with this group of participants, as well as the steps I took to mediate this.

Whilst carrying out this research I encountered a participant whose circumstances required my assistance. Amy was a nineteen year old white Australian mother of two young children who demonstrated a strong interest in taking part in the research when I met her at a parenting group during the course of recruiting participants. Although unable to keep our first appointment due to the illness of her two small children, she immediately nominated a future date. When I arrived at her home she ushered me in with apologetic whispers that her ex-boyfriend Sean was living with her against her wishes and was in another room. It was immediately apparent that Amy was scared of this man and that he controlled whom she had contact with. In order to legitimise contact with me, she had told him that a Centrelink worker may visit her to talk about extra benefits. I reassured her that carrying out the interview was unimportant compared to her safety and told her that I had experience of working in a domestic violence welfare agency and would be willing to help her if I could. Amy agreed she would like some help. I gave her the telephone numbers of a domestic

violence service and a women's shelter. She wrote the numbers on a small piece of paper and hid it in her clothing. When I mentioned the legitimacy of calling the police when she felt in danger, she said they had not been helpful in the past.

At this point, Sean walked through the room and our opportunity for private conversation ended and Amy requested that I leave. I arranged to telephone her that afternoon. When I did, she could only talk briefly, but said she was okay and that my visit had not prompted any adverse reaction from Sean. She stated that she was determined to participate in my research and asked if she could contact me in the future to arrange an interview. I agreed that she could but at this stage was no longer thinking of her as a potential participant. It seemed unlikely that she could practically take part in the research, given Sean's control over her movements. It also seemed like a very unimportant activity compared to the difficulties of her life as an isolated, poor, young mother of two small children, living with violence. However, I wanted her to be able to contact me if she wanted to, in case I could support her.

Following this experience, I was preoccupied with thoughts about Amy and her children. I wondered whether my interaction with her had been one which contributed to her future safety, or whether it had compromised it. My experience in working with women who have been victimised by sexual assault and domestic violence prepared me somewhat for the distress of knowing about and not being able to personally alleviate the dreadful circumstances in which some women and children live. I understood the complex difficulties associated with 'just leaving' and was not unfamiliar with the notion that police responses to domestic violence are frequently inadequate and do not provide easy solutions for women who are trying to prevent further violence against themselves and their children.

A month later, Amy called me to ask if I was still interested in conducting an interview with her. I said I was, but that I was more concerned about her safety. She told me that Sean had just left for the day to spend time with his family (taking one of the children with him as insurance against her leaving in his absence) and she invited me to visit her at home as soon as I could. My primary motivation at this point was to have further contact with Amy in order to offer her further support and information. When I arrived, she had finished tidying up and had set up a table and two chairs for us to use while we conducted the interview. I asked her why she wanted to take part in the research and she replied that she wanted other young women to hear her story and to use it to protect themselves from being in a similar situation.

She said that if I wanted to hear about young women's lives, then her situation should be included. I went through the usual procedure of informed consent, taking particular care to outline provisions for anonymity and confidentiality. I asked several times whether she would prefer to just have a conversation with me rather than being part of the research process. She was adamant that she wanted to participate in the research. In the following hour, with little prompting from me, Amy told me her life story and the circumstances that led to her having a relationship with Sean. She described the nature and extent of his violence. When Amy had finished telling her story, we turned the tape recorder off and spent an hour talking about possible strategies for her safety. After this hour, she requested that the taped interview resume and she reiterated her reasons for wanting to participate in the research.

I have reflected at length on the ethical dimensions of Amy's participation in this research. I am satisfied that her personal persistence in securing her inclusion reflects an informed decision and desire on her part. I also consider that the reasons she gave for wanting to take part were genuine and legitimate. I do also think that she was lonely and vulnerable and attracted to the idea of being able to talk at length and in conditions of confidentiality with a "friendly stranger" whose life is situated at some distance from her own (Cotterill 1992, 596). She said she felt better for our time together, I think we had some conversations that were useful to her planning for her and her children's safety and I am glad about that. I have kept in touch with Amy. She remains in much the same circumstances, which deeply saddens me.

Managing and analysing the data

I transcribed each of the tape-recorded interviews verbatim. My approach to transcribing involved minimal 'cleaning up' of the data, the inclusion of significant pauses or laughter, self-corrections, emphasis and the use of ungrammatical punctuation to capture rhythm and laughter. Sometimes the quotes that are used in this thesis have been edited for comments that are extraneous to its sense. This is indicated by three dots and great care has been taken in order to preserve the meaning of what is said. Transcribing is a rather laborious and time-consuming task but I considered it an ultimately rewarding and invaluable part of the research process. It necessitated my immersion in the data and as a result of personally carrying out the process, I developed a higher level of familiarity with it and engaged in its analysis at an early stage and to an increased degree (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell and Alexander 1995).

Transcribing the interviews produced about a thousand pages of data. NVivo, a qualitative data software program was used to manage the transcribed data, field notes and memos (Bazeley and Richards 2000; Richards 1999). Once the transcribed data was imported to NVivo, my coding process was similar to previous work that had been carried out manually. The main difference was that I used NVivo's coding functions as I worked through the transcripts on the computer screen rather than on paper. Some principles of a 'grounded theory' approach to qualitative data analysis were used (Strauss and Corbin 1998). However, no feminist research can be completely inductive or solely based in grounded theory because of the role of prior knowledge and theoretical orientation in coding data (Maynard 1994, 23). I used NVivo to begin reducing the data, initially with open, unrestricted coding, to produce provisional concepts and dimensions that seemed to fit the data. After these codes were moderated, saturation occurred where data fitted into existing codes and no new codes emerged. During axial coding I looked for categories or concepts that clustered together, combining closely related concepts. Experiential data and generative questions were also considered and these led to comparisons and distinctions between the information collected and prompted further lines of inquiry. NVivo also functioned as a tool of analysis in comparing the attributes of participants represented in the various coding schemes. Memos were written continuously throughout the research process and these analytic memos forged the link between the raw data and more abstract, theoretical thinking. The audit trail produced throughout this process enhances the trustworthiness, or rigour of the research (Padgett 1998).

Although there are no infallible rules for establishing validity in qualitative research, there are a range of tactics that can be employed to ascertain and maximise the credibility, plausibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Miles and Huberman 1994). Of course, the author is intrinsically part of the research process, having generated the questions, prompted clarifications and followed digressions. Despite this subjectivity, and because of the steps taken to monitor and scrutinise it, there is quite a high likelihood that another researcher with a similar approach and assumptions would describe comparable themes. I do consider that theoretical generalisation is possible from the findings of this research. The consistencies and similarities in data across a range of interviews are evidence of its reliability. Quotes are selected because they are normative and illustrative of a viewpoint or experience that is articulated by a number of participants or because they provide a comparison to commonly

expressed views. Throughout the thesis I have taken care to explain the grounds on which the selective interpretation has been made.

Given the difference between my views and those of many of the participants about sexual equality and feminism, I suggest that there was very limited compliance and deference to the views of the researcher in these areas. I do consider, however, that there were instances where participants offered responses that they probably thought I would endorse. When participants made statements about overcoming obstacles and avoiding victimhood through self-reliance and individual ambition, I often got the impression that they expected me to approve of this view. This kind of experiential data added to my theorising because it pointed to the widespread expectation and approval of individualised accounts of disadvantage and resiliency.

This study was developed with a commitment to making the research findings accessible to participants in the research. This involved producing a summary of the project and research findings in everyday language so that participants can see where their own values, attitudes or experiences fit in or compare with the whole sample. This was distributed to all those young women who had agreed they would like to receive a copy when interviewed. In order that the findings of this research are accessible and usable, the researcher also has a commitment to disseminating the findings of this research through mainstream media as well as scholarly books and journals.

Chapter summary and conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the epistemological and theoretical framework that guides this research. I have described how this feminist underpinning has informed the methodological focus and the use of appropriate research methods. One of the aims of this discussion of methodology and theoretical focus has been to introduce some transparency to the research process. This chapter has included a strong consideration of the micropolitics of the research process (Bhavani 2004) and has made evident the process of conceptualising the rationale for the research as well as the conduct involved in gathering, interpreting and presenting data. Particular attention has been paid to the relationships of domination and subordination between researcher and participants that were encountered and negotiated, including the ethical issues that arose and how I responded to them.

This thesis now moves to five chapters which outline the findings of this research. These findings are organised under the headings of 'Motherhood and domesticity', 'Education and employment', 'Relationships', 'Politics' and 'Neo-liberalism and the burdens of liberty'.

Chapter four

Motherhood and domesticity

Introduction

The parenting experiences and aspirations of the participants are explored in this chapter, as well as their experiences and expectations about the division of domestic work. The first section of the chapter reports and analyses the experiences of the young women who were already mothering and the second section discusses the parenting and domestic aspirations that were described by the young women who were not mothers. Their responses are examined against the context of apparent de-traditionalisation in which the family is widely conceived to be constituted less through obligation and more through negotiation (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Giddens 1992) and neo-liberal ideology in which individuals must increasingly organise their own paths through life in an autonomous and self-interested manner (Rose 1990 and 1996). Feminist scholarship has identified the sacrificial and self-abnegating values associated with mothering as it has been socially constructed and this literature also provides a framework for analysing the data reported in this chapter.

Feminist critiques of mothering

The relationship between the neo-liberal imperative for a rational and autonomous approach to biographical work contrasts sharply with feminist analysis of the conditions and experiences of motherhood and the domestic life of women. Early second wave feminist analysis brought into focus the role of male-dominated ideology in shaping the social institution of motherhood and its potentially oppressive conditions (for example Firestone 1970; Friedan 1963; Rich 1977). Researchers such as Ann Oakley have exposed the stress, isolation and economic dependence that characterises many women's domestic experiences and have legitimised such experience as crucial sites of study (1974, 1979 and 1993). Feminist analysis has argued that women are subjected to a higher standard of morality than men, particularly in the sphere of domesticity and parenting, with attitudes towards mothers often characterised by the extremes of idealisation and denigration (Featherstone 1997). The ideology and practice of domesticity which requires women to be self-sacrificing, endlessly giving and patient means that those women who act for themselves rather than others are likely to be judged negatively because self-interest for women is determined to be the same as selfish. Furthermore, the idealisation of motherhood serves to obstruct women from opportunities to understand not only the benefits but hazards that motherhood will pose to

their identities and lifestyles (Oakley 1993). In Australia, social researchers such as Belinda Probert (2002) have expressed doubts about the co-existence of self-actualisation and women's primary responsibility for childcare. Barbara Pocock has also highlighted the essential incompatibility of competitive individualism and personal gain and the non-economic logic of 'sacred' motherhood (2003, 101). It is this site of contention that is a primary focus for examination in this chapter.

Feminists have pointed out that early motherhood is not a neutral subject, but one that is embedded in moral, political and economic structures that construct it as a social problem and social threat (Phoenix 1991; Silva 1996). The stigma associated with early mothering, particularly as a sole parent, often rests on young women's perceived rejection of fathers and a reduced role of men in children's lives, their dependency on the state and the creation of an underclass (Bullen and Kenway 2004).

In addition to such stigmatised notions, scholarship in this area also points to the significant extent of material disadvantage that correlates with young motherhood. Girls and young women from low socio-economic backgrounds who leave school before Year 12 are a particularly vulnerable and at risk group (Lamb and McKenzie 2001). Low levels of formal education are a key risk factor for adolescent maternity (Milne-Home, Power and Dennis 1996, 2-3). As such, they are the least likely to reach full time employment and the most likely not to have access to an income earned through employment. Those young women who parent early will be more likely to experience ongoing socio-economic advantage. In their analysis of data from the Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health[11], Lois Bryson and Penny Warner-Smith (1998) found that the socio-economic status and levels of education of mothers who deferred child-rearing was systematically higher than that of women who had their children at an earlier age. Belinda Probert and Fiona Macdonald's (1997) qualitative research with young women indicates an increasing gap between women who establish careers before having children and those who parent early. In this research, it was clear that the majority of young women who were already parenting were disadvantaged economically and socially and that the majority (although not all) of young women who were not parents

---

[11] The Australian Longitudinal Study on Women's Health began in 1997 and is following the lives of 40,000 women for twenty years. The women were selected from all parts of Australia using a Medicare sampling frame. The study contains three cohorts (young, middle and older), who at the commencement of the study were aged eighteen to twenty three, forty five to fifty and seventy to seventy five.

had higher levels of education and were more likely to have experienced a stable upbringing, less characterised by the unhappy experiences of the parenting young women.

Demographics of the mothers and their children

Twenty (just over 36%) of the fifty five participants were parenting. One mother of three was also looking after her eleven year old brother who lived with her family. In all, the mothers had thirty one biological children. The majority of the mothers, twelve, had one child, with one pregnant at the time of interview. Six mothers had two children, with one mother having three children (as well as caring for her eleven year old brother) and one mother having four children. The oldest biological child was seven, with the youngest being two weeks old. All of the mothers identified as heterosexual. Fifteen of the twenty mothers were white Australians, two were Aboriginal, one was a Torres Strait Islander, one was African and one was Indonesian.

In this sample, the majority of participants who were already parenting were markedly more socially, economically and educationally disadvantaged than the participants who had not become mothers. In Australia, students enter the secondary school system at Year 8 and are usually aged twelve or thirteen. Four of the mothers had education to a Year 9 level; eight of the twenty mothers had education to Year 10 (with two of them receiving their education in Indonesia and Africa, their countries of origin). Leaving school early and becoming pregnant were all related somehow to difficult and unhappy family experiences. Nine of the mothers who left school before Year 12 had left their family homes as teenagers and all nine had been involved with alcohol and drugs to a degree that they described as problematic. Two had criminal records. Members of this group had experienced state care, parents' substance abuse, physical harm from parents, sexual abuse and domestic violence, racism and poverty. Several had experienced homelessness and had used youth shelters. Only two of the participants in this research with education to a Year 10 level or under did not have a child but had experienced very difficult childhoods which resulted in their leaving school early. Three mothers had formal education to Year 12 level (including one who had left her degree course when she became pregnant). Four of the remaining mothers were currently enrolled in university study (including two young women who had left home and school at age sixteen) and one already had a university degree.

The circumstances of pregnancy

A dominant feature of over half of the pregnancies experienced by the participants in this research was their unintentional nature. Young women's experience of failed birth control, mistakes, coercive relationships and forced sex demonstrate that often the circumstances of motherhood pose a fundamental challenge to the purposeful rationality inherent in methodological individualism. The first pregnancy of twelve of the mothers was unplanned. Fourteen pregnancies, less than half of the total thirty one biological children, were described as intentional, with subsequent pregnancies more likely to be described as planned additions to their existing family. Three pregnancies which were not terminated were described as occurring under conditions not of their choosing with both young women involved describing situations where their partners had wanted children and employed coercive behaviour to prevent the use of birth control. Analysis of Women's Health Australia data found that, for young women, having been pregnant was associated with a 230% increase in partner violence, they were more likely to have been pregnant if they had a partner and reported recent violence (Taft, Watson and Lee 2004). Only two of the unplanned pregnancies had occurred in situations where birth control had not been used. Two young women became pregnant although they had been diagnosed as infertile by doctors. Many described difficulties with the contraceptive pill.

When the young women reflected on the circumstances of finding out they were unintentionally pregnant they described it as an extremely stressful and fearful time. It was variously described as a period of turmoil, depression, confusion, family conflict and disappointment. One young woman described her unhappy realisation that she was now tied to her partner through their parenting relationship, although at the time she became unintentionally pregnant, she had been considering ending this relationship. The partners of four of the young women ended their relationship when they heard about the pregnancy and other losses included three young women giving up jobs and one young woman leaving her degree course. For the majority of the young women who experienced unplanned pregnancies, impending motherhood immediately forecast the loss of independence and the constriction of everyday movement and future possibilities.

> I guess the disappointment about it is I was only young still and I wanted, I had a few plans or whatever but I can still do it, I just take her with me (Ashley, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

> I was unfortunate when I became pregnant with Josh. I was actually ready to manage the bakery that I was working at. I had six weeks to go until I could have started opening and closing the store and managing, unfortunately (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

> I reckon before in my life I've always done what I wanted to do. And if it was something that wasn't possible I would make it possible. And I don't think my life works that way any longer (Eva, 25, White European, University Student, I child)

Despite the unplanned nature of their pregnancies and their willingness to describe its difficulties, the decision to continue the pregnancy and keep the child was presented as a personal choice and a positive outcome that was not regretted. Abortion was not strongly considered or widely used. Five of the participants said they had terminated a pregnancy and three of those pregnancies had occurred as a result of rape. The remaining two terminations were second pregnancies and were carried out because the young women did not consider that they were financially able to raise another child. Therefore, in this sample, all the young women whose first pregnancy was unintentional but were not raped continued with the pregnancy, even though it brought unplanned and initially unwanted changes to their lives. All of these young women either said that they "did not believe" in abortion or that the circumstances of their unplanned pregnancy did not warrant such an action because they were "not serious enough". There was general acceptance of the right of a woman to choose to terminate a pregnancy if she did not share their moral objections, or if her circumstances somehow justified such action.

Although limited access to abortion services in Queensland was not widely cited by the participants as a problem, two young women spoke about financial difficulties involved in obtaining a termination. Laws covering abortion in Queensland remain in three sections of the Criminal Code[12]. These laws make abortion unlawful unless it is performed to save the woman's life and prison sentences of seven and fourteen years can apply. Therefore, in order to obtain an abortion in Queensland, a girl or woman must find a doctor who is prepared to state that the procedure is necessary in order to prevent her mental or physical harm. In the region of North Queensland where most participants lived, the only medical practice that provides the procedure under these circumstances charges almost five hundred dollars. Greer

---

[12] S.224, 224 &226 Criminal Code Act. (1899). Queensland.

(1992) suggests that abortion is often a fragile right that is presented as a privilege. Certainly, amongst the participants in this research, the option to terminate an unintentional pregnancy was not widely used, taken up only by those who had been raped and by two women who had already continued with two unintended pregnancies and were parenting in impoverished circumstances. The majority of the young women who experienced unplanned pregnancies did not regard termination as justifiable in their circumstances, difficult as they were.

This finding contrasts strongly with the position taken by Australian Government Health Minister Tony Abbott in recent public debate in Australia, suggesting that the use of a termination procedure as a 'convenient' method of managing an unwanted pregnancy has reached 'epidemic' proportions (Abbott in Metherell and Todd 2004, 1). However, there is no national data or uniform method of collecting information on abortion. Hospital and Medicare data over-counts numbers because they include gynaecological procedures that are not terminations and therefore the figure of 100,000 cited by Abbot could be closer to 70-80,000 (Pratt, Biggs and Buckmaster 2005). Faced with the unplanned circumstances of motherhood which would mean relinquishing independence and autonomy and require the suppression of personal needs and work ambitions, this group of young women (the majority of whom had already experienced significant disadvantage), proceeded with their pregnancies. This chapter now moves to a more detailed consideration of the young women's experiences of parenting.

Positive descriptions of mothering: "It was the biggest goal in my whole life"
Although the majority of mothers spoke at length of the difficulties of mothering, four of the twenty mothers spoke predominantly of its enjoyment and satisfactions. Two of these mothers provided full time care for their children; one was a student whose male partner was currently taking paternity leave in order to care for their baby and one worked part-time as an administrator. All but one had intentionally become pregnant and had planned to start a family. Three of them were white Australians and married and one was a Torres Strait Islander and living with a partner to whom she was engaged to be married. The young women described these relationships in positive terms. Each of the men they were partnered with was regarded as being emotionally connected to his children (apart from one man who was described as ignoring his daughter in favour of his son and non-biological son) and contributed in varying degrees to their practical needs.

Of these four women, Rosie was most vocal about her commitment to and delight in motherhood. Despite the suicide of her first child's father when she was three months pregnant, her subsequent (unexplained) blame for his death by members of her island community, poverty and her family's habitual experience of racism, Rosie was not disappointed by motherhood. She had experienced a strong desire to have children from an early age, to the degree that she was eager to have sex as a teenager as the means to becoming pregnant:

> It was the biggest goal in my whole life, I had been thinking about it since I was thirteen, I'm sure, at that young age and all I wanted was a baby. I just wanted my own child, my own baby…As soon as I could think about it, as soon as I'd known about sex and how babies was made, I just wanted to have babies (Rosie, 25, Torres Strait Islander, Home Duties and Part Time Administrator, 3 children).

Throughout her interview, Rosie emphasised the family-oriented focus of her Torres Strait Islander culture and viewed this priority as very different to what she perceived to be the common aspirations of white young women and their families. She wished to offer an alternative to the feminist critique of women's private subordination in domestic life. Indeed, as the following extracts show, her motivations diverged strongly from her white father's ambitions for her and she draws specific attention to the contrasting response to a young woman's pregnancy that she imagines would commonly occur in a white, Western culture:

> From when I can ever remember I was always nursing babies, that was it, it was just something that was put upon and it's something that my father could never definitely understand, being a white person and wanting me to travel and further my education, go to uni, do all of this sort of stuff which I'm not even interested in. And so it was hard for him to deal with it. So I finally had my own child, my own baby.

> I fell pregnant, I think I was eighteen. It was so happy. Mum was happy, everyone was just so happy and then I said in any other culture if you say you're pregnant at eighteen they'd be crying in pain. And we're crying with happiness, yeah it was just so good (Rosie, 25, Torres Strait Islander, Home Duties and Part Time Administrator, 3 children).

In contrast to Rosie, who described many difficulties that she had encountered in her life so far, the other three young women in this group of mothers had experienced stability as they grew up, with two specifically describing strong admiration for their parents and the

conditions of their upbringing and identifying their parents as role models for parenting. The young women who represented themselves as overwhelmingly contented with mothering described how they enjoyed the task of raising their child; accepting the responsibility of being the person who primarily provided their care, shaped their behaviour and oriented them to the world.

The remaining sixteen mothers also made some positive statements about their children or the experience of being a mother. Such comments, however, were generally of limited detail and would precede more intricately described negative experiences, which they preferred to be more expansive about. The following pair of positive statements about mothering from Ashley preceded lengthy descriptions of the stresses she experienced as the young mother of an unplanned baby:

> Mmm, it's rewarding watching their first moves, her first giggle. I was in [name of regional town] for her first laugh. Smiling, just everything. There's some down points…

> Mothering's a rewarding thing. I find it very rewarding. Sometimes it can be, just, you want to kill them but you never would…(Ashley, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

There were occasions when I would purposefully enquire whether there were aspects of motherhood that the young women liked or enjoyed, in order to discover any counterpoint to their unhappy observations. Susie had just completed a vivid and spirited description of the difficulty of balancing motherhood and study against the backdrop of vehement family disapproval of herself as a mother. My initial question is met with disorientation and silence. After I rephrase it, she explains why it was difficult to respond:

> Joanne: What are the positives about being a mum? (Pause). If you have a good day, what's it like?
> Susie: It's really hard for me because Jake threw the biggest tantrum this morning (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student).

Alternatively, positive statements would be added at the end of a complaint; either to minimise its intensity or seemingly to prove their fundamental commitment to their children or their suitability for mothering. In similarity to other researchers' experience of interviewing mothers (such as Orenstein 2000), I noted that many of the young women with

children appeared compelled to prove their devotion to their children at the same time as they took the opportunity to articulate much of what was burdensome and isolating about parenting. Rozsika Parker (1997) describes the common experience of maternal ambivalence, where feelings of love and hate exist simultaneously, resulting in a contradictory and complicated set of emotions. Given the particular stresses faced by young mothers and their commonly articulated need to 'prove' their suitability for the task (which I discuss later in this chapter), it is not surprising that on one hand, they made use of an opportunity to detail their often unheard frustrations and on the other, ensured that this was accompanied by statements of commitment and displays of affection and competence.

Physical, emotional and social costs of mothering: "I'm not the same person I used to be"

Romito argues that the ideology of motherhood "still retains its sacred aura" and thus creates a climate where it is very hard for a mother to admit to any burdens and constraints (1997, 172). However, my conversations with young women who were mothers were characterised by lengthy descriptions of the difficulties of being a mother, particularly at a young age. The opportunity to detail their rarely heard frustrations and disappointments in an uninterrupted and confidential interview seemed to override any inclination to remain silent on such matters. However, although their complaints were often indignant and keenly felt, they were also tempered by expressions of devotion and commitment, a reluctance to express regret about their circumstances or decisions, or to explicitly describe their parenting circumstances as unfairly gendered.

Most of the young women who were mothers described aspects of pregnancy, childbirth and mothering that had entailed great physical pain, discomfort and altered their bodies and mental state in negative ways. Several of the participants experienced pregnancy under difficult medical conditions such as hydrocephalus, toxaemia and anaemia. Nine young women were drinking heavily and using illegal drugs when they became pregnant and all described successful efforts to end this behaviour. Two of the participants gave birth to premature babies and their subsequent medical treatment and hospitalisation were described as extremely stressful. Two of the participants gave birth at home without medical assistance after the rapid onset of labour. They both described their shock at this experience. One of the births resulted in a healthy baby; the other baby was premature, was not breathing at birth and was resuscitated by the young woman's mother.

Several participants described how they felt unattractive when they gained weight during pregnancy and failed to return to their previous weight afterwards. This was often linked to their concern about still being sexually desirable to a male partner and it was a fear that was often exacerbated by a partner's 'jokes' or critical comments about their appearance. For example, Leanne (21, White Australian, University Student and Home Duties, 1 child) had not planned to become pregnant and the impact of the resulting distress on her academic work almost resulted in the loss of her university place. She talked quite extensively about being a "big fat whale", her dislike of being pregnant and its constraints on her life:

Six of the twenty mothers described feeling depressed during pregnancy and after giving birth. In each case, the depressive symptoms were worrying enough to prompt the young woman to consult with a doctor. This experience of depression was not explicitly linked to the stresses of parenting which they described so vividly during our conversations. Instead, they were more likely to speculate about its possible biological causes. For example, Peta had experienced no improvement after taking anti-depressant medication on a short-term prescription and was continuing to look for an explanation about her changed mental state:

> I've been to the doctors' about it and said, "Look, I'm not the same person I used to be"…I've asked, you know, is it a hormonal imbalance? Am I lacking in something? But they just sort of say, "Oh just take some vitamin B and get lots of rest and you'll be right". Hello, there's two kids under five. So it makes it a bit difficult to sort of really distinguish what it is, that's sort of left me who I am at the moment (Peta, 21, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

The emotional impact of mothering was no more apparent than in my interview with Peta. In a moving conversation during which she was tearful for much of the time, she described the way in which she had changed and the physical and emotional exhaustion which resulted from the relentless activity involved in parenting two small boys.

> Yeah, just the things that I've got to do. And then it's get the kids' breakfast, make sure they're bathed. Do the everyday housework, the dishes, the washing, the mopping and sweeping, the constant bottle changing and lots of yelling…I've always been an emotional person but never like that. Never. Maybe it's just because I've kept everything inside that it's

got to the point where I'm about ready to really explode (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

She had regarded herself as a reasonably contented, "bubbly" and outgoing person until she became a sole parent at nineteen; her boyfriend ended their relationship and left their home immediately after discovering that she was pregnant. Left to parent alone, she calculated her reduced chances of having future relationships with men:

> When I had Josh, his dad left the second I told him I was pregnant. He just packed his bags and I never saw hide of him again. I thought well if that's the case then no man's gonna want a single mum with a kid (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Peta had met a new partner with whom she now lived with and had had a second child. Mothering had meant she had become isolated from her friends, was experiencing financial hardship and had been unsuccessfully attempting to find employment and childcare. She was disappointed in herself as a mother, seemed uncertain of her partner's feelings for her, felt unattractive and compared herself unfavourably to her partner's female friends and women on television and in magazines.

The theme of the social losses associated with mothering was taken up by most of the mothers. The most common loss to be described by the young women who were mothering was the dramatic shrinking of their social life and the end of meaningful contact with many friends. Many of the mothers felt sharply differentiated from their childless peers who did not experience similar constraints to their social opportunities:

> And that's what hurts I think because you lose so many friends whereas that's what you need, you need your friends… You realise who your friends are. And it's amazing how many friends you don't have. And like I look back on it now, I had so many friends then, now I have hardly none. That's the most hurtful thing, is I have hardly no friends. And it's sad, it's very, very sad. But you know, that's the way it goes, I guess (Courtney, 21, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

> You can't just go out partying every weekend. Like people invite you out and then you go I can't do it and then they stop inviting you out and they don't want to invite you anywhere because you've got a baby (Melanie, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Like especially in uni I suppose because I'm sitting next to a group of people my age but I have a baby. I get a phone call from day care and I have to go. You know, everybody looks at me, like, what? I always sort of feel the outcast because there's something holding me back from being at the party (Leanne, 21, White Australian, University Student and Home Duties, 1 child).

Occluding self-interest: Children come first

One of the strongest features of mothering described by the young women was its weight of responsibility, the demand for an instinctive nurturing and the need for self-sacrifice. Here, I use an extract from my interview with Amy, the young woman whose ex-partner was living with her against her will and whose participation in this research I discussed in the 'Theory and methodology' chapter. The responsibility of mothering was thrust upon her in a complicated and traumatic set of circumstances. She describes how nurturing impulses were required of her even as she recovered from the shock of a sudden, frightening labour at home in her bathroom:

It was just so scary. Everyone was telling me, hold your baby, hold your baby, you need to get her feeding. And I couldn't touch her. It wasn't that I didn't love her, it wasn't that I didn't want her. I just could not touch her, I just was, I think, in shock. And she was still attached to me because the ambulance is on the phone, don't cut the cord, you know. But I just couldn't hold her and then people are kind of getting angry at me, saying, hold your baby, it's the best thing. And all I wanted to do was just sit there and relax and get my breath back…and everyone's standing there watching me and I wouldn't hold the baby and I got in the ambulance and still didn't want to hold her. It wasn't anything, I was just, I just wanted, I finally did hold her when I got the hospital and I looked at her and she was beautiful but I just kind of was a bit scared. And I had a little baby who was only just one and I was scared of having her and I thought about giving her [the newborn] up and I couldn't (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Even as Amy related this harrowing birth story, she was anxious to convince me that she was not an indifferent or unloving mother. Amy's experience of mothering her two children has been largely defined by the violence of their father towards her and her consideration of relinquishing her new baby into state care is based on a desire for her daughter's safety and doubts about her capacity to provide care for her under such circumstances. Her experience of mothering under violent circumstances is further explored in the 'Parenting and physical violence' section of this chapter.

Other mothers took up the theme of responsibility in response to my queries about what it was like to be a mother. With the exception of one mother, whose partner was currently on paternity leave, it was notable that they all spoke as the main provider of care for their children, whether or not they were living with partners, married or single. It seemed that primary responsibility for the everyday care of their babies and children had naturally devolved to them, despite suggestions that the practice of childcare has changed significantly, particularly in regard to the increased involvement of fathers (for example Wilkinson and Mulgan 1995). Commonly, during conversations about this theme of maternal responsibility, mothers described their surprise at the full extent of parental accountability that it had simply not been possible to anticipate, in particular its unwavering and constant nature. Motherhood was therefore a 'choice' that was made with limited information. Melanie and Sophie both lived with partners who were the fathers of their children but considered that they had to be constantly available and were ultimately responsible for their baby's well-being:

> It's like you have to grow up a lot. You've got to grow up a lot when you have a baby. Like, yeah, a lot…Where you have a baby staying at home, you can't be sick, you've got to be twenty-four hour call so you can get really tired and you can't just push him to one side and say look I don't want him any more, take him (Melanie, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

> The only time I stop working is when I'm asleep. But then I've got to get up in the night and feed bubby (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

The influence of the ideology of the 'good mother' was apparent in some of the participants' self-assessments of their parenting ability. Even as Jeanie resists its pressure, she is drawn into demonstrating her worthiness as a mother:

> I mean fair enough, with me, like I'm not the perfect mother, no I don't think there is a perfect mother, you know. But I've always said to a lot of women, as long as you've got a roof over your baby's head, you've got food in your baby's stomach, you've got clothes on the baby's head and you're *there* when your baby wakes up and goes to sleep, you know, you're a good mother. I think that a good mother is *there* when that child wakes up. First thing that child sees should be mum. Last thing that child sees should be mum. But that's how I've always, that's how Mum's brought me up and I've always thought that (Jeanie, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Unemployed, 1 child).

Similarly, Melanie and Susie both resist criticism of their mothering and the unattainable ideology of the perfect mother by judging themselves to be doing no harm to their babies:

> I just believe as long as he's happy and healthy and I'm not beating him and I'm not, you know, neglecting him. Like I don't really let him cry that much (Melanie, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child)

> And so my older sister constantly tells me I'm a bad mother because of the people I hang around with and stuff like that. But I'm not and I know I'm not because my son's got a roof and my son gets fed, my son isn't in any kind of harm. You know, stuff like that. And he's happy. He smiles everyday. So how can that be bad? And it's not like, when I go out head banging, that Zak's there. He's asleep before I leave and he's not awake when I get home, you know, he doesn't even know that I'm gone. So how can that be a bad thing (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student, 1 child)?

The single parents among the participants, such as Jeanie and Susie, felt the weight of responsibility particularly acutely, noting the absence of cooperation and shared concern that they imagined might characterise the partnering of two parents:

> Because your child's constantly going "Mum, Mum, Mum, Mum, Mum." 'Cos there's no *dad* there, there's no extra help where you can go, "just go to your dad". There's none of that. It's like, you're the only one (Jeanie, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Unemployed, Home Duties, 1 child).

> You've always got in the back of your head, "am I screwing this up?" You know, it's not like you've got, where there's two parents, where you can go, "you screwed up our kid". If you screw up the kid you do it yourself, you know (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student, 1 child)?

However, a recurrent theme from many of the mothers who were partnered was that they did not derive significant practical benefit from this:

> I've always been a single parent, even when one of their dads was around I see I was a single parent (Molly, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Home Duties, 4 children).

You have a husband but they do not help so you are alone with your children (Meena, 23, Indonesian, Home Duties, 1 child).

No, I wouldn't like to be on my own but me, I seen it already on my own. I see that I'm like a single parent (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

In addition to her comments about feeling like she parented alone, Sophie also voiced the observation that being partnered masked the disadvantage of young mothers like herself. She had observed that social welfare workers often made the assumption that if young mothers had male partners then it could be assumed that they had 'help' with the children and would therefore be coping better than young mothers who were single. However, the daily absence of parenting support, as well as unhelpful input from fathers was bitterly painful for many of the young women who were mothering. This issue is taken up further in the 'Fathering' section in this chapter.

A strong feature of mothering responsibility was self-sacrifice. The change of priority from oneself to one's child or children was described by every participant who was a mother. As the following extracts illustrate, this was consistently described in strikingly similar terms:

But like it (mothering) has its downs. Like obviously you've got to make sacrifices, put them first, not yourself (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

You are there for your children. Always. However you feel, you are there for your children. (Meena, 23, Indonesian, Home Duties, 1 child).

You can't think of yourself, you can't just say, I'm gonna get this and that and that. The kids come first, all the time (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Children are first, then the husband. You are last, so there is no time for you. That is the way it is (Nia, 22, African, Home Duties, 2 children)

I'm such a different person now than I was before I had Georgie. You know, he has made me less selfish, you know what I mean. It's not about me, it's always about Georgie sort of thing (Leanne, 21, White Australian, University Student and Home Duties, 1 child).

The sacrifices referred to included the large amounts of time that were spent caring for children rather than on activities for themselves as well as directing any financial resources to their children's needs rather than their own. A British report into spending on children and childhood poverty found that a large percentage of mothers claimed to go without clothes and leisure for themselves in order to provide things for their children, with one in twenty mothers sometimes going without food to meet the needs of their children (Middleton, Ashworth and Braithwaite 1997). Gina, who had become pregnant with her first child when she was sixteen, considered that, as a young mother, she had never experienced an adult life which encompassed self-interest and autonomy. This meant that she had less experience of independence to lose but had struggled to retain a sense of her own identity that was distinct from herself as a mother:

> You do see that there's disadvantages of being an older person having kids because you're set in your ways and you've got your habits and you are used to being an independent person. I don't know what it's like to be an independent person. Like I don't know what it's like to be able to go, oh wow, like silence, and I can sleep or do whatever I want. I don't know what that is so it is probably easier to adapt to children because you don't have that sense of yourself yet. Yeah, but in the same respect it's harder to find yourself while you're trying to be responsible for two other people (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Here, Gina's observations about the incompatibility of mothering and independence point to the difficulty of reconciling the neo-liberal striving for self-actualisation and its assumption of a stable and unified identity with the conditions of motherhood as it has been socially constructed. Self-interest, whether it is the desire for a period of silence or the freedom to pursue other interests, must be suppressed in order to accomplish the responsibilities of mothering.

Fathering: "He just likes the whole play experience"
The involvement of fathers in the lives of this group of young women's thirty one biological children was varied. Thirteen (almost 42%) of the thirty one children did not live with their fathers. One father had suicided three months before the birth of his son and another had died as a result of a drug overdose (it was not known whether this was intentional or not). Of the thirteen children who were not living with their fathers, five of these had varying degrees of contact with their father, two having the same father, although only one of those arrangements was described as working well by the mother. Of the six fathers who had no

contact with their children, one paid child support (although not voluntarily). Four of the other fathers had left the relationship and not maintained contact. Two of these men had been violent towards their partner and the young women had determined it safer to not pursue them for child support contributions. The other two fathers were described as having abandoned their families and had not sought to make any financial contribution to the upkeep of their child. Both young women in question stated that they had not pursued these men for child payments because they were deemed to have relinquished any right to a future relationship with their child and an enforced financial contribution may provide them with an entitlement to future contact which the young women did not want to occur.

Fifteen of the twenty one parenting young women were living with partners (including one against her will) or were married. Five of these young women either described their parenting partnerships as working to their satisfaction or made very few negative comments. Only one of these fathers was the primary care provider for his baby, having taken a few months of paternity leave from his job in order to do so. The mothers who expressed satisfaction with the fathering of their children all stated that they had chosen to be the main daily carer and to postpone their educational or employment aspirations. Men's difficulty in taking leave or altering or reducing the hours of their jobs or their more lucrative employment were also cited as reasons for the women staying at home to care for their children.

Rosie, a Torres Strait Islander; Molly, an Aboriginal Australian; Meena an Indonesian and Nia, an African each specified that their approach to mothering was largely determined by their culture which dictated childcare to be the role and responsibility of women rather than men. Although their cultural backgrounds were diverse, they all described mothering as more valued in their culture than in white Australia. However, only Rosie could be described as satisfied with parenting arrangements; Meena, Molly and Nia identified their cultures' attitudes to mothering as limiting their ability to enlist help from their husbands. Strikingly, none of the white Australians suggested that parenting for them was culturally determined in any explicit way.

A quarter of the mothers, then, can be described as expressing contentment with their parenting partnership. The remaining sixteen mothers were all taking primary responsibility for their children's care and six were single mothers. This group were demonstrably finding motherhood difficult in some way and reported very minimal parenting from the fathers of

their children. Indeed, the involvement of fathers was often instigated by mothers suggesting and organising activities that they could engage in with their children or by them contacting fathers with marginal input to the care of their children in order to encourage access.

One of the dissatisfactions with fathers that were expressed was that in some instances, rather than providing parental care to their children, they required similar amounts of care and work as their children. Two participants raised the numbers of children they cared for by one, identifying their partners as one extra child. Similarly, Courtney described the intense efforts she had made, which were reminiscent of parental coaching, to improve her partner's social skills and manners:

> Ann, which is Simon's mum, is very happy. She said, "You've changed him". He never used to say please, thank you, nothing. And I don't give him anything. If he doesn't say please or thank you I go, "You know where it is". If he says, "Can I have a drink?" I say, "What do you say, Simon?" "Can I please have a drink Courtney?" And like now he'll do it without me even saying, "What do you say?" He'll go, "Can I have a drink please?" You know, things like that. And he's more helpful, he used to be a very outspoken, not outspoken but he would never ever think of what he was saying, never, never think. He would just say things. I'd think, why would you say that? Right now, why would you say something like that? He would just say things. And now he thinks before he says things. He's polite (Courtney, 21, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Mothering was not only experienced as difficult because of the absence of fathering work from men, it could actually be exacerbated by some fathers' unhelpful input. Examples of such unsupportive behaviour included absent fathers' inconsistent contact with children and obstructive fathering where mothers were overruled and therefore undermined on issues such as routine and discipline. However, despite the often limited and problematic fathering activity of men, the young women's criticism of other mothers that is described later in this chapter was more vehement than any disapproval of unsatisfactory fathers. Their complaints about fathers tended to be hesitant, brief and muted when they did assess these men's input into parenting partnerships. It was common for the mothers to punctuate their mostly brief criticisms with what appeared to be disproportionately generous affirmations about their children's father. This tendency is illustrated by the following extract from Melanie's interview:

He doesn't really help that much. Like I go, he goes, "I'm working, you do nothing all day". And I'm like, "I do, I look after him all day". And then when he gets home he'll play with Eamon for five minutes and then he'll hand him back and then he'll take him off me again. He's an excellent dad, though. But not as much 'cos he works all the time and doesn't really want to be changing nappies and feeding him. He just likes the whole play experience (Melanie, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

The combination of tentative criticism and interspersed (although often unsubstantiated) praise was possibly because any kind of commitment to or interaction with their children was regarded with gratitude and was therefore enough to earn a father commendation of some kind. Men's unhappy childhoods or poor family relationships were often mentioned in order to contextualise and provide a fuller explanation for their parenting inadequacies. This contrasted strikingly with the impossibly high standards of behaviour expected from mothers, who rarely contextualised their own difficulties or the difficulties of the other mothers they judged negatively (which is detailed later in the chapter). Gina described her ex-partner and father of her two children as emotionally abusive. His controlling and suspicious behaviour towards her had led her to develop habitual panic attacks while she waited for him to return home from work and anticipated his questioning about what she had done and whom she had seen that day. He had arranged for a paternity test for his first child and planned to do so for his two week old baby. Gina related his abusive and untrusting behaviour to the influence of his mother who she perceived to be immature and "trailer-trashy" (22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

She described the new experience of her ex-partner occasionally independently looking after their five year old son since their relationship ended. His previous lack of involvement meant that it was so difficult that he often cancelled planned access visits because he doubted his ability to cope:

Yeah he's actually rung me and gone, look I'm just losing it, I don't think I'm in the right frame of mind to have him. So he's starting to open his eyes up and see it. But he hasn't had a lot to do with parenting in the last five years…so he was trying to make up for it and trying to look like a bigger person by going well I'll take these children, sort of thing. And now he's realising, oh shit, like raising children is harder than it looks like and the job is harder…He took Jake to the park and he came back after about ten minutes and I was like, oh did you forget something? And he was like, no, the park trip is over and it wasn't 'til then that I

realised that he'd never taken him out, ever, by himself before (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Sophie's speculation of what it would be like if traditional roles were reversed and men took primary responsibility for the daily care of children revealed a similar assessment of father's limited parenting skills. The resulting chaos she predicts would be "like a cyclone":

> They don't realise how hard it is being a mother. And if it could turn to let the fathers look after them and mothers work, it'd be a big, big difference. It'd be like a cyclone. Because they'd be going, "Shit, how many scoops of formula does he have? How do I change him" (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children)?

Parenting and physical violence: "What am I meant to tell my kids?"

Five of the mothers had been subjected to abusive behaviour from the fathers of their children while they were pregnant and parenting. Australian research about the extent of domestic violence during pregnancy confirms its common occurrence and tendency to escalate at this time (Walsh and Weeks 2004) and its association with miscarriage and termination (Taft, Watson and Lee 2004). Four of the young women described physical violence. Additionally, as mentioned in the previous section, Gina described emotional abuse characterised by extreme jealousy and control of her behaviour. Three of the four young women who had been physically assaulted had stayed at women's refuges while pregnant and parenting. Molly, a twenty two year old Aboriginal woman had used three different shelters in two states on "more than five, I think" occasions. Two of the four fathers of her children had beaten her. Her physical injuries had consisted of a broken jaw, a dislocated knee and an assortment of cuts and bruises. She ended both relationships. Three of her children had been taken into temporary state care on two occasions due to the challenges of safeguarding (deemed her 'failure to protect') her children from the men's violence.

Susie, a twenty two year old white Australian, had been beaten by her boyfriend regularly while she was pregnant and parenting their baby. She had also needed to stay at a women's refuge, with the additional precaution of relocating to a different part of the state due to his threats to kill her and the baby. He spent time in jail for drugs-related crimes and had died of a drug overdose a few months before I met Susie in early 2004.

Meena, a twenty three year old Indonesian was hit, kicked and strangled by her husband when she threatened to leave their marriage. She briefly used a women's shelter before returning to her home because he promised to never repeat the violence and she worried about bringing shame to their families in Indonesia if the marriage ended. She was still in the relationship at the time of interview and he had not physically assaulted her for almost a year.

The 'Theory and methodology' chapter introduced Amy, the participant who was living with her violent ex-partner, Sean, against her will. Here, I will focus on her experience of living with violence during pregnancy and parenting. They had two children aged one and two. Part of Sean's current abuse of her was rape and she had terminated a pregnancy that had occurred in such circumstances the week before her interview for this project. Sean physically assaulted Amy on a daily basis. She had bruises and scratch marks from him on her neck during our interview. The impact of Sean's abuse on Amy's life as a mother was profound. His appropriation of her money and bank card resulted in a precarious financial situation for her and her children. He regularly threatened to kill her and the children if she tried to leave him. His threats were considered credible and constituted the main reason why Amy felt trapped. She described him as a dangerous, disturbed, illiterate and unemployed man with "nothing to lose". Her first days of motherhood were characterised by fear and violence when Sean locked Amy in her hospital room and beat her, a common occurrence:

> Amy: He locks me in rooms and if I try and call for help that's when I'll, I'm trapped or he's got his hand over my mouth or he's hitting me more and just the fact that he threatens me scares me. I felt like there was no way out and I went home with my newborn baby and the first day I took him home I told Sean he wasn't allowed out to my parents' house because they didn't want him out there. He turned up and he threatened to take Trent, he threatened to take Trent back to his place and said I'm his dad as well, why can't I have Trent. And so he pushed his way in and started packing his stuff and I said no, you're not taking my newborn baby home and he gave me a slap across the face and this and that. And then a neighbour had called the police and the police had come out and I had the choice right then and there to put a restraining order on him or to do something about it but I didn't, I just said, no it's because he's scared that I'm taking his baby away from him, that's what I thought. So I didn't do anything about it.
>
> Joanne: The police didn't take an order out?
>
> Amy: I mean, they saw me and they didn't do anything. They had a talk to him and by this stage he's crying and putting on the sob story and saying I'm taking his baby away from him, which I wasn't. He knew that I was just taking him home, that's where I was gonna live

because things were so bad between us (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Amy describes how Sean's status as a father who is distressed at separation from his baby was enough to ensure lenient treatment from the attending police officers. She berates herself for not initiating any legislative protection for herself. Under Queensland's domestic violence legislation, the police can apply for a Domestic Violence Order on behalf of an aggrieved person. This removes the onus of responsibility from the victimised person to make an application, what Amy calls her "choice", hence my query about the police not having taken an order out for her[13]. In fact, Amy had a strong commitment to Sean's fathering and described how, following this incident, she daily rode the bus from her parents' home in an outlying suburb to Sean's home some distance away, in order to facilitate contact between him and his child. As a result of this laborious trip and the distress it caused her parents to witness it each day, Amy moved back in with Sean. She soon found herself pregnant again, having believed that breastfeeding protected against pregnancy. Amy was overwhelmed by the thought of having another child with Sean and considered terminating the pregnancy. Although he opposed the addition of another child, he said that she would be a murderer if she did have an abortion. Amy went as far as making an appointment and attending a clinic but left before the procedure could be performed, citing her Christian upbringing as the reason she could not go ahead. Sean's response was to punch her repeatedly in the stomach in order to kill the foetus. Amy recalled this history of abuse and its misogyny when she considered the impact of leaving Sean on their children:

> And what am I meant to tell my kids, you know, when they're fifteen or sixteen or even before that when they're asking about their dad? I don't know what situation I'll be in. How am I meant to describe to my kids about their father, what have I got to say about him? That he's horrible? That he, Claire, he tried killing you when you were in my belly, you know? He didn't want to touch you for the first six months, he wouldn't even look at you. He used to call you a slut before you were even walking, you know? When I told him that I was having a baby girl, he turned around, I'd just walked out of the ultrasound, he turned around, he said "well shit happens"…Sometimes I wish he was dead and that's the nastiest thing anyone could say. And my kids love him, that's what makes me angry, the kids love him, they adore him (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

---

[13] S. 67 (1&2) Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act. (1989). Queensland.

Sean took no part whatsoever in the daily care of the two young children but his damaging behaviour to them exceeded a lack of involvement and the harmful behaviour directed at their mother. Amy assured me that he did not physically harm the children (apart from punching Amy in the stomach while she was pregnant with Claire). He was further damaging Amy's relationship with her son by actively coaching him in misogyny, teaching him to call his mother a whore and to hit her:

> He gets Trent, my two year old, to hit me. And I can't smack him because he's been told to do that, you know, his dad's telling him to do something, I can't turn around. I do, I say don't hit Mummy and I'll explain to him that grown-ups can smack, if someone's been naughty then you get in trouble, kind of thing. But he's been told to hit me and I can't say anything because it's what his dad's telling him to do (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Amy also revealed details of random, cruel acts that were designed to impede the nurturing of her children:

> I bought my kids a pool and Sean stabbed it. It was Claire's birthday yesterday and I tried making a cake for her and he spat in it. (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

The powerful ideology of 'good' mothering was readily available to Sean and it was used regularly to taunt Amy. In the following incident, she is blamed for his dangerous neglect of the two children under two years old because she fled when he returned to her house after a night of heavy drinking and attempted to rape her, "kind of doing his thing":

> I remember I had to run out of the house one morning, at six o'clock in the morning because he'd just got home and was kind of doing his thing and I had to literally run and I had to leave the kids and I felt so, so terrible. And I just had to run and I kept running and I ran into the city and I didn't know what to do and I came back and it was a few hours later and he was passed out on the couch and the kids had eggs and make-up and just everything in the house was trashed. You know what I mean, the kids had just completely destroyed everything and he's passed out. Trent had broken a bottle of my perfume, my only perfume and he'd broken a bottle and there's glass everywhere and there's Claire crawling around in that. He didn't care. I got in trouble for leaving, I was a really bad mum for leaving the kids (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

It is clear that Amy's ability to nurture her children as she wishes to and to live up to the impossibly high standards of mothering ideology is highly constrained by the coercion and violence to which she is subjected. Indeed, the high moral standards by which mothers are judged constrained her ability to seek help. When she did call police to attend her home after Sean had beaten her and stolen her bankcard, she was berated by two officers for crying and screaming in front of her children and threatened with their removal into state care if she continued to make accusations of violence.

Surveillance, scrutiny and unwanted advice: "People are looking down their nose at you"

Although the majority of young women who were mothers described their fear and trepidation at becoming parents and their longing for support and reassurance, they also consistently commented negatively on the barrage of parenting advice that they received. On one hand they quaked at the enormous responsibility of parenting and on the other, they felt inundated with critical comments. These commonly came from family, friends and social welfare workers. They regarded this as being directed at them on account of their age and their supposed deficiencies in parenting knowledge and experience. They craved encouragement but received advice that was most often experienced as judgemental and patronising and as not taking account of their capabilities or commitment. Susie responds defiantly to the critics of her parenting, many of whom had urged her to terminate her pregnancy:

> And I have a lot of people watching me and telling me what to do and stuff like that, but they've learnt the hard way that they can sit there and judge me all they like, but if they're gonna sit there and do that, I'm not gonna put up with it. Because they have to learn that *I* gave birth to Zak and he's my kid and no matter what they say, I'm gonna do things my way because, you know, if I turned around and listened to them, Zak wouldn't be here (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student, 1 child).

The young women's conversations about parenting revealed a high level of self-consciousness about the age at which they had become parents, particularly if it had occurred in their teenage years.

> You're too young, what are you doing, you're just out to get money off someone. You're just a little slut, basically (Melanie, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

I make sure I look nice. I've got nice clothes and stuff. It will be clothes that I've had since I was fourteen, you know? And I do want to dress like a mum, more sophisticated and stuff. And I can't afford that kind of stuff. I still go out looking like a teeny-bopper. It sounds silly, but (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Many of the young mothers also felt scrutinised because their children were regarded as evidence of promiscuity:

People would look at me as if to say, "you tramp". And I don't think, people judge before they know. My mother in law is one of those. They judge before they know the facts or before they know everything (Ashley, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Because a lot of people will say, "are these both your children?" I say, "yes they are". You know, I feel a bit defensive and think that I would think the same thing. All these last names, I wonder what this girl is like. And a lot of people are like that. It's so not like that but it's just some people's perception when kids don't have the same last name (Charmaine, 25, White Australian, University Student, Home Duties and Part Time Care Worker, 2 children).

Jeanie described the combination of racist and sexist scrutiny she received as an Aboriginal single mother:

It's funny because like on top of me being Aboriginal and a single Mum, I'm shunned both ways. I'm pretty much screwed both ways. Because like they look at me and they think, oh yeah, some parkie, river gin down the street, as in Aboriginal, and then they'll look at me and oh, single mum, someone who's constantly unreliable. They think of unreliable, unethical and they think I'm irresponsible, you know. They have all these things when they know they don't really know the whole story behind *why* you're a single mum, you know (Jeanie, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Unemployed, 1 child)?

Some participants who were parenting at a young age also felt unfavourably compared to those women who parented 'respectably' and more affluently, later in life:

Well I went to the [name of parenting support centre] when I first got here to try and meet people. Everyone was thirty and over and they'd talk to you, but it was a real different way to how they'd talk to everybody else…Yeah, plus Will wasn't over here when I went there and that was a big no-no there…Just, you know, you're supposed to be married and have a house.

And I didn't have a car, didn't have hardly anything, so, you know, just these things that you're supposed to do before you have kids (Thea, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child and pregnant).

I guess some people would make assumptions when they meet you. They think you're a young mum, irresponsible, unintelligent possibly and all that sort of thing. But you try and prove them otherwise. Like particularly women who might work full-time and have children and that sort of thing, might look on you as being lazy, you know, not working, staying at home sort of thing, young mum on the dole (Jana, 21, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Some of these comments by young women display their awareness of the way in which age and socio-economic categorisation differentiated who was positioned as a 'respectable' mother. They also indicate a need to defend their position as a young mother against the women who have delayed childrearing and have established a career. The harsh judgement of younger mothers may increase as a new, intensified, commodified ideal of mothering strengthens (Hays 1996). This is increasingly to be achieved through the application of information and strategies from child-rearing manuals and other forms of expertise, which are more accessible to those with educational capital and financial resources. There were several references by the mothers in this research to parenting books they had the impression they "ought to have read" and some mentioned feeling overwhelmed by the number of stimulating activities they should ideally be engaging in with their children.

The idea of the scrounging 'welfare mother' was also uncomfortably present in many of these young women's minds. They felt marked by the stigma of this female caricature who becomes pregnant with the sole purpose of receiving welfare payments. This was certainly not the motivation of any of the participants involved with this project, although some did employ the 'welfare mother' discourse to criticise other young mothers, an issue which will be more fully discussed in the 'Criticism of the 'other' mother' section of this chapter. In contrast, many of the mothers described the inadequacy of parenting payments and their strenuous attempts to adhere to its budget or supplement this meagre income through paid employment. Additionally, rather than perceiving parenting payments as an incentive to have children, many mothers suggested that the size of their families would be limited because of financial constraints and the expense of raising children and two participants included the prohibitive financial cost of raising a child as a reason for terminating their pregnancies.

Children as a source of resilience: "The only reason why I'm probably here today"

Despite the very difficult circumstances under which many of these mothers were parenting and which they described at length, none of them articulated any regrets about having their children. Often they would specifically state that they did not have regrets. Indeed, a remarkably consistent feature of their stories were their remarks about how pregnancy and childbirth had saved them from destructive and sometimes potentially fatal circumstances and made them want to live for someone else. This finding resonates strongly with research conducted by Marilyn Callahan, Deborah Rutman, Susan Strega and Lena Dominelli (2005). In their work with young women who were in care and were mothers they described a strong tendency for them to minimise their problems or losses, in case they appear ill-prepared for adulthood and mothering and to describe how having a child had rescued them from the dangerous consequences of high-risk behaviour. Probert and Macdonald (1997) also reported that young women described having children as 'saving' them.

> Kyle has made a difference in my life. I used to be a sort of street people and live in shelters and stuff and I got my own flat through youth housing when I found out I was pregnant. I moved in and used to smoke pot and then I just stopped everything and stopped hanging around the people I was with. Knew I had a baby coming (Toni, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

> He's definitely sort of helped me. He's the only reason why I'm probably here today, because I was partying a lot and smoking a lot of dope and drinking, all of that sort of stuff you tend to do, but I think I went a little bit overboard. And then once I fell pregnant all that sort of stopped and then I remember after it happened (her expected baby's father's suicide) thinking I should just go and kill myself. It's not fair that it has to happen to me. And then, I don't know, I found the strength in me and realised this is my time, I'm having my baby (Rosie, 25, Torres Strait Islander, Home Duties and Part Time Administrator, 3 children**).**

> I don't know, if I didn't go through it. I can turn around and honestly say, if everything didn't happen to me, I'd probably be on the streets, a drug addict (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student, 1 child).

> So yeah, I've come back [to university] and I sort of, I just feel that it's not just me anymore, so I'm not the only one that's gonna be affected if I fail. Ally is gonna be affected as well. And I want to have a career and I want to have a steady income and, you know, be able to

provide for Ally in the way that I want him to have everything. So yes, basically that's why I've decided that I want to knuckle down and get it all done (Leanne, 21, White Australian, University Student, Home Duties, 1 child).

But I have to admit, having a baby was a good thing because if I didn't have her I'd still be on drugs, so she was a good thing…I was using drugs back then and found out I was pregnant and thought well now's the time for me to wake up to myself and get my life on track. I did and I've got this beautiful little thing now…She keeps me clean. I'd rather spend my money on her than spend my money on drugs. She needs all my money now. I'd rather go to the shop and buy her some dresses or some shoes or whatever, than go out and fix myself up. That's my reward now, that's my high (Ashley, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

These young women defined their circumstances as propitious, and in doing so were able to present their biographies as 'making sense'. Self-production and responsibility for one's own fate are so fundamental to late modernity that self-determination is required in even the most testing situations. Under a neo-liberal imperative to improve and regulate the self, these young women were able to describe the ways in which unplanned motherhood had allowed them to learn from adversity and to redefine themselves as suitable parents. I do not want to suggest that there are no benefits in an approach to adversity that draws on discourses of individual resilience. It did allow these young women the opportunity to develop a positive interpretation of their experience of tremendously challenging sets of circumstances. However, the process did also seem to involve the minimising or shrugging off of unfairness and the profoundly gendered nature of their situation in preference for a focus on the role of personal determination and the virtue of a sacrificial stance to motherhood. I also suggest that there are relational consequences for such a tendency, where attitudes are hardened towards those who are not seen to have 'triumphed' over their circumstances in similar ways. This leads to some discussion about the dearth of empathic responses to other young mothers, taken up in the next section.

Criticism of the 'other' mother: "People like that shouldn't be having them"
A strong feature of the young women's talk about parenting was criticism of 'other' mothers. This criticism came predominantly, but not solely, from the young women who were mothering themselves. It commonly appeared to serve the purpose of justifying their own particular set of mothering circumstances or protecting themselves from the routine criticism that is directed at younger mothers through the 'welfare mother' discourse. Those young

women who had taken drugs prior to becoming a mother distinguished themselves from those still involved with drinking and drug-taking:

> Because one of the girls at [name of a parenting support service] yesterday, she was stoned off her face and her baby was crying and she didn't care and her sister was there with her and her sister was feeding it and her sister was playing with it. And she goes, "Come on let's go outside for a cigarette" and she just left her baby lying there on the ground and walked out. And the sister's like, "You can't leave the baby there", she goes, "Yes we can, he'll be all right" and she just left him there. Those people like that shouldn't be having them, they shouldn't be allowed, I think it's wrong (Melanie, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Furthermore, Melanie thought that parenting should be regulated to the degree that prospective mothers' homes be inspected while they are in hospital giving birth, in order to determine their suitability for parenting:

> Oh well I do think the government should, you know, if you're having a baby and you go to the hospital, they should go to your house and they should check you out and see how you live and see if you're on drugs and stuff. And then they should say you can have a kid or you can't. I think that's a big issue that the government should do (Melanie, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Several participants also voiced concern about the proposed baby bonus which was receiving much media attention in the run up to the 2004 general election when some of these interviews took place. Their disapproval of the scheme centred on the possibility that it would encourage the 'wrong' kind of mothers; young, poor, unmarried women who would supposedly become pregnant with the sole purpose of receiving the financial bonus. Several mothers outlined how they had spent previous baby bonuses or would spend any future ones. This usually involved paying off household goods, buying furniture and baby equipment such as changing tables and prams. They expressed doubt that every other young parent would spend such an amount so judiciously. Other criticism involved the amount of time and effort other mothers spent on their children. The following quote is from Jana, a young woman from a middle class family, married to a university postgraduate student. She was one of the mothers who expressed satisfaction with her parenting situation and who took enormous pride in the precocious skills of her toddler son. She had given up her degree course in its

second year when she became unexpectedly pregnant and preferred to remain out of the labour market and provide his daily care and stimulation, placing a high priority on the role she played in advancing his intellectual and social skills. Here she expresses implicitly class-based disapproval at the parenting skills of other mothers at a parenting support group she attended:

> They'd sit their kid in front of the telly for hours. Oh she watches this show, this show, this show and this show. It's like the child never left the television stuff and they're 6 months old and I think that's a bit wrong. I believe in actually parenting your child sort of thing. Since I've had him I've strived to be a good parent sort of thing. But yeah, just the way they'd talk, you know, that sort of thing, things they'd talk about, they weren't my sort of people (Jana, 21, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Several of the mothers who described the injustice and inaccuracy of being perceived as having become pregnant in order to receive parenting payments did, however, believe that *other* young women did this on a regular basis. When I reviewed the critical comments of 'other' mothers I was left with the impression of members of a much maligned social group jostling to avoid the extremes of censure of young mothers. The significant disapproval of welfare recipients and other disadvantaged groups is considered as a politics of resentment in the 'Neo-liberalism and the burdens of liberty' chapter.

A smaller number of young women who were not mothers also voiced criticism of younger women who were parenting. Their censure, when placed in the context of their own circumstances and aspirations, also appeared to serve the purpose of justifying their own position regarding parenting. For example, Nicole was one of four young women who stated that they did not plan to have children. She was also one of the participants who presented very career-focused aspirations. In the following extract she animatedly spoke at some length about a young woman she knew from school who, in her opinion, was guilty of underachievement and not advancing the cause of career-minded women because she was a sole parent with a modest retail job. The circumstances and behaviour of the single mother in question are interpreted within a framework of rugged individualism where the personal qualities of bravery and ambition are required:

> And yet she works in a newsagency, day by day, no aspirations but it's her prerogative. Has no goals about saving or further career moves. I mean, to everyone their own and I suppose

those women are just living life day by day and maybe Zara wants to be a mother and grow up with her son. I don't know. Maybe she just wants to get married one day and she'll live with her husband and be happy ever after. Everyone's different. But me, I just look at those situations and think, what a waste…So I think that there are women out there who miss out on opportunities that are put in front of them. But when they miss out on those opportunities, I think it takes a really brave woman to go looking for them. And I think that's what's happened, they're not brave enough to go out and actually start looking for work or looking to go back to uni or looking for a property or whatever. And so I think in that respect it's a misfortune but opposite to that there are a lot of women who are doing a lot of good for the female population (Nicole, 21, White Australian, Nurse).

It was clear from young women's accounts of mothering that it involved physical and mental changes and established considerable constraints on their social and employment opportunities. Entry into motherhood was most often unintentional and, for a quarter of the mothers, was marked by violence. They described an absence of freedom and in some cases, destabilised identities. Although they took the opportunity to describe these difficulties and their disappointments, their circumstances were presented within the framework of personal choice to be a mother and the primary carer for their children. In a neo-liberal framework, difficult circumstances are likely to denote personal failure rather than structural inequality. Therefore, through the definition of their circumstances as fortuitous and beneficial, they were able to present themselves as purposeful agents who had overcome adversity rather than as victims of unlucky or inequitable circumstances. The strictures invoked by mothering ideology meant their parenting credentials were precarious and that they needed to find ways to defend their position. This need to deflect judgement from themselves often involved criticism of other young mothers.

Parenting aspirations: "I just don't want to rush into it"

It is pertinent to investigate what young women's aspirations of motherhood are at a time of public concern about falling birth rates and the raising of many young women's expectations about what they might reasonably expect their life course to offer them in terms of their own personal development and achievements. I asked every young woman that I interviewed about her parenting aspirations. If the young woman currently had no children, I asked her if she did want to have children at some point. If the young woman was already mothering, I asked her if she planned to have more children. Of the twenty who already had biological children, seven planned to have more children and one planned to foster more children. Eight

did not plan to have more children and four were uncertain about whether or not they would have more children.

Of the thirty five who currently had no biological children, thirty one (89%) indicated they would like to have children at some point in the future. Twenty seven of the thirty one participants who planned to have children some day specified the wish to have more than one child. The four remaining participants who wanted children specified their wish to have one child only. Four participants (just over 7% of the total sample) stated that they did not plan to have children. Wicks and Mishra (1998) found similar results, with 92% of young women aged eighteen to twenty two wanting to have children by the age of thirty five and 8% stating that they did not plan to have children.

Firstly, considering the thirty one young women with aspirations to be mothers in the future, twenty seven of them specifically aspired to family sizes of two or more children. Only one of this group of twenty seven indicated that, although wanting more, she would be satisfied to have just one child. Significantly, she was an only child herself and her happy experience of this was referred to in her justification of this as an option. There were also strong indications of loyalty to intergenerational continuity, with many participants wanting to emulate the way that they had been raised and their experience of siblings. When I probed further about the young women's desires for families of two or more children, they consistently expressed a disinclination to have one child, often citing their own experiences of a large family for this preference and their beliefs that one child would be lonely and would miss out on the benefits associated with having siblings. This aspect of the data provides clear indication of many young women's wish to have children, suggesting that for many this is still a naturalised and inevitable step.

Two of the three young women who expressed a preference for having one child were in lesbian relationships, with one identifying as a lesbian and one as a bisexual woman. They both aspired to raising children within their current relationships but, due to predicted financial constraints and what they perceived to be the more difficult arrangements involved with becoming pregnant, they planned to have one child. The heterosexual young woman who stated a wish to have one child had been criticised for limiting her child-rearing aspirations:

And I would like to have one child and I get a lot of criticism for mentioning one child. Everyone's like, "that's really selfish". You know, one child, they get lonely and stuff like that. But it's about how you bring up children, isn't it (Gwen, 25, White Australian, Postgraduate Student)?

Accusations of selfishness were also levelled at two of the four young women who voiced their desire not to have children at all. Each of these four young women's stance on this issue was also greeted with disbelief by family, friends and colleagues, suggesting that, although they didn't expect to now, they would in fact 'settle down' and have children:

I don't want children. I'm too career-orientated, I'm too independent. Children and marriage completely freak me out, to the point where if I were to get pregnant now I do think there would be mental issues. I just can't handle the thought of it, if anyone makes a joke out of it or anything, I get very upset. I don't know why, like I don't know, I've always had children around me and stuff and my nephew, I completely adore him. But I just couldn't handle the fact of having to look after another child. And a lot of people say you might change your mind in the future but I've been pretty certain for a long time, I've never wanted to have children…I get called selfish because I don't want to look after someone else and because I say I want my career. I couldn't handle being a stay-at-home mum or anything so they say I want my career and I'm selfish, you don't want to bring in life (Alice, 20, White Australian, University Student).

In this extract, Alice expresses confusion about her strong desire to remain childless. Her disinclination to raise a child of her own and her preference to autonomously pursue career interests are not experienced as uncomplicated and understandable reasons; she is compelled to examine her feelings towards her nephew and other children in case her aspirations reveal a flaw in her capacity to be responsive to children. Romito writes that women who do not have children feel compelled to justify their decision and prove they can still be maternal and receptive (1997, 166). Although independence and individualism are typically regarded as admirable traits, in the context of discussion about remaining childless, such a preference is most likely to be interpreted as selfishness. It seems that in the issue of whether or not to have children, personal choice loses currency. A woman's personal preference to remain childless is not widely found to be acceptable.

Of course, some women who state a disinclination to have children will go on to do so (Weston and Qu 2001). What is interesting, however, is the lack of credibility that is given to

the initial assertion of the desire to remain childless. In the following extract, Julianne describes how her plans to remain childless have been altered by the recent experience of becoming involved in a relationship, with the assumption that children would be a natural step "at some stage along the way". Amidst this destabilising of her earlier plans, however, she is keen to establish some boundaries to the conditions of raising children:

> Joanne: So you mentioned that you have started to think about having children, have you thought about when that might be?
>
> Julianne: Not soon. Like not soon at all. Like, in like two years maybe. It's just that I've never thought of it. A couple of years ago I said, "no way, I'm never having kids. It was just a thing. No. Never want kids. And then I haven't thought about it, I just didn't think about it for a while and then now, you get into a relationship and start to think about settling down and just being with one person for the rest of your life. And kids are probably a plan at some stage along the way. But I just don't want to rush into it, at all. I want to be totally prepared and financially set and want the kids to be totally planned. I don't want to be rushing into things (Julianne, 21, White Australian, Nurse).

Although a majority of young women did plan to have children, this was not always expressed as a straightforward desire. The majority of the young women not parenting were involved in or had some plans for higher education and a career. All the young women who aspired to motherhood expected to combine this with paid work, with most expressing a preference to be able to spend more time with their children before they reached school age. Against this widely reported desire for children, some cautious concerns were expressed about the difficulties they might face in combining their planned career with raising children, particularly in terms of their desire to delay having children until they felt financially secure, had travelled, met a partner and established their career. Some were uncomfortably aware of age limits to their fertility and tentatively shared the fear that it might be hard to "fit it all in". Additionally, many were not keen to be too old when they finally did raise children. Hugh Mackay also described the unpopular idea of being an older parent (1997). Many young women wanted to mother when they were old enough to be sure they are ready to settle down but not so old that they would feel remote from their children. The median age of Australian mothers on their first birth has risen to 30 in Australian Bureau of Statistics figures for 2001 (ABS Various years). This has clear implications for the spacing of children and fertility of those young women who want larger sized families following the establishment of financial and career stability.

For women with educational capital, there are an increased range of options which compete with having a child. The overwhelming parenting aspiration of the childless young women in this research was to have children after having availed themselves of the opportunity to develop a career, travel and found a partner. The decision about when to "settle down" (which was how most of these young women described the potential switch to family concerns) indicated the desire by many for a longer transition to adulthood. It was common to hear remarks about young women not feeling "ready" or "responsible enough" to regard motherhood as an imminent goal. Such self-interested pursuits as travel and work ambitions were often contrasted with the implicit knowledge that motherhood would constrict such behaviour. Here, Emma struggles with the derogatory spin that is often associated with self-interested behaviour:

> I think I'm quite selfish as a person. Not selfish like oh I won't do that for you but I think I want, myself, to have things done before I can worry about other people (Emma, 20, White Australian, University Student)

Further ambiguities about the extent of young women's untethering from traditional notions of motherhood were revealed as the young women described how they would like to "become their own person" before motherhood (with the implication being that this would be more difficult afterwards) or that they would be happy to settle down providing they had "been a bit independent" first. In the following extract, even as Lacey expands on this view of the new freedoms available to some women, it is informed by notions of 'good' mothering because once women have children their personal ambitions are more likely to be interpreted as selfish and uncaring:

> I think we need to like experience everything before we have kids otherwise we turn out like, we'd be like one of those middle aged mothers that wants to leave their kids at home or ship them off so they can go off travelling and do all the things they didn't get to do when they were younger. Wouldn't want to neglect my children to do things I hadn't done before (Lacey, 18, White Australian, Restaurant Worker).

Although I would suggest that the changing influences on whether or not to have children now make it an area of ambiguity and contestation, the desire to have children has not simply disappeared in individualized and rationalised western society. Beck (2002) suggests that it

acquires a new importance as people search for warmth and meaning in life, so women are torn between the wish to have a child and the wish for independence and a "bit of a life of their own".

Expectations of domesticity: "I just want equality"

Young women who were not mothering but planned to have children overwhelmingly expressed aspirations for an egalitarian relationship in which housework and childcare were negotiated and shared rather than imposed as the woman's sole duty. This follows Bulbeck's finding that young women are imagining the kind of domestic environments that will support the 'double dream' (1997, 184).

> And he [her boyfriend] says when you start having kids, it will be equal. We'll share the work (Jasmine, 22, Torres Strait Islander, University Student).

> I really, personally, I'd really like, I know I'd be really happy to be married and work maybe just 4 days a week then I've got my independence still, but I'm happy to be mum at home. But not the mum that primarily you're 100% in charge, you're raising, it's all equal between the husband and wife (Clare, 24, White Australian, Veterinary Nurse).

> But if I got into a relationship I'd have to be with someone who wants kids as well, but wouldn't make me feel insignificant, like put me in a position where they say, "oh you've got to stay home and look after the kids", I wouldn't want that. As much as I'd love to do it I'd still want to have a job and maintain what *I've earned*, which is through university, like I've put in all the hours, I still want to carry out what I've done. I just want equality. If I do cook and clean he does have to wash up, kind of thing…I don't think I'd like the thought of being trapped (Holly, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Only one young woman dissented from this line of opinion. In response to my question about her future expectations for how household work and child care would be provided, she outlined her belief in the value of Christian doctrine that emphasised men's role as women's defenders and head of the family:

> I've got a lot to say to this. You've picked the right person to interview. Because I think it always comes back to a Christian, being brought up that way. In the bible it strongly says that the man's the leader of the household. And Dale [her boyfriend] plays that role perfectly. I

think that the man should protect the woman and provide for the woman (Lucy, 18, White Australian, Hairdresser).

The practice of domesticity: "He does a lot of the yard work"

Feminist analysis of men's and women's domestic arrangements has exposed motherhood and other forms of domestic work, as socially constructed, as services rendered to men that free them to pursue more self-interested activities and which support the operation of capitalism (Delphy and Leonard 1992; Maushart 2001; Mies 1998; Waring 1988). Barbara Ehrenreich suggests that housework is fundamentally embedded in degrading relationships because "making a mess that another person has to deal with is to exert domination in a silent and intimate form" (2003, 88). Despite the optimistic hopes of many of the young women, research about the contribution that men make to domestic work in their homes has consistently demonstrated its disproportionately low nature compared to the contributions of their female partners, despite the fact that the women are also in the labour force (Bittman and Pixley 1997; Craig 2005; Dempsey 2000; McMahon 1999; Pocock 2003; Sullivan 2000).

Although I had remained sceptical about what I had regarded as overly optimistic and exaggerated accounts of men becoming more involved in domestic work, I was, nevertheless, quite surprised at the extent of the reported intransigence of some of the young women's partners on this issue. The majority of young women who were mothers staying home to provide child care stated that they did the majority of the housework, with the unanimous finding that their partners' contributions mostly consisted of mowing the grass. Men carry out more outside tasks which have been shown repeatedly to take much less time than inside tasks or childcare (Dempsey 2000 and Sullivan 2000). In general, the uneven division of labour was described in personal choice terms and represented as a practical rather than a gender issue that suited the particular circumstances of their family or relationship. There was general acceptance that this was the most convenient arrangement while their partners were employed outside of the home. Some participants stated that they chose to do the majority of the housework because they did it better than their male partners and they preferred not to have to re-do it following what they perceived to be inferior efforts. Such domestic arrangements were commonly described as having been negotiated rather than imposed on the young women:

He does the washing up and the mowing and I do the rest. I hate the dishes. One thing I refuse to do. I cook and I do the washing and that so yeah. It's usually just he does the mowing and

the washing up. Yeah. He works all day as well. Don't really push him to do much else (Thea, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child and pregnant).

I choose to do it because I know I do it better and it's not worth the effort to nag him. Just causes a fight. My choice to do it I guess, yeah (Suzanne, 21, White Australian, Administrator).

No-one tells me to clean up! Up to me. But it's easier to do it if you're home with the kids and they [men} don't do it no good anyways and it just causes a fight (Molly, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Home Duties, 4 children).

The young women were conscious that it was reasonable to expect equitable behaviour in relationships. For the majority of parenting young women, these expectations were obviously not matched by their reality. The knowledge that equitable relationships were possible, and indeed expected in order not to conform to a discredited and old-fashioned form of traditional femininity, seemed to necessitate an obligation to present their relationships as possessing some features of equality; hence the suggestion of domestic negotiation rather than imposition. This process was somewhat reminiscent of Michael Bittman and Jocelyn Pixley's 'pseudomutuality', where domestic conditions that subordinate women occur in a framework of ostensible commitment to equality (1997, 151). Lynn Jamieson (1999) suggests that women put energy into sustaining a sense of equality in order to manage the gap between the experience of inequality and new cultural ideals of intimacy. Caroline Dryden's (1999) study of married couples also found on obligation on the part of women to construct their relationships with men as equal. They 'balanced the books' by toning down their complaints about unfairness in order to create some semblance of equality. When it was not possible for participants in this research to interpret circumstances in this way, when unfairness became too blatant, the young women's descriptions of the injustice always contained details of how they had challenged or resisted it, because they knew it was wrong, they weren't to be duped. The following two examples demonstrate how their narratives in such instances would recall the exact arguments and phrases they had used in order to enhance the credibility of how they had resisted the inequality:

He does a lot of the yard work. Like he'll mow the lawn, he'll do all this. He feels, which we have a huge fight on, he feels that because he brings in the money, when he comes home every day, that the house should be clean and the washing should be done. And I say to him, "I want you to spend a day with Liam by yourself". I said "I want to see you clean up and

then let Liam trash it". I said "I clean up, I do, I clean up every night" (Courtney, 21, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Like, I mean my partner still says to me "get in the kitchen and cook me some dinner". I'm like, "do it yourself". Like I'm a strong believer in fifty-fifty and I make him do his part of the washing as well. I won't fold his clothes. I leave them there for him to put them away. Because a lot of men still think, and I find it quite bizarre, how a guy who's twenty four still thinks that a woman should cook breakfast for him and make his lunch when they've been shown, that for ages now, that that's not the case and that they are quite capable of doing it themselves and they know they can do it. It's just male laziness. But also conditioned through their family as well…I get my back up all the time when my partner says to me "it's a woman's job to clean the bathroom". I said "no, you do your arse in here, you learn how to clean the bathroom because it's your mess" (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser).

The final quote from Jennifer also illustrates the way in which socialisation such as family "conditioning" and sexual characteristics, "male laziness" were drawn on to explain any inequality. It was harder for young women to present inequitable arrangements as unproblematic when it was apparent that men's behaviour did not change if they were not at work, as occurred occasionally with self-employed Finn. In the next extract, Peta describes the division of domestic labour as "fair enough" when Finn is out at work, but demonstrates her angry resistance to the injustice of his inactivity when he isn't:

I mainly do the majority of the housework. Finn probably mows the lawn once every blue moon but he won't do the inside and outside housework. Even taking out the rubbish, I do that. Which is fair enough because he works during the week. I don't mind doing it but when he doesn't work I get really frustrated, say, "You're not working, get off your arse and pick up something" (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Conflict occurred in some relationships when the uneven contribution to housework continued despite a young woman's full-time paid employment. In the following excerpt from my interview with Gina, she identifies manifest domestic inequity as a contributing cause of her relationship breakdown. Similar to Peta's example above, injustice is exposed when men are not at work and neglect housework. Gina recognises that his attitudes are out of date as a "very traditional person" but doesn't finish that statement of "The woman has her (place?)" and tones down the impact of this revelation by stating that his beliefs weren't imposed in a "pushy" or "arrogant" manner. The extent of the asymmetry is minimised by

"he would do things here and there" and "little things like that". Again, this narrative is vividly illustrated by details of her defiance:

> That's what, in the end, pushed the relationship to break down because Steve wasn't, he had had me at home doing everything for him for the last five years, for me to be working five days a week and dropping his kid off. Like I'd be dropping Tim [their child] off, going to work, finishing work, going and picking him up, coming home and going, shit, look at my house. Steve's a shift worker so a couple of days a week he was here so I'd walk in and go, what have you done all day? Like just trash my house. There'd be the washing up before you'd cook dinner and by the time you were in bed I was just like, what am I doing? This is just way too much to take on…Oh no, no he was a very traditional person. Like the woman has her, he wasn't overly, he wasn't arrogant with that but I knew that that's what his beliefs were. So he's not sort of pushy about it and he would do things here and there. When it got to that point like he'd put his own work uniforms on or something like that. It's like, yeah, good on you, you washed your own friggin' uniforms! Do you want a badge now? Look I washed my own uniforms today. Wow, that's great, what about the washing up that's sitting there? Like little things like that. So I think that was a huge issue in our relationship towards the end because for the first time I'm going, hang on a second, I've got a job and a life now too (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Helen Wilkinson and Geoff Mulgan's *Freedom's Children*, as the title suggests, describes an unravelling of gendered traditions such as the division of labour (1995). In describing a trend towards greater equality in the home, including more flexible approaches to parenting, the authors suggest that the rate of change is so strong that it might be expected that the gender gap will have disappeared within a decade or so; a claim that it is clearly possible to refute, almost ten years after publication. Barbara Pocock's (2004) research with young people found that young men hope that they will find partners who will do the housework and ignore or accept their limited contribution. While Sue Sharpe (1994) found that some men supported equality and changes to men's behaviour, many were sceptical or opposed such ideas. Such mismatches in attitudes and expectations augur badly for future heterosexual relationships. Reports from participants involved with this research do not give cause for optimism about the increased involvement of the majority of men with parenting or their equitable contribution to domestic work. The findings suggest that what has changed is the *expectation* of fairness in domestic matters, the requirement to challenge its absence and the need to employ strategies to meet the social obligation of constructing domestic relationships as equal.

Chapter summary and conclusion

At times during my conversations with young women about parenting, I was aware of what I can only describe as a gulf between those who are already mothers and those who are not. Despite the difficult childhoods and demanding circumstances experienced by the majority of the young mothers, the framework for much of their thinking about and experience of domestic life and motherhood is one of personal choice and individualised resilience. Despite this, their conceptions of motherhood are heavily influenced by ideology that positions it as an essentially sacred and sacrificing endeavour which devolves naturally and is carried out instinctively by women. These requirements are fundamentally incongruous with the self-interested competitive individualism valorised by neo-liberalism.

A strong majority of the participants in this research who were not already mothers demonstrated an enduring aspiration to raise children following a period of concentration on educational, employment and leisure pursuits. Their commitment to child-rearing was further evidenced in their disinclination for one child and the desire for several children in order to emulate family experiences of their own. Although parenting aspirations were expressed in ways that presented it as an inevitable and naturalised desire, there was also evidence of difficulties associated with the way in which the previously straightforward expectation to have children has become subject to more reflexive consideration and planning and must compete with alternative possibilities and imperatives for those with education.

In the following chapter about the young women's educational and employment experiences and aspirations, the incompatibility of mothering (as experienced and aspired to) and public sphere involvement is further explored to reveal tension in the expectation of mobility, flexibility and self-actualising achievement in late modernity for young women.

Chapter five

Education and employment

Introduction

The material and ideological changes to the lives of girls and young women have been particularly apparent in the areas of education and employment. Industrial and economic changes have altered the outlooks and opportunities available to girls and young women and these changes have been paralleled by an increasing emphasis on individualisation (in particular, personal transformation and flexibility) and choice. A consideration of the ways in which young women's achievements in education and employment have been invoked in popular and scholarly work formed a part of the literature review to this thesis. The labour market, perhaps more than any other area, is regarded as less determined by gender and class and more by self-design and individual performance. Beck and Beck-Gernsheim assert that gender at work is self-fashioned to the degree that it is "decidable down to the small print" (1995, 29). This is widely regarded as providing grounds for the assertion that women now have, or are close to having, equal status with men in public life.

This chapter is concerned with the education and employment experiences and aspirations described by the participants in this research. I asked each young woman about her current occupation (whether it was mothering, studying, paid employment or looking for work or a combination of these), how she came to be doing it and what her occupational aspirations were. These lines of discussion elicited experiential information about how young women encounter education and the labour market and how they make decisions related to these arenas. This chapter explores the validity of the feminisation thesis as applied to the young women in this research through a consideration of the ways in which their educational and employment experiences provide evidence for fluidity and self-creation or structural determinants. It also explores the congruence of their behaviour and stated preferences with the competitive rationality of economic actors in neo-liberal theory.

Educational and employment demographics

As I outlined in the previous chapter, unhappy and disadvantaged home lives were often linked with limited educational qualifications and early parenthood. As can be seen in Table 5.1, there is a clear association between being a mother and level of educational attainment. Only a quarter of the young mothers had education that exceeded a Year 12 level. This

finding was reversed for the participants without children. Of the thirty five young women who were not mothers, over half (seventeen) were currently enrolled in university degree courses (including one participant who was doing a second undergraduate degree), two were enrolled in postgraduate courses and a further five had already completed a university degree. Two were enrolled in TAFE (Technical and Further Education) vocational courses. Therefore, just under three quarters of the young women who were not mothers were either currently enrolled in or had successfully completed higher education qualifications compared with a quarter of the mothers.

Table 5.1 Educational levels attained by young mothers and young women without children

Educational level	Mothers	Young women without children	Totals
Year 9	4	2	6
Year 10	8	0	8
Year 12	2	3	5
Year 12 + discontinued degree course	1	4	5
TAFE enrolment or qualification	0	2	2
Enrolled in university degree course	4	17	21
University Graduate	1	5	6
Postgraduate Student	0	2	2
Totals	**20**	**35**	**55**

Chi square = 23.5   df= 7 p<0.01

Seven of the women without children had education to a Year 12 level and four of these had started university courses but had not gone on to complete them. At least two of these young women planned to return to study for a university degree a second time and another young woman with education to Year 12 planned to enrol at university the following year. In fact, only one participant without children who had education to Year 12 said she had no interest in further study. Only two of the participants who did not have children had no formal educational qualifications (both had very difficult childhoods, left school before completing Year 10 and were currently unemployed). Twenty seven of the thirty five women without

children were from white Australian backgrounds, three were Aboriginal, one was a Torres Strait Islander and one an Australian South Sea Islander. One was Fijian Indian, one Vietnamese Australian and one Filipino Australian.

In terms of employment, two of the mothers were employed part-time, one as an administrator and one as a care worker (who was also studying for a degree through distance education). Ten of the young women without children were in full-time employment; two were hairdressers, three were nurses, four had administrative jobs and one part-owned and ran a small business. The two young women without children who had education to a Year 9 level were both unemployed and actively seeking work.

The intersection of parenting, education and employment

Recent Australian research has demonstrated the continued importance of class to educational outcomes and post-school trajectories (for example Lamb 1998 and Teese 2000). In Australia, socio-economic status is usually judged by a number of factors such as parents' occupation and education, locality and income level. It is one of the strongest predictors of school achievement, retention rates, continuation to higher education and the types of courses, careers and universities that are entered. Young women's educational and employment experiences in this sample reflect a significant polarisation such as that identified by Probert and Macdonald (1997). They contend that there is a deepening divide between the young women who defer motherhood, and have the capacity and interest to pursue further education and a career, and young women who have had negative school experiences and have become mothers as teenagers or in their early twenties. Mark Wooden and Adriana VandenHeuvel (1999) also argue that the labour market remains strongly divided along gender lines. They assert that this division is predominantly created by young women's involvement in parenting because their levels of participation are strikingly similar to those of young men otherwise. Many more women than men in their early twenties have dependent children, 19% compared to almost 6% (McClelland and Macdonald 1999).

This research found no evidence to suggest that those young women from disadvantaged backgrounds looked only to the mothering role for status or fulfilment. Although, as reported in the previous chapter, young mothers emphasised their commitment to parenting and reconstructed its unplanned nature as ultimately fortuitous, none of the young mothers identified 'choosing' motherhood as an alternative to education or employment. The majority

of the mothers had limited educational qualifications and nearly all described having hated school. However, this had not prevented many of them from attempting to improve their educational credentials following their early exit from school. Both Toni and Sophie had left school at age fifteen but had subsequently, although unsuccessfully, attempted to complete their Year 10 certificate. They were strongly motivated to demonstrate their worth and to set a positive example to their children through the status of being a worker rather than 'just a housewife'. Toni was a single mother to a year-old baby and described her plan to save up to do a beautician's course rather than rely on welfare benefits:

> I'd rather have a job, though. It's more money and you feel better if you're working at something (Toni, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

> No woman wants to die just being a home mum and go, oh, what have you done all your life? Ask your children what your mum's been doing, what did your mum do all her life? Oh Mum just stayed home looking after us kids, she didn't do nothing. I want to sort of like show my kids that I can do something. I can go and work. I can get a job and like bring them stuff home and know that I've done it for myself and that my other half didn't, didn't buy it or nothing, but I've done it (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Many of the young mothers in this research aspired to or had experience in a narrow band of occupations; childcare, retail and food handling. Several described their current unsuccessful attempts to secure employment in the retail sector, in particular. The divide between the parenting and non-parenting young women was no more apparent than when the young mothers described their aspirations for the same jobs that were being worked by the participants who were at university. Such employment provided them with money to spend on clothes and going out and their parents financed their living expenses.

Damned if you do, don't or can't: Young mothers, employment and studying

For the young women who were already mothering, the combination of parenting and employment was fraught with difficulties and characterised by material and emotional constraints. Only two of the twenty mothers amongst my research participants were currently in the labour market and both worked part-time. Four were studying for degrees (including one of the mothers who worked part-time). The young mothers variously described difficulties of combining, or attempting to combine their family and employment aspirations. Rosie described the way that her culture's expectation that women would primarily take on a

nurturing role and her financial need to work had caused conflict in her family. Her compromise of working three days a week meant that she had found a way to try and satisfy each responsibility:

> We're taught that our family, we have to run our family and that's our main position. And me being working and Len's family is so against it from when I first had Lily, she was in day care so that was a big thing because I wasn't at home looking after my babies. They were sending family down to come and look after them…So having those two days at home, I love my cooking and cleaning and picking up after them. That makes me feel culturally appropriate, being home two days a week rather than working full time. And it seems to make things happy between both cultures. Plus we need the money (Rosie, 25, Torres Strait Islander, Home Duties and Part Time Administrator, 3 children)**.**

Most of the mothers who were in the labour market or studying described their perception of the stigma attached to the use of childcare. Susie, who prided herself on toughness in the face of criticism from her family, confided her experience of the pressure to present as a responsible and caring mother whist simultaneously leaving her child with others:

> I do look for people's approval, in some ways. When I go to the day care centre and stuff like that, it's more when I go in there, I try and act like a good mother (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student and Home Duties, 1 child).

Many young mothers felt guilty about leaving their children at child care facilities, used them reluctantly and often described them as a necessary evil. Here, Gina's description of unease at her previous use of child care focuses on the assumption that she is relinquishing her duty to personally care for her child. This diminishes the pleasure of independence and identity that accompanied being employed:

> You sort of feel like you're, what's the word I'm looking for? You're neglecting their needs, to a degree. That's where I got to the point where I was like, I've had this child, it is my responsibility to go, to raise him and it doesn't feel right to be dropping him with somebody else everyday. I mean, I'd love to get back to work. It's good to be out of the house and be that little bit independent and go oh wow I'm a person. Like and these people don't own me. But in the same respect it's sort of like, where do your responsibilities lie, sort of thing (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children)?

However, as the following extracts illustrate, mothers also needed to defend their decisions not to take up employment while their children were very young. Gina had left school before finishing Year 10 and was particularly sensitive to the pressure felt by young mothers to demonstrate the educational and employment ambition and competence now required of young women These findings echo Barbara Pocock's identification of the "cross criticism" that mothers of young children face where they feel guilty if they have a job and guilty or inadequate if they don't (2003, 76).

> I felt huge pressure to be like a working mum. Because I was so young it was like, even though you've had a kid, well hang on a second what about a job? And I think Steve [her ex-partner] sort of pushed that a little bit too. Like I wouldn't say he had an expectation that I work but he always kind of silently or subconsciously pushed it. Like I tried to do a few different courses and just didn't have the support to do it… Just everything I've attempted to do, I feel I've wasted like the time I should have been enjoying with him on these expectations that society have for you, that you should be out there getting an education and going to work even though you're trying to raise a kid (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Courtney also described the negative judgement she was experiencing as a young mother providing full-time care at home for her child rather than demonstrating visible participation in the labour market:

> You've got to go out and get a job, you've got to go out and do this, you've got make sure he has this. People who just jump on your back all the time are just weighing you down even more so you don't wanna get out there and do it. There's too much on people as it is. Like just not even young mums, on people themselves. And being a young mum, I think, doubles it because everyone's thinking well you have to do this for your child, you have to make sure they have this when they're older, you've got make sure you've got money if they want to go to uni. God just let me have the first year with him alone please before you come and jump on my back about all these things I need to do (Courtney, 21, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

The two mothers who were currently combining parenting with other occupations described the need to elaborately plan and organise their domestic and occupational responsibilities in order to have any success in balancing the demands on their time and energy. For other young mothers, concerns centred on their thwarted attempts to combine employment with

parenting. Single mothers described job interviews which interrogated their parental status and childcare arrangements. Others were on waiting lists for funded childcare places and described employment and training opportunities that they had missed through a lack of childcare support. For others, their lack of education and training rendered them marginalised in the labour market. Sophie described her fruitless search for work in childcare centres and supermarkets:

> Even though you only went through to Year 9 they should still give people a go. And it's even harder now for me because I've got children. And no one wants, they just said, "Oh well, how are you gonna look after your children if you're working here?" (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Future parenting and employment: "I'd want to be around as much as I could"

In this research, all the young women who aspired to motherhood (89% per cent of the women who currently did not have children) expected to combine this with paid work. This strong allegiance to both career and family roles appears to represent an increased commitment to employment with no reduction of commitment to motherhood. The participation rates of mothers of young children in the labour force have been steadily increasing. Michael Pusey (2003) points out that the structural social change that most closely coincides with recent economic reform is the large increase in the proportion of women with children in the workforce and that under these conditions, there is increasing acceptance that two partners are in the labour market. Similarly, Probert found that the most unequivocal support for mother's employment was referred to in terms of the need for two incomes to maintain contemporary living standards (2002, 12). She notes, however, that if support for mothers' employment is expressed predominantly in terms of the needs of families and households, then perhaps this represents only a fractional shift in attitude, driven by financial needs.

Many of the participants articulated support for mothers' employment based on financial considerations, with the young women who were already mothers being more likely to mention the financial imperatives for this. The overwhelming majority of young women in this research also described the pursuit of a career as a vehicle for self-expression and satisfaction, a way of fulfilling their personal potential and establishing a crucial part of their identity. They commonly stated that it was important for them to be happy in their job. This

finding echoes observations by Angela Barns (2003), Anne Machung (1989) and Peggy Orenstein (2000) about the importance of employment to women's identity and personal fulfilment. The young women with higher levels of education also expressed value for employment that offered flexibility, variety and opportunities to relocate or travel. For these young women, salary and economic advancement were most often identified as lesser issues, perhaps reflecting the way in which they often conceived of themselves as a secondary earner to a future partner as is reported later in this chapter. Generally there was little mention of financial considerations, and limited mention of the power or economic status that might accrue from their career choices.

This research also found evidence to suggest that young women who place a high value on paid employment may still expect to curtail their career involvement because of competing family responsibilities:

> I think if I have kids, for the first probably couple of years I would hopefully be doing, either be doing work that I could work from home, like my writing, or be doing undemanding part-time work. I definitely wouldn't go back to the full-time workforce ASAP [as soon as possible]. I think I'd want to take the whole maternity leave. Like when the child or the children were older, about I think probably kindergarten age, I would edge more and more into work. But yeah I think for me I'd personally want to be around as much as I could, without cutting everything out of my life 'cos I think the balance is important but the children would be the priority (Mary, 24, Vietnamese Australian, Artist).

Sharne was a university graduate with a young daughter who was planning to have more children in the near future. She also intended to begin a postgraduate course and in the following extracts shares her observations about her changing priorities since becoming a mother and her attempts to reconcile her desire to parent with her pursuit of a career:

> I don't want to be someone who has one or the other. I want to have both. Because before I had Emily I was very, I was quite career-orientated. I really did want to go out and have a big career and everything and then, um, yeah. But now that I've had her I don't want to put her into that [childcare]. I'd miss her too much, so yeah (Sharne, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Sharne's comments illustrate the general disinclination to anticipate using child care in any substantial way that emerged from the aspiring mothers. She goes on to describe her plans to shape her career aspirations around family responsibilities:

> Joanne: And the idea is to be self-employed. Tell me about why you want that.
>
> Sharne: Yes, the main reason is because of Emily and if I have more children, is that I don't want to be someone who puts them into day care full-time and they're at day care five days a week and we see them at nights and on the weekends. I mean I've had children because I want them in my life and I want them to be around me. So the main reason there is that self-employment will give me the flexibility to have them with me most of the time and you know every now and then if they have to go to day care or they might have to go to, stay with someone else. But most, the majority of the time they would be with me (Sharne, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Most of the young women who wanted to have children anticipated fitting their child rearing around their careers with many of these participants expecting to interrupt their careers for significant periods of time (usually about five years) in order to care for their children. Pocock (2003) also found that most mothers want to spend part of the very early years with their children. Many of the young women's comments about combining employment and parenthood revealed an underlying assumption that although future partners might be involved to some degree with child care responsibilities, they imagined themselves as the primary carer who altered their employment commitments accordingly. This support the finding in another research study by Barbara Pocock that young women imagine working around their caring responsibilities while the reserve is true for young men (2004). Other research has found that university students who expressed a high value for their career aspirations usually expected to compromise their careers to accommodate family responsibilities (Davey 1998). Monique, who at other times in her interview talked about the inevitability of her pathway to university and her planned career as a pharmacist, describes how she intends to interrupt this career in order to care for her children in their first years before school. It is notable, too, that she positions her salary as a secondary income that provides additional resources for her children and some financial freedom (although not independence, presumably) for herself.

> Yeah. I would take a while off when the child is born but I don't want to sort of sit at home the whole time. Because they'll be at school and stuff like that and you'd be sitting at home

and I just don't want to do that, I'd rather be out there earning some money so that my kids could do what they like, like learn sports and musical instruments and stuff and I wouldn't have to be dependent on my husband for his money. So I think I would definitely keep working (Monique, 18, White Australian, University Student, Pharmacy).

The findings of this research indicate that the values of most young women have evolved to include a high regard for both family and employment. This challenges the quantitative research findings of sociologist Catherine Hakim (2000), who argues that the gendered composition of occupational structure and career patterns reflect women's personality-based preferences for career or family orientations. Barbara Pocock (2003) is also critical of Hakim's preference theory and its reliance on rigid personality groupings. She argues that women's labour is better explained as transitions between paid work and caring roles (2003, 32), which is also indicated in this research. Involvement in the public sphere was a consistent desire for participants in this study, who often associated having a job with 'having a life' or being a 'real person'. Despite their stated aspirations for both career and motherhood, most of the young women in this research still expected to follow the traditional pattern of discontinuous participation in the labour force in order to care for their children. While this expectation may reflect the priority of family concerns for some women, for others it seems to suggest practical and emotional constraints such as the lack of change in men's fathering behaviour and inadequate institutional responses to women's desire to combine parenting and employment. It is possible that the career and family expectations of many of these women are incompatible and therefore unrealistic. The implications of these aspirations are examined against the contemporary Australian social policy climate in 'Make your own way there: Social policy and the neo-liberal agenda'.

The fact that, for the more highly educated participants, work is discussed primarily in terms of personal fulfilment rather than economic necessity or economic *independence* for women can be interpreted as an example of the way in which young women are enjoying expanded options and free choice. To a degree, this is an accurate appraisal because many of the young women in this sample were certainly formulating ideas about their future occupations within an expanded framework of choice (although there are gendered parameters to this framework of choice, as I argue in further sections of this chapter). However, the assumption of their earning capacity as a secondary supplement to that of a male partner still remains strong for the majority young women and it is this imagined male income that underpins their 'choice'

to interrupt their career in order to provide care for children. The one lesbian and one bisexual woman who were both in relationships with women also explicitly stated that they wanted to raise a child with their partner and they expected to share financial and practical responsibilities. The primary conception of work as a vehicle for self-expression and satisfaction may also mean that it is more likely to be measured against other obligations that could be regarded as personally fulfilling. Given the traditionally sacrificial nature of mothering, the inherent satisfaction it is supposed to engender and the intolerance of a choice to remain childless, women may be more inclined to relinquish (either permanently or temporarily) their employment for parenting responsibilities. I suggest that women's planned occupational flexibility may be best viewed as a an illustration of the way in which young women today make decisions which are guided by personal preferences and are based on notions of freedom but which are still bounded by intransigent historically and culturally imposed limits and assumptions.

Identification of constraints: Speed bumps ahead?

The young women who were not currently mothering demonstrated high levels of optimism about the likelihood of combining their career and family aspirations, supporting the findings of Wicks and Mishra (1998). It was notable that the majority lacked specific strategies for implementing this expectation, many stating that they had not given the issue too much thought or that it seemed too far in the future to warrant serious consideration. When young women did identify limitations to women's employment outcomes, they tended to make reference to depersonalised or hypothetical examples of blatant unfairness. Such examples included limited numbers of women in the very highest positions of business and politics and the prohibition of women working in the front line of military services. However, there was little awareness of the availability or limits to maternity leave provision in Australia, with most of these young women expressing vague intentions to use maternity leave schemes if they could. The aspiration for discontinuous labour market participation was underpinned by the imagined presence of a (usually male) partner. There was no reference to fatherhood as inhibiting access to education and work, but an expectation that, when home, fathers should share child care and domestic work. There did emerge, however, occasional sneaking suspicions about potential problems. Following an anecdote about the work/life balance problems of a female colleague, I asked Gwen how she envisioned reconciling her own wish to have a child with her desire to pursue a career in medical research. Her observation that

there may be some "speed bumps" ahead characterised such tentative identification of future constraints:

> Joanne: Have you done any thinking about that yet or is it too distant?
> Gwen: A little bit I guess but yeah probably a bit too distant at the moment. Maybe there's some speed bumps ahead.
> Joanne: Deal with them when they come up, hey?
> Gwen: I guess so, yeah. I'll probably go and think about it now (Gwen, 25, White Australian, Postgraduate Science Student).

Gwen's rueful comment that she would probably mull over our conversation at a later time suggests that she had not considered this issue a great deal previously. A possible shift in her consciousness resulted from this query about her future goals.

A few participants were already conscious that their plans for large families and their desire to be 'hands-on' parents were not necessarily compatible with their career ambitions. Bella wanted four children and described how she had already begun to modify the timing of when she envisaged this happening:

> I always wanted kids but I always said that I'd have them at like twenty six or twenty seven and then when I turned twenty, I was like, oh my god, that's six or seven years away, I'm not having kids then! So I've sort of changed it to like thirty but then I sort of said if I don't have kids by the time I'm thirty I'm not going to have kids at all. Because, oh, my career and I want to, you know how I said my parents had it hard? I want to be established within my career, have a house and a car and, I guess all of those material things. And maybe establish some sort of savings for my kids if they choose to go to university or travel, or whatever they want to do. Um, I always said that I wanted to do that, but I always said I wanted to have kids at twenty seven, so! I didn't think it was really realistic so I said, if I don't have kids by the time I'm thirty, I won't have them at all. And now that I'm twenty, I'm like well that's ten years away, maybe thirty two, thirty three! (Laughter) So I'm pushing it back (Bella, 20, Aboriginal Australian, University Student).

Beth was worried that the demands of completing her PhD and establishing a career would prevent her being able to fulfil her wish to have children but was determined that her focus on work would not divert her from a strongly-held wish to have children:

I'm just scared that I'll get side-tracked. I don't, I'm not scared that I won't finish things…I'm afraid I'll lose sight of what is really going to make me happy. That's why I sort of set myself an age limit on kids. Because I know that kids make me happy (Beth, 23, White Australian, Postgraduate Science Student).

Feminist-informed research has highlighted the challenges mothers face in combining their role as family carer with labour market involvement. A strong concern identified by Barbara Pocock (2003) was the disjunction between changes to women's working lives and cultural and institutional responses. She argues that the changes in women's expectations and behaviour have not been compensated for in either cultural attitudes or social or organisational support. In her analysis of labour force participation in couple families with children, Pocock demonstrates that men's patterns show very little change while women's follow largely traditional lines (2003). The current Work and Family Test Case from the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) contends that Australia is second last among the western OECD nations on work and family balance issues (ACTU 2004).

The parameters and problems of choice

Attitudes to education and training: "I just always thought, you leave school, you go to uni"

I have already made reference to the tendency for young mothers from disadvantaged backgrounds to describe negative school experiences. A third of the young mothers described their involvement in raising their siblings and the negative effect that this had on their schooling. Rebecca had missed a lot of school because she took responsibility for her mother (who she described as an alcoholic) and nine siblings. She found it hard to attend to her learning when she was at school because she worried about her family's welfare. She left school in Year 9 and was currently attending evening classes at TAFE in order to achieve her Year 10 and Year 12 certificates and described her continuing struggle to pursue her educational aspirations:

Sometimes I lose some information when I'm not concentrating properly. It's like, what was that again? Had a hard day at home, go to TAFE, just not concentrating. That happens a couple of times. Get phone calls from Mum, "Come over here, I need your help with the kids", hectic. Then I go to TAFE, it's like I've still got the kids in my ear (Rebecca, 19, White Australian, Unemployed).

In strong contrast, many of the young women in this research described higher education as a natural progression for them. The vast majority of the young women who were not mothers had either completed a higher education qualification or were currently involved in higher education. The entitlement of young women to attend higher education institutions was unquestioned and normalised for the white Australian participants in this research. This inevitability is described by Monique:

Up until a couple of years ago I didn't even think that there was any other way. Because my mum, she's a teacher and both my older sisters are at uni now. So I didn't even think. I just always thought, you leave school, you go to uni. And then Mum said, "you don't have to go to uni if you don't want to". And I'm like, I might as well go, so I did (Monique, 18, White Australian, University Student, Pharmacy).

Following the drive towards credentialism, the young women viewed education as an investment in their future employability and the majority had chosen degrees with an end job or profession in mind. Additional qualifications were often regarded as a necessary addition to their degree in order to actually get a job. The pursuit of higher education qualifications was overwhelmingly described as a choice but alongside this was the commonly expressed opinion that without a good education you 'wouldn't get anywhere'. The following extracts also illustrate the consistent evidence of strong family expectations for young women to achieve academically:

I don't think I thought too much about going, but I did know I was going to uni. I remember a friend saying to me your mum will be so disappointed if you don't to uni. And that would have been true. My mum would have been really disappointed…I cried when I got accepted so I don't know whether that was because I was afraid I wouldn't get in, I didn't want to upset Mum. I think I've always known I would have to go. I don't know whether it was because I thought Mum wanted it or I wanted it I'm not sure about that. (Clare, 24, White Australian, Veterinary Nurse).

Yes. I wouldn't say it was forced on me but my parents are very, they want us to have an education because these days you don't really get very far if you don't have a degree. And so they want us to have the best that we can possibly get (Paula, 19, White Australian, University Student, Social Science).

My parents are very, you're gonna go to uni pretty much right from when I was young. And it wasn't that I didn't want to go at all. It was just something that I always knew Mum and Dad pretty much wanted us to. So, pretty much, I knew that I had to go to uni (Julianne, 21, White Australian, Nurse).

I've pretty much all my life been, well not pushed, but you know, in the general direction of education as the most important thing that a girl can do. And I suppose because my dad was like a single parent and like, all that encouragement just pushed me a bit forward towards that education (Shelly, 21, South Sea Islander, University Student, Arts).

Ruth: They always [said], it's your own choice that you really should get some sort of education because you can't do anything without it (Ruth, 20, White Australian, University Student, Social Sciences).

I noted that the students who were members of disadvantaged social groups or who had overcome hardships in order to attend university were more likely to identify fears about fitting in and less likely to describe it as an inevitable path for them. Indigenous students in particular, pointed out that it was important for them to attend a regional university that was close to their families. The four Indigenous young women in this research sample who were university students all mentioned the privilege of being at university. They specifically wanted their educational achievements to provide hope and ambition for other Indigenous girls and three described their desire to encourage younger female family members to believe that they could invoke similar personal determination and do the same. Shelly's comments below demonstrate a belief in meritocracy and social mobility:

No I was the first one [in her family to go to university]. It's good in a way because I think I wanted to do it because I wanted to set an example for all my cousins and that. You don't have to be rich and have money to go to uni. If you work hard enough you'll get it (Shelly, 21, South Sea Islander, University Student, Arts).

Despite the unquestioned pathway to university that was commonly described, the choice of degree was often characterised by doubt and indecision. When the young women with strong educational credentials responded to my enquiries about their occupational aspirations and how they came to be doing their current course of study or employment, there frequently emerged detailed narratives about the difficulties of choosing a university course, descriptions of changing courses and orientations and leaving university for periods of time

to consider their future. It was common for the young women to demonstrate self-consciousness and embarrassment at the absence of a firm and unwavering career decision that had resulted in a linear and focused path towards key achievements. What was notable in this research was the disparity for many young women from differing backgrounds between their expectation of certainty and their experience of confusion amidst widened choice (the difficulties associated with choice and decision-making are described further in the 'Neo-liberalism and the burdens of liberty' chapter).

> I suppose you think you should know what you want to do so you can really, you know, go for it. But sometimes you're not sure if you've made the right choice (Dee, 20, White Australian, Restaurant Worker).

> And, yeah, most people have it all organised and planned out and I'm like, "I don't really know what I want to do". 'Cos there's so much to choose from now (Lin, 19, Filipino-Australian, TAFE Student in Childcare).

> Jeanie: Trying to find a path. I hate that, it's the worst thing. I can't wait 'til I'm like twenty five, then I'll know exactly what I want in life. But then again my sister's twenty seven and I don't know what she's gone on. A lot of people in my society, we look at paths and we say paths a lot instead of life experiences or life expectations. We say we're walking a path. You see, me, I walk this path, but I get sidetracked a lot. So my path goes from straight to going totally left or u-turning right. My path is always zigzagging, just going everywhere (Jeanie, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Unemployed, 1 child).

These extracts invite consideration of the circumstances under which choice is experienced as problematic. The anxiety of managing the discrepancy between a desire for confidence and the experience of uncertainty led three participants to seek professional assistance with their career decisions. Helen saw a counsellor when the difficulty of deciding on a university course led to significant emotional distress. She actually brought some written strategies from those consultations to our interview to show me. During this interview with Helen, I was struck by her tendency to talk nervously and at great speed and at the way the descriptions of her life were infused with expressions of fear. As a 'clever' middle class girl, Helen was regarded as having strong academic prospects (unlike her brother) and she worried about not living up to her parents' expectations. Her current anxiety was due to her fear that she had,

again, made the 'wrong' choice (she had already left a degree course in education) and wondered whether to continue with or change her course:

> Mum says I have a gift of talking to people. I wanted to be a psychologist, a person who sits down and talks to people and helps them. But I give too much of myself, emotionally. I have had to build up some barriers…So I'm scared, it's really pretty scary. I was talking the other day about being a librarian, going and doing a librarian course. Maybe working as a librarian in a rural community. But my Mum and Dad really want me to keep doing psychology. They want me to stick with it. It's funny really because they always thought my brother would be the one who couldn't decide (Helen, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Social and cultural changes have meant that, ostensibly, women have access to unprecedented choice. I suggest that such new possibilities are still located within the traditional parameters of sex, class and race and that, for some, the onus of choice is demanding rather than purely liberating:

> Like we have a choice in Australia. But sometimes it seems like we have too much choice…I suppose it's because we have that choice we're expected to make those choices (Ruth, 20, White Australian, University Student).

Those highly educated young women who did not demonstrate such anxiety in the face of choice were more likely to express a preference for a contingent and flexible approach to their career path, focusing on the present and anticipating the need to adapt to changing circumstances. Jennifer had already demonstrated such flexibility by completing a photography degree and then embarking on a career in hairdressing:

> When you asked about what I want to do in the future, it kind of stumps me because I don't necessarily think about exactly what I want to do in the future. Especially at this age. I'll stay here until I'm not happy anymore and then think about it later. I think that the more opportunities you give yourself, the freer you feel to do something that you're happy with. If you have that social conditioning where you're supposed to only have one career and you've got to choose it when you're eighteen and stay in there for the next sixty years or something then that's where people start to get depressed or stressed in their positions and stuff like that. I think, you give yourself more options and you'll be a lot happier. (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser).

Because I try to live life day to day. I don't need to plan for five years ahead when everything I plan on happens anyway. So that's why I try to live my life now (Kate, 21, White Australian, University Student).

Angela Barns (2003) found that young women's decisions about occupations were best described as an exploration than an instantaneous decision. Millicent Poole and Janice Langan-Fox also described the process of pursuing career paths as involving 'untidy decisions' (1997, 227). Johanna Wyn and Peter Dwyer describe a similar observation and interpret it positively as a demonstration of the more flexible approach taken by young women to their post-school education and pathways as compared to young men who are more likely to focus intently on a particular qualification or pathway (2000). Manuela du Bois Raymond (1998) emphasises the ongoing class underpinnings of young people's life courses. She identifies those young people who experience what she calls a 'normal' biography (which is similar to Beck's standardised biography). Such biographies are associated with the attainment of early adulthood and are highly gendered. They are characterised by the early experience of employment and family formation relative to the transitions of young people from higher social classes. Those with relatively higher social, economic and educational capital are more likely to experience what du Bois Raymond calls a 'choice' biography where the life course is a project based on strategic planning and need to adapt to changing circumstances. It is possible, in this research, to identify distinct groups of young women, largely divided along parenting lines, who are experiencing such 'normal' and choice biographies. In congruence with a central argument of this research, she does not suggest that choice biographies are based on freedom and unfettered choice. Rather, there are comparatively more options to choose from that must be reflected on and justified against assumptions grounded in male dominance and in conditions that do not materially support the unfettered expansion of women's work and family aspirations.

The women with less educational capital generally described their occupational experience or aspirations in more pragmatic terms, usually either stating that it was something they had thought they would like to do or it was what was available to them at their level of educational qualification. The feminisation of low status, part time and poorly paid service positions has been well-documented by feminists (for example Game and Pringle 1984; Walby 1986 and 1997). Feminists have argued that such occupations are often treated as

extensions of the domestic role, emphasise caring, empathy and docility and are consequently devalued and under-remunerated.

The young mothers and disadvantaged young women in my research primarily wanted work in order to be able to support their family and their occupational aspirations were often modest. Narina explicitly dismisses the relevance (or perhaps the luxury) of a specific career focus to her life because the priority is to have any work and to be able to support herself and her girlfriend. Her comments that she is not the "sort of person" to "just go for one job" indicate that she has internalised the demands for flexibility:

> I just want to have a job. I don't like having no job. I'd have any job in the world, I'd just take it. Even if it's the most disgustingest job, I'll take it. So I hope to be able to support myself and my partner and my family. I just want a car and a house and, you know, the normal essentials of life. That's about it. I will take any job. I don't have one goal that is set on that one job because I don't think it is right to just go for one job. It just doesn't seem right, I'm just not that sort of person. I'll take anything. (Narina, 19, Torres Strait Islander and White Australian parentage, Unemployed).

> I don't really want to get a job in a high up place. I just want to work at Target or something like that. Something easy, something that's not hard and that. It's not much money but I really hate studying (Thea, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child and pregnant).

In addition to this, the pursuit of employment was often expressed as a way to avoid being regarded as 'just a housewife'. Even for those in extremely difficult circumstances, such as Amy who was living with her ex-partner against her will, the desire to be employed was linked to personal fulfilment and was often combined with comments about 'getting my life back':

> It's a shame, I just hope that I can have another chance at getting things right. I hope that I get myself out of this and put my kids into a good school and then be able to get on with my life again. Because I know I can do more. I love being a mum but I think that I was meant for more than just being a mum, I think there's something out there that I'm meant to be doing (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Occupational preferences: "Making a difference"

The career preferences that the young women identified revealed an overwhelming orientation to people-focused, altruistic jobs that persisted across socio-economic status and racial background. The altruistic orientation of women's occupational preferences has been noted in feminist employment literature (for example Poole and Langan-Fox 1997; Rubery 1988). Paula England and Barbara Kilbourne (1990) argue that socialisation disposes women to adopt connective and nurturing values and an altruistic orientation. Carol Gilligan described women's morality as being underpinned by an 'ethic of care' in which relationships and responsibilities are prioritised, although these features are generally demeaned because they are culturally associated with women (1982). In contrast, men's socialisation predisposes them to be directed in the more culturally valued, self-interested manner presumed by economic theory. England and Kilbourne also point out that women make greater relationship-specific investments than men and contribute substantial emotional work which may take time and energy away from other occupational pursuits. This point is taken up in the following 'Relationships' chapter. Although this sample included disproportionate numbers of young women in social science degrees (eleven participants were taking degrees in archaeology, psychology or social work), the desire to have a job which involved relating to and helping others was striking and is evidenced across a variety of occupations and degree courses, as the following quotes demonstrate:

> Um, because people told me I'd be good, you know, good with people, like through my personality and that. And I wasn't really interested in hairdressing at all but I just got involved and then I really liked being with people. I think that's the main reason I did hairdressing (Lucy, 18, White Australian, Hairdresser).

> I've always been a people person. I chose it because I like to talk to people and I think that I'm a good people person (Kate, 21, White Australian, University Student, Social Sciences).

> I'd like a job where I help other people, like, even though I've gone through stuff in my life, when I can get a job one day, I would like to be helping people (Molly, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

> Always as a child I always wanted to have something to do with helping the homeless. It was always my goal when I was a child (Charmaine, 25, White Australian, University Student, Social Sciences, Home Duties and Part Time Care Worker, 2 children).

If I can work one day I like special children, I want to help special [needs] children, I think I can help (Nia, 22, African, Home Duties, 2 children).

Indigenous young women were explicit about their altruistic focus being directed to helping other Indigenous Australians. They all described in some detail how they hoped their future occupation would make a difference to disadvantaged Indigenous Australians and 'give something back':

And then I want to do, get into family law and specialise in that. I think it's because I found that a lot of my family, like my mum's first cousins, they have a lot of children and they're being taken away from them and I've seen how hurtful all that was for that family. I just didn't like it and I wanted to fight for those kids and, you know, really get in there and do something about it (Shelly, 21, South Sea Islander, University Student, Humanities).

Other young women also drew on the theme of using their life experiences for others' benefit. Susie was a single mum who had used alcohol and drugs heavily, had a criminal record and had spent time in a women's shelter before her partner died of a drug overdose. She was contending with the disadvantages of these circumstances to complete a social science degree which she hoped would assist her goal of helping other people addicted to drugs:

Like I want to do this because I, in a way, I think I can make a difference because I can relate to them, bring some kind of understanding to it all…I watched Keith go in and out, like no rehabilitation at all, and I thought well if I can relate to people like that, who are criminals and drug addicts and stuff like that, then maybe I can make a difference. Because if I can understand them and I can get through to them like that then maybe the rehabilitation process will work a lot better and people will actually have a new start to their lives (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student, Social Sciences, 1 child).

The orientation to an altruistic occupation was not only expressed by those who hoped to engage in caring work. One young woman who was doing a postgraduate degree in the field of science that would equip her for a career in primary resource exploration described at length her ethical doubts about her choice of occupation, despite her love of scientific research and practical exploration of the environment:

I'm very, I'm very scared to branch out into something completely different. Especially if I'm going well with something I'm already doing. But I have so many interests. So. But I have a really, I think one thing I struggle with on a daily basis, with my work, is that I am, doing something that is not really primarily helping people. And I have really strong beliefs, you know, things like, just humanity, humans and the way they should be treated and you know. I'm a member of Amnesty…Very anti-war and I feel like I should be maybe in a Third World country teaching English to kids or I should be doing something that I can really help people. And I think I will. Sometime in the future…But I really, I think that when I get older I will quit blocking a lot of my inside urges to help people (Beth, 23, White Australian, Postgraduate Science Student).

Moderating ambitions: "Out of the window" and "down the drain"

Interviews with young women also contained narratives of how some had revised their occupational aspirations from masculinised or professional occupations to goals that fitted with a more traditionally feminised role or required strong educational qualifications that they probably couldn't realise. Leanne describes the successive discounting of occupational goals that led her to be enrolled in an education degree. She was one of the few participants who had overcome the disadvantages of an extremely impoverished and violent background to attend university but did not feel like she 'fitted in' in the Law School where she began her university studies:

> I always knew that I was going to uni, I always had that, I was going to do something like that with my life. And because I have hydrocephalus, a neurosurgeon saved my life as a baby so until about the sixth grade I wanted to be a neurosurgeon. And then I found out what is actually involved in being a neurosurgeon so that sort of went out of the window. And then I wanted to be a lawyer, right or wrong, I was going to be a lawyer. I went down to Canberra and went to Parliament House. I was just enthralled, that was my dream. So I got accepted to law, came up here and did a semester of it. I was just, like no. So then I came to education and I love it (Leanne, 21, White Australian, University Student, Education and Home Duties, 1 child).

Thea had what she described as a poor Year 10 pass and her occupational aspirations were based on what this might qualify her for and a strong disinclination for further study:

I did want to be a vet when I was little but then I found out you had to do, like four or five years at uni and stuff and get really high marks in the HSC, which I wouldn't get, so that went down the drain (Thea, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child and pregnant).

A number of the participants were either working in or studying for qualifications in the health profession, a popular choice because it was associated with altruistic work. Only one was training to be a doctor but had almost automatically selected herself into nursing despite having the qualifications to attempt a degree in medicine:

I'd always thought I wanted to do something in the medical field. It's funny, I'd always thought, oh nursing, nursing would be the thing. And one day a friend said to me, I said I was thinking about going back and doing nursing and she said, "Why don't you do medicine? It just doesn't make sense, you've got the brain power." And I thought yes, I guess I do. I don't know why I wouldn't think I could. (Ellie, 25, White Australian, University Student, Medicine).

Wicks and Mishra (1998) provide some comparative data about the occupation realities and aspirations of women from the Australian Women's Health longitudinal data. In their mid-life cohort, almost 24% of women were working as clerks, while only 3.5% of the young cohort aspires to this occupation. 82% of the high income area group aspire to professional, para-professional or managerial occupations compared to 67% of women in the low income area group, a statistically significant difference. This trend is reversed in the area of sales and personal service occupations. It is possible to argue, then, that despite the expanded entitlement that young women demonstrate in considering a range of occupational goals, their actual employment is often concentrated into a narrow band of jobs involving poorly paid service work for those with few educational qualifications. Those with stronger educational credentials are able to access occupations with higher financial rewards and some professional status but consistently centre their aspirations around the significantly gendered activity of people-focused work. The following section of this chapter takes up the theme of women's discomfort with competitive and masculinised occupational behaviour.

Navigating masculinised occupations: "I don't want to become arrogant or anything like that"

Hilary Lips (2000) found that, despite having comparable academic talents, female university students envisaged a future in which they were less in charge than men and then actualised

that vision by the 'choices' they make in regard to their academic programs and employment. In her research, women rated the possibility of becoming a person with power or a political leader lower than men did and were also significantly more likely to anticipate relationship problems with the political leader role. Three young women in this research had either completed a business-related degree or were currently studying for one. However, their involvement with business as young women was not described as a natural combination in the same way as participants identified their interest in altruistic pursuits. All three young women who had completed or were currently doing business-related degrees in this sample specifically described the importance of a male mentor who encouraged this interest. Despite this, the world of business either seemed to provoke some unease and discomfort for them, or to require them to explain or justify their presence in the business environment. One young woman initially described herself as a waitress and it was only through subsequent discussion that it emerged that she was actually one of two owners of a restaurant and catering business.

Holly had been plagued by doubts during her enrolment in a business degree. She was only interested in its psychological components about marketing and management. After an unsuccessful first year at university, Holly took some time off to travel. On her return, she returned to her business degree after consultation with a career counsellor who administered psychological tests which indicated her suitability for marketing work. Nevertheless, her inclination towards educational work had persisted. In the following extract it becomes clear that Holly considers herself ill-suited to what she perceives as the competitive and ruthless world of business and the extent of her worries about this:

> Holly: I really want to work for a business but then I want to work overseas, like work in India. I've always wanted to be a teacher in India in a little village. I always wanted that. I thought it would be so rewarding…I get scared because it's something completely different to what I know of, so that's why I get scared. But then I think well I could always go back to education, once you've got your business degree. But I don't really like the mentality of business people either.
> Joanne: Oh, tell me about that.
> Holly: Oh, I just think, because I worked in an insurance broker for two months. My boss, he was really arrogant, like he was young, but really arrogant and I just didn't like it and I reckon there's a lot like that. It's a dog eat dog world. I think that's what I get scared of as well. You've just constantly got to be watching your back and competing with the people that are your friends. I don't like that very much.

Joanne: How do you imagine you'll go with that?

Holly: I don't know. I think sometimes it will be very overwhelming for me, like I'd probably break down a few times. Like not nerves but just like, oh I can't handle it. But it depends what mood I'm in. Like sometimes I think yeah I can get control or whatever. But overall I think it might be a bit scary for me. But I really think I'm gonna mature too. You sort of adapt to the environment. If you're surrounded by people who are arrogant, you tend to lean that way. That's what I'm scared of, I don't want to become arrogant or anything like that (Holly, 19, White Australian, University Student, Business).

Holly's anxiety about the kind of behaviour required in business was echoed by other participants, who voiced some tentative concerns about being able to be "strong enough" to "handle it". It appears that young women's increased occupational possibilities are still significantly moderated by gender. The participants in this research showed a striking orientation to people-focused, caring work that prioritises the needs of others. There were consistent expressions of anxiety about their ability to take on the masculinity required in occupations that do not emphasise an altruistic approach. This finding provides some support for Adkins' argument that it is not easy for women to transgress femininity in the realm of employment (2001, 2002) .

Chapter summary and conclusion

In this chapter I have questioned whether the wider opportunities, increased qualifications and sense of entitlement of young women has led to occupational experiences and aspirations that are uncomplicated reflections of autonomy and choice. The findings of this research provide evidence for the continuing importance of social structures in shaping young women's life chances although these structures are increasingly obscured by individualist values. The majority of the participants in this research aspire to or are engaged in altruistic or people-oriented work and, depending on their education and socio-economic status, this clusters them in low-level, casualised service work or caring professions. This chapter has reported how young women are forming their aspirations and mediating their expectations in order to enable them to fulfil the dual desires of childrearing and employment. This reflects their current reality or future expectation that they will take primary responsibility for childcare and domestic work. When read together, the findings reported in this and the 'Motherhood and domesticity' chapter do not suggest that women have been liberated to any significant degree from assuming responsibility for care in the private sphere. Young

women's occupational aspirations, although articulated in a framework of personal choice, take account of this and reflect the continuation of historically and culturally imposed limits.

In the following 'Relationships' chapter, attention is turned to the ways in which young women experience their intimate and familial connections, their relationships with other women and their assessment of equality between men and women today.

Chapter six

Relationships

Introduction

The previous two chapters have described the ways in which young women today encounter their apparent liberation from supposedly outdated constraints amidst what are evidently durable patterns of oppression. A general unwillingness to recognise or articulate this contradiction also resonated through the young women's talk about relationships. The intimate emotional and sexual lives of young women are another arena in which transformation and autonomy are emphasised. In his consideration of the changes associated with modernity, Giddens (1992) has highlighted the notion of the democratisation of intimate life, postulating a profound alteration of intimacy in personal relationships and optimistically emphasising (women's) changed expectations for emotional fulfilment and equality from relationships. Much of the academic and media commentary on young women's lives also signals a change of emphasis in their relational lives. Prominence is given to a perceived increase in the sexual and emotional assertiveness of young women in particular (for example Hopkins 2002; Howard and Wilkinson 1997; Kamen 2000). Therefore, in this chapter, young women's attitudes to and experiences of intimate relationships and friendships are examined against this suggestion of reconstructed relational expectations.

Marriage: "one day"

Only six of the fifty five participants were married and none were divorced or separated from a marriage. Thirteen were living with partners in de facto relationships. One of the three young women who identified as lesbian or bisexual was currently in an ongoing intimate relationship with a young woman. The subject of marriage and intimate relationships usually entered discussions with the participants when I asked about their personal hopes and dreams. A range of attitudes towards marriage were described. However, the most commonly expressed view, illustrated by Holly below, was that its importance had declined and that the decision to be married or not was now a personal choice rather than an imposed expectation:

> I really want kids and I do want to get married, if I meet the right person. I don't want to just get married because that's just something you have to do. I don't want that. I don't care if I'm single as long as I'm having fun and I'm doing what I want to do at that time (Holly, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Despite an apparent untethering from the obligation to marry and the young women's general support of this, a majority, including Holly, nevertheless did express the wish to be married 'one day', supporting the findings of other Australian research (Wicks and Mishra 1998). Crucially, this aspiration was expressed as one which represented individual desires and was undetermined by overt regulation. Within the apparent freedom from compulsion to marry that so many young women commented on, their stated wish to do just that was often ambivalently expressed. This desire was justified in a number of ways; as a self-conscious, often embarrassed wish for the traditional, as a way of conferring respectability on themselves or on their children who were born outside of a marriage relationship and as a desire to emulate, for some, the security, fulfilment and longevity of their parents' relationship.

The ambivalence that many young women felt towards marriage was often grounded in their rejection of the need for legal formalities in an emotionally committed relationship. The social, legal and religious dictates that aimed to uphold the ideal of a formal heterosexual marriage that was hard to dissolve have been significantly eroded through the liberalisation of divorce laws, widespread acceptance of cohabitation, improved contraception and the decriminalisation of homosexuality. Charmaine had two children, and was in a long-term relationship with one of their fathers. Earlier in our conversation, she had spoken about her embarrassment that she and her children all had different family names. Her comments below are in response to a question about what her personal aspirations were. The opening certainty of her answer is immediately undermined by her doubts about the necessity for or wisdom of marriage, despite the fact that she is engaged to her current partner:

> Charmaine: I hope one day, definitely, to marry Danny. I don't know, I never really believed in marriage, like that's my personal view, I don't see how actually marrying somebody, if you're together and living together is worth it. My point is - touch wood it doesn't happen - with the split up, the break up, there's so much drama when you actually marry. You know, there's so much drama you have to go through. I've seen all my friends, although my mum and dad are still together. But most of my friends, I've seen what they've gone through just 'cos they've divorced and the kids as well, especially the kids. If you're together, it's just a piece of paper to me, no difference at all.
>
> Joanne: But you're engaged?
>
> Charmaine: Yes.

Joanne: So it [marriage] could be on the horizon?

Charmaine: Oh yeah, maybe, I don't know. We've been engaged for about three years. We've both got no idea. Not too keen on that idea.

Joanne: So how did you get engaged?

Charmaine: He asked me. I was actually pregnant with Shayla. We actually had a fight and I was staying at a friend's house and he came over the next morning with a big bunch of flowers and a little box on the top of the flowers and said, "will you marry me". And I said yes. So I sort of accepted the marriage proposal, I suppose, but not as such the marriage. It's just, like, a nice ring. So yeah, we'll see (Charmaine, 25, White Australian, University Student, Home Duties and Part Time Care Worker, 2 children).

This particular marriage proposal appears to represent a romantic gesture in the context of an apology following an argument. The ambivalence of both parties to an actual marriage is perhaps best interpreted as indicating the continuing romantic currency of a chivalrous proposal rather than a clear-cut commitment to the institution of marriage.

The subject of marriage provided a clear example of what might previously have been regarded as a straightforward decision or obligation, but which is now consciously deliberated by young women. Perhaps more than any other participant, Jennifer was absorbed by the idea that life was now more complicated for women and spoke at uninterrupted length on the subject. When I approached her with the invitation to take part in this research, she was immediately enthusiastic and told me that sometimes she wished she lived with the moral and behavioural certainties of her mother's generation, where women were expected to get married as virgins at a young age and have children shortly thereafter. This is a concept that she takes up again in the following extract. Her speech is highly reflexive and self-examining as she manages her uncertainty and her juxtaposing wish for the emotional conviction that she is with the 'right' person and her appreciation of a more adaptable and varied approach to intimate relationships where one can "cruise along in life":

Some of your more full-on choices in life. Do you get married? You know, when my mother got married she got married at the age of eighteen and that was just expected that she knew she would, knew she would stay with that person forever… Because my partner and I have been together since I was very young and I mean although it's been six years, there's still no, like people tend to say that you should know but I think that it takes time to know and that you shouldn't be pressured that you have to know. I think that it's quite fine that you can cruise along in life these days and just take it where it needs to be taken, when it has to be

taken. But at the same time a lot of people tend to tell you that if you get together young it can't possibly work out. It can't last because you've got so many changes to go through... And I find that those sorts of influences do make it hard because you end up doubting yourself then. And you question your own motives for what you're doing. Am I doing this just because I think it's the right thing to do? Or am I doing it because that's really where I want to go. I personally don't look at being married any time in the future because I don't see there's a restriction on an age when I should get married. Yeah, if it was fifty years ago I should have been married by now and been having kids (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser).

Amidst a valorised culture of female independence and choice, some young women such as Leanne were self-conscious about their desires for marriage and traditional gendered domestic arrangements. Their embarrassment seemed to stem from their suspicion that such wishes are now 'wrong' or as Leanne in the following quote says; "a source of contention" in a climate that emphasises expanded options and autonomy for women. Leanne is no longer living with her boyfriend, Den, who is the father of her baby, although they still spend time together and have a sexual relationship. Although Leanne equates her desires with the conventional view of what "every" girl wants, she is aware that it may sound "quaint" against contemporary expectations and opportunities for young women. She seeks to legitimise her aspirations by aligning them to her personal characteristics and desire for self-actualisation. It is not that she is accepting a submissive role, but rather that she will be "fulfilled" if she is "that type of person":

Joanne: What are your hopes and dreams for your personal life?
Leanne: Oh, have you got four hours? This is a source of contention for me because as a child, I suppose everybody has the same dreams really. As a child it was always, get married, buy the house, have the white picket fence, have the dog playing in the yard with the kids, have the two cars, you know? And everything was sort of going according to plan until Georgie [her baby] came along and I sort of verged off a bit then. So yeah, I really dearly want to be married and have that whole, wholesome family life. Like the Brady Bunch, I really want to be that type of person. So yes, I just want to be married. I don't care what it takes, I just want to be married. That's my dream. Sounds very quaint I suppose…But yeah, I just really, really want to be married and have a big house. This sounds really stupid but I miss, like doing Den's laundry and ironing his clothes and cooking his dinner and making his lunch and things like that, like I so miss it. That's the sort of stuff I love. It makes me feel

fulfilled to do those things, looking after Den and my baby (Leanne, 21, White Australian, University Student and Home Duties, 1 child).

Two young women from reasonably affluent backgrounds reported pressure from parents to either terminate their pregnancies or marry the fathers of their unborn children in order to avoid damaging the reputation of themselves or their families. Young women with limited educational capital were most likely to express the desire to get married in order to confer legitimacy on their current de facto relationships. Despite many protestations against the need for legally recognised relationships, the continuing benefit of married status for the (precarious) respectability of working class women and children was in evidence. Several also mentioned its importance in protecting their children from being teased and called a "bastard" because they had unmarried parents. These mothers therefore wanted to be married before their children started school. Here, Melanie also provides some additional justifications for wanting a "good wedding"; it will be an indulgence after some difficult times and will provide her with the opportunity to wear a dress, which as a 'modern' girl, she normally wouldn't do:

> Get married is one of my things that I want to do, so he doesn't get called a bastard in school…If I have a wedding it's gonna be a good wedding. We're gonna get a castle for it, we're gonna have it in a castle…and I'm gonna arrive on a horse and cart with my dad, hopefully, if he comes [they were currently estranged because he disapproved of her partner]. And then, um, yeah, that's about all I want. And a video camera and a photographer. That's what I want, a nice wedding. 'Cos I don't usually dress up in dresses so I want to have a nice wedding dress. I think it's a treat, after going without (Melanie, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Embedded in the subject of marriage, there was again some evidence of intergenerational loyalty, where several young women identified a desire to repeat the conduct and values of their parents. This view was often supported in purposeful opposition to what was regarded as the norm of a more casual, less committed approach to family life:

> Our parents are still together, kind of thing, you don't see that a lot any more and I think it's because divorce is too easy. It's easy to get a divorce now and people know that and they don't necessarily try and make it work. And so I want what they've got. I want the thirty years of marriage and I want the family house and the holidays and all that like it was for me.

I suppose I take their values, what they've instilled in me (Paula, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Conversely, some tentativeness about marriage was expressed by participants whose parents had divorced. However, in general there was a sense of the future inevitability of marriage, with the majority of young women's aspirations for this being linked to their expectation of having children one day. This majority included two of the three young women who identified as lesbian or bisexual, who were prepared to travel overseas to get married if necessary. As I will report again later in this chapter, the disadvantage of not identifying with the heterosexual dominant group was minimised by these three young women. However, they did all point out the unfairness of not being able to access the institution of marriage and their justifications for wanting to marry were based on the view that they should not be denied an opportunity that was open to heterosexual people:

I definitely want to get married, if I meet the right person, you know and I think we [lesbian women] should be able to. And gay men. There's no reason why we shouldn't be able to get married and have it legal. Straight people can so it's not fair if we can't. It's just one of those things that has to be caught up with so there's equality, you know (Liz, 22, White Australian, TAFE Student).

The desire for marriage that the majority of young women who participated in this research expressed was framed within an understanding of it as a personal choice which was no longer a compulsion. The importance of a legally recognised partnership was stronger for working class women with children and for the young women who identified as lesbian or bisexual, for whom its conferral of respectability was more important. For the young women with higher educational capital, the desire for marriage was often expressed self-consciously and characterised by embarrassed and involved explanations.

Experience and trepidation of boys' and men's violence

Although this research project was not designed with a particular focus on young women's experience of violence, my interviews with participants did reveal its significance in many of their lives. The issue of violence usually entered conversations when I asked broad questions about their family background or growing up or what they considered to have been important experiences in their life that they would like to speak about. Although it became common to hear about the violence that the participants had experienced, the issue of men's violence

against women was only raised by two participants when I asked for their opinions about equality between men and women. It was raised in our conversations in the context of a personal experience rather than as an example of male dominance or inequality.

Twenty five out of the fifty five participants (45%) reported that they had experienced violence. This high incidence of the experience of violence may reflect the fact that fourteen of the participants were approached in welfare locations, although only two were recruited from women's services which have a specific focus on assisting women victimised by violence. The remaining twelve were recruited from generic welfare services such as Centrelink and parenting groups run by youth services. Indeed, ten of this group of fourteen are amongst the women who reported experiences of violence, including six young women with multiple experiences of violence. The remaining fifteen young women (37% of the forty one participants who were not recruited from welfare locations) who reported experiences of violence were recruited by my own approach, from friends and colleagues, from participants themselves or responded to flyers in educational and social settings. None of these young women were specifically targeted for their potential or probable experience of violence, although three of the nine young women that I approached were aware of my employment experience and academic interest in this issue and this may have increased the likelihood of their reports of domestic and/or family violence experiences.

The experiences of violence that were described were; physical and/or sexual abuse as a child, experiencing domestic and/or family violence as they grew up, being raped as a girl or young woman and experiencing domestic violence in their own intimate relationship with a man. None of the lesbian or bisexual women reported experiencing violence in their intimate relationships with women although the young woman who identified as bisexual had experienced domestic violence in a relationship with a young man. Table 1 presents the breakdown of numbers and percentages of young women who experienced each kind of violence. All of the violence was perpetrated by boys or men apart from two young women whose mothers had physically harmed them as children.

Table 6.1 Young women's experience of types of violence

Type of Violence	Number who experienced	Percentage of participants who experienced type of violence
Childhood physical abuse	4	7.%
Childhood sexual abuse	4	77%
Domestic and/or family violence as child	14	25.%
Rape	6	11%
Domestic violence in own relationship	11	20%

Young women from backgrounds other than white Australian were over-represented amongst those who identified experiences of violence. Each of the nine participants from an Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and South Sea Islander background provided unprompted reports of their experience of domestic or family violence or its significant occurrence in the community in which they were raised. The disproportionately high incidence of violence for Indigenous women is well documented (Robertson 2000). Eight of the twenty five participants had experienced multiple forms of violence. Two had experienced each of the types of violence that were described by participants during this research. None of these eight women were currently employed and none had education past a Year 10 level or equivalent and six of them had children.

Table 6.2 Young women's multiple experience of violence

Participant	Number of types of violence experienced	Types of violence experienced
Rebecca, 19, White Australian, unemployed and TAFE Student	6	Childhood physical and sexual abuse, domestic and family violence as a child, rape and domestic violence in own relationship
Molly, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Home Duties, 4 children	6	Childhood physical and sexual abuse, domestic and family violence as a child, rape and domestic violence in own relationships
Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children	4	Childhood sexual abuse, domestic violence as a child, rape and domestic violence in own relationship
Nia, 22, African, Home Duties, 2 children	3	Physical abuse as a child, rape and domestic violence in own relationship
Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children	2	Rape and domestic violence in own relationship
Narina, 19, Torres Strait Islander and White Australian parentage, Unemployed	2	Domestic violence as a child and domestic violence in own relationship
Toni, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child	2	Childhood physical abuse, domestic violence as a child
Jeanie, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Unemployed, 1 child	2	Domestic violence as a child and domestic violence in own relationship

Twenty per cent of the participants in this research had experienced domestic violence in an intimate heterosexual relationship. The national Women's Safety Australia survey found that just over 7% of women aged between 18 and 24 had experienced physical or sexual abuse

from male partners in the previous twelve months (ABS 1996). More women in this age range had experienced abuse from male partners than older women. The 1999 British Crime Survey revealed that 28% of women aged 20-24 had experienced domestic assault at some time in their lives (YWCA 2002). Indeed, there is a significant amount of research that indicates the ongoing high levels of violence experienced by women and young women's particular vulnerability to such victimisation (for example Levy 1998; Mulroney 2000; PADV 2001). Domestic violence is identified as the biggest single health risk factor for Australian women aged between fifteen and forty four (Access Economics 2004). Despite evidence of the nature and extent of sexualised violence against young women, recent texts which analyse contemporary young women's positioning as social and political subjects in the twenty first century omit the issue. Of particular note is Wilkinson and Mulgan's *Freedom's Children* (1995), which avoids any mention of women's experience of violence in their relationships throughout an entire chapter titled 'Renegotiating relationships and parenting'. Although the increasing rate of divorce and relationship breakdown is discussed, the role that men's violence may play in women's decisions to end relationships is not raised. Rather, growing expectations for personal fulfilment in a relationship is the key area of focus, as well as the need for improved skills in handling difficult periods in relationships (1995 70-73).

By contrast, in this study, the young women's experience of violence was prevalent and profound. Many considered that it had shaped their behaviour and impeded their ability to function in the way they wished. This was the case for Amy, who was experiencing domestic violence from her ex-partner at the time of interview, "I don't know what to do. I hate who I've turned into. I'm a completely different person" (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children). All of the young women who had been sexually abused as children spoke about the impact this abuse had on their adult relationships with men. For Lucy and Sophie, the experience of vulnerability due to childhood sexual abuse meant that they kept some emotional and sexual distance from their current male partners, which each described as not 'letting him in':

> You've got to watch that you're not selfish, you've got to put someone else first…I had a lot of stuff happen, all the time [which she has previously described as her father's regular rape of her between the ages of three and five]. And now I find it really hard to commit to someone. Like I've been having problems with Ben just too in my face [referring to his desire for sex]. 'Cos sometimes I just don't want to be with him but I know that he is perfect for me

151

but it's sort of like I've shut him out, I won't let anyone in (Lucy, 18, White Australian, Hairdresser).

And even though you got a boyfriend and stuff you sort of, you're distance (sic), you don't let them right in like you should be. Well you don't have to but if you felt more comfortable and loved and stuff, you'd let them in more. But I don't know if I could let him in (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Some participants who had experienced violence directed against family members also spoke about future relationships with men with trepidation, often describing conscious strategies to avoid their own direct experience of violence:

I have thought about it a lot actually. I think it's probably why I'm not in a relationship right now. I have seen a lot of violence within, like, my family as in relations, cousins and what not. And I have expressively said that I will not let myself be put in that situation. I won't even allow myself to be in that situation. And it gets really frustrating when I do see people I know and that I love, are in those situations, and there's only so much I can do to get them wanting to change. Yeah. Yes, so I've explicitly made that a requirement that I wouldn't let myself get in that situation. And also not just violence, also stuff like gambling, alcohol and drug abuse as well. And basically just like mutual feelings, it's not I'm the giver, you're the taker, sort of, one of those sort of relationships (Bella, 20, Aboriginal Australian, University Student).

Well that's part of why I don't like being in relationships. I get scared of stuff. Because I witnessed her [her sister] being beat up and stuff and doors broken down and stuff like that. And, I don't know, if I'm with someone and he seems to get a little bit angry then I'll just leave. But I know people get angry but I just don't, I can't be around it. So I just can't have a relationship like that (Alice, 20, White Australian, University Student).

Similarly, some participants who had experienced intrusive and controlling behaviour from men that they did not categorise as an experience of violence spoke of decisions to avoid or exert strong caution in intimate relationships. Shelly described her retreat from relationships following her intensely draining experience of a boyfriend's possessive and domineering behaviour:

Yeah one particular one that happened about two years ago and yeah he got really possessive, kind of thing. I'm a very independent person and I don't like being in a relationship…And

then I wanted to quit uni and just go back home because I've never been in that kind of relationship before, you know, a real serious one...He said I couldn't go anywhere and stuff like that. Who I was going out with, what time I would be home...Thinking about myself for a change, not anyone else...I'd like to be in a relationship but I know I wouldn't be able to handle it at the moment. But whatever happens, happens. That's my attitude. I'm not going to live the rest of my life waiting for a man (Shelly, 21, South Sea Islander, University Student).

Ruth (20, White Australian, University Student) told me how her experience of being stalked by a young man during high school had rendered her mistrustful and guarded about her relationships with men, indeed she described herself as never having had a boyfriend because she was now very "reticent" and engaged in much "double thinking" about such relationships. The prevalence and impact of violence and harassment in young women's lives provides an important counterpoint to the celebratory discourse of sassy boldness and experimentation which is most commonly invoked.

Young women's experience of violence in their intimate relationships was another area in which individualised interpretations dominated. These young women chided themselves for not "realising sooner" or being "strong enough" to end the violence. Amy described how she tried to dress in a trendy way in order to avoid the pity and humiliation that she imagines would follow if people knew what her life was 'really' like. She also stated, "I know it's wrong, it's not that I think that's the way it's meant to be or anything like that, you know?" They demonstrated their awareness of the expectation of gender equality by strenuously articulating the unacceptability and unfairness of domestic violence and in so doing were able to distance themselves from being thought of as unwitting subordinates to their violent partners. Ellie's description of her boyfriend's violence to her, which included him pulling out chunks of her hair and breaking her arm, focused on the ways in which her own immaturity and embarrassment at what was happening prevented her from being able to stop the abuse. In similarity to the young mothers who redefined their difficult experience of an unplanned pregnancy, Ellie also finds some "good fortune" in her experience because the absence of control and aggression makes her feel that "anything's possible":

But once I kind of climbed out of all that, it was like, if you can get past that and get over that and not feel that way any more. I mean I couldn't understand at the time, like, just not care what he thought. You just think this is the biggest thing in the world and then once you get to the point where it doesn't matter anymore you kind of realise that anything's possible. I think

I did, anyway. It's like, if I really don't care what he thinks anymore or want anything to do with him then maybe everything in my life could be different. But yeah it was kind of very good fortune. And then suddenly all these things I wanted to do, I just did and it was really easy and I wasn't tied down. Yeah, that was probably the biggest turning point (Ellie, 25, White Australian, University Student).

The tendency for minimisation and self blame by women who experience violence has been documented by feminists (for example Kelly 1988; Kelly and Radford 1996). However, changing attitudes associated with the celebration of an empowered femininity may now provide an additional complication for women. Amy provides some insight to the implications of the destabilising of assumptions about the relative social and physical power of men and women:

You know, I don't know much about politics and all that but people are trying to say that women have more authority to do things that only men used to be allowed to do. But they're also giving *men* more authority over things that girls, for example when the cops turn up and they used to just drag the male off if anything was happening. Now they say there's two sides to a story and this and that (Amy 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Relational commitment versus autonomy

In addition to some participants' concerns about the threat of violence in relationships with men, other concerns about constraints to satisfying relationships were tentatively raised. Many of the young women with educational capital talked about the possibility of or already experienced difficulties with establishing a heterosexual relationship and maintaining other aspects of their lives that they valued. They voiced concerns about attaining intimate emotional involvement with men without submerging their focus on other goals. Several participants mentioned the time and effort that relationships took away from other activities that they had previously enjoyed, such as playing sport and spending time with female friends. Here, I return to an extract from my conversation with Holly about relationships. She takes up the commonly expressed theme that having a boyfriend can result in a loss of independence. Within this theme, the notion that boys could be more "clingy" than girls was often articulated in order to suggest that the tables have turned and young men now desire more committed relationships at an early age than young women. Despite this, Holly also reveals some concern that her disinclination for a committed relationship "sounds like an obsession", suggesting that although young women may be encouraged to be independent,

they should not express such a wish too stridently because a self-interested freedom from relationships is still fundamentally incongruent with traditional femininity and perhaps resonates with unpopular feminist demands:

> Holly: I don't care if I'm single as long as I'm having fun and I'm doing what I want to do at that time. That's why my boyfriend broke it off. Like I don't even think he was my boyfriend. But the guy I was with broke up with me because he said that I was too independent for him. So he wanted someone, 'cos I went out Friday night and he came round Friday night and I said "no, I'm going out". And he's like, "oh I thought you'd stay home with me." And I'd already organised it, kind of thing. So I went out and had fun with my friends.
>
> Joanne: Was it a girls' night out?
>
> Holly: Yes. I didn't want to lose my independence. It sounds like an obsession but I don't want to lose it. I really don't.
>
> Joanne: Is he about your age?
>
> Holly: Yeah, he's twenty. I'm like we can be friends but he didn't want to but I thought that was bizarre. He wanted a relationship where it only becomes them two, but there's more outside the circle and then you lose your friends from that as well.
>
> Joanne: Have you seen girls your age lose their independence?
>
> Holly: Yeah, heaps. Like one of my good friends, all her boyfriend, everything they do is together. I just think it's weird, like, I know twenty, like I still think it's too young. I really do, I think twenty is still too young to be worrying about someone else. People getting married at twenty-one and things like that, I still think it's too young. There's so much more out there (Holly, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Holly's opposition to early partnering echoed the views of many of the middle class girls embarking on the 'choice' biographies of du Bois Raymond's terminology (1998) that were described in the 'Education and employment' chapter. Many of the working class young women were more likely to have relatively less education, to have had de facto or marriage relationships and to have become pregnant at an early age, resulting in the early attainment of adulthood. In contrast, young middle class women such as Holly were consciously deferring relationship commitment, family responsibility and employment for higher education and casual relationships because "there's so much more out there" for them.

An aspect of early partnering that Holly opposed was that women in their early twenties like her were "too young to be worrying about someone else". The idea or experience that a woman's involvement in a heterosexual relationship entailed significant emotional work

which was in some way burdensome was a frequently expressed observation. Several participants described their current or past relationships as "emotionally draining" and alluded to the weight of responsibility that they (rather than their male partner) carried for the success and emotional satisfaction of the relationship. In language that struck me as reminiscent of the self-sacrificing ideology of motherhood, many young women indicated their understanding or experience of the self-abnegating nature of intimate relationships with men; that you had to "put someone else first" and "not just think about yourself". The submissive connotations of these statements were countered with explanations (such as Holly provided) that this was why they did not want a serious relationship at the moment, because as independent and progressive young women, they wanted to focus on their studies or career, take advantage of opportunities to travel, have fun with friends and not be responsible for the emotional contentment of a male partner or the smooth running of a relationship. At least, not until later.

Several young women described their unreturned nurturing and flattering of their partners. These comments echoed Pravder Mirkin's assertion that the asymmetrical division of power in a heterosexual relationship often involves a woman giving all with few limits and a man taking all with little reciprocity (1994). For example, Peta became quite upset during my interview with her as she described disappointment with her experience of motherhood, her relationship with her partner and her feelings of being unattractive. In the following extracts she describes the uneven nature of her and her partner's appreciation and praise of each other. Despite this, throughout the interview, Peta disparages herself for her lack of trust in Finn's commitment and fidelity to her and her resulting feelings of low self-esteem, although it is clear that his attentiveness to her has waned. Peta identifies the pressure she feels to be judged as physically attractive, within a male framework of beauty, in order to be valued, although the gendered nature of this insecurity is challenged by her partner:

> Last time we had a really big argument I just told him I don't feel that I should be loving someone who doesn't love me sort of thing. I tell him, not every day. When he shaves his whiskers off I say "You look really good today, babe, you look really sexy in those shorts" and things like that. I compliment him more than he compliments me. And it does get a bit frustrating…Finn says to me you're a paranoid freak and men go through the same [feelings of physical insecurity] but you don't see a lot of it in men as you do in women. 'Cos, personally myself, I'm not picky when it comes to men. Finn's not exactly the world's most attractive person but it's not his looks that I'm interested in, that attracted me to him. It's his

personality. The way, when we first met, he sort of listened to me. It's qualities like that whereas for men it's physical. I think that's probably where I've got the trust and the low self-esteem from (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Some participants were candid about the competing and potentially conflicting desires of progressive independence and the thrill of embarking on a loving intimate relationship. Emma was consciously embarking on a 'choice' biography in which she was pursuing a career in the media and postponing her desire to have children and a partner later in life. She spoke at some length about the energy that many young women expended on preparation for and analysis of heterosexual relationships in comparison to their male counterparts:

> Emma: Yeah and then you think, oh, can I do what I want with my career if I've got someone who maybe wants to do something with their life as well. Like is it gonna work out?
>
> Joanne: So when you consider relationships you're considering how they might fit in with the career aspirations that you have?
>
> Emma: Yeah, I think at the beginning and stuff you get caught up in it and you don't think about that. But after a while you start going oh it might be an idea to have kids, but I've got other things to do besides being in a relationship. So, we'll have to wait and see I suppose. But I think we are really young, I think, to be getting caught up in big dramatic relationships (laughter). As much as we try and ignore it, well not ignore it, but you do place importance on the relationship side of things, something for girls to worry about. They do waste a lot of time thinking about things. And girls sit there talking about it. I think the other thing with girls is they read into things a whole lot more. Like if someone said something, like if you said something to a boyfriend or whatever, they would just take it as that. But if they said that to us we like to sit there and analyse it for about an hour or so. I don't know why we do it. But it's the done thing (Emma, 20, White Australian, University Student).

Julianne had, while she was a high school and undergraduate student, expressed similar views about valuing her independence and avoiding relationships that might curtail her travelling ambitions and social life. In recent months, however, she had met a new boyfriend whom she said she loved and had put her plans to travel and work overseas on hold and was considering moving interstate in order to follow a career change that he intended to make:

> Like I've never really planned to have a boyfriend. I've always planned to go overseas and just do my own thing. I've been very independent. I went through a big stage of never letting boys do anything for me. I don't know, most people go through it, I think. Like it doesn't

worry me now, with him at all. Total change of perspective when you find someone, I think (Julianne, 21, White Australian, Nurse).

Any partiality for remaining single was presented as the reflection of a distinctive personal characteristic rather than a reluctance to conform to gendered expectations about relationships which might curtail their experience of autonomy. In the following quotes, each young woman preceded her statement of preference not to have a committed relationship (yet) with phrases that individualised this response:

> I'm not the sort of person that needs a partner. I don't think that I'll get married for probably ten or fifteen years because I don't need a partner. I feel cluttered. Whereas some people, they hope to find that person really early (Julie, 19, White Australian, Real Estate Administrator).

> I've had one boyfriend in the last three years. I think it's just me, though, I like my independence, just being able to do what I want and go where I want without the hassle. But it gets bad because you see all your friends and think, I want that (Lacey, 18, White Australian, Restaurant Worker).

However, parallel to the frequent statements about the importance of young women's relational independence were testimonies about their experience of pressure from friends and family to have a boyfriend. Similar to the criticism that those young women received who stated a wish to remain childless or to have only one child, the choice to remain single was not regarded as an acceptable feature of individuality by those who urged single women to find a partner. Again, any resistance to the injunction to partner is interpreted as an essentially personal attribute, "it's just not who I am":

> I don't really have much of a personal life. I don't have a social life, I don't have a personal life. I've never had a boyfriend. My friends are a bit off about that. They're always trying to set me up with guys. But I don't really have any sort of, if I find somebody that's good. If I don't, I don't. I've got my friends saying, "you've got to have a boyfriend, you've got to have men in your life". Like one girl said, "yeah well I've had thirty seven guys, I've got to find you at least one guy." I'm like, it's just not who I am (Ruth, 20, White Australian, University Student).

Susie was indignant about her reluctance to find a partner despite admonitions from her friends and family that she did so. Given the experience of her ex-partner's violence to her

and his recent death through a drug overdose, their faith in the benefits of a new relationship is particularly questionable. Furthermore, her strongly-felt preference to remain single was interpreted as a misguided reaction during a time of grief (following her ex-partner's death) rather than a rational choice to avoid "a hell of a lot of hassle" or being held back by anything:

> But I do find, having a man does somehow makes a woman, I've found that, with a lot of my friends, you know. I know a lot of my friends would never leave their husbands for any reason. I just think there's too much emphasis on that. And then when I turn around and say no, I don't want to date someone it's a big shock and why should I, you know? Everyone just keeps saying, "oh she's grieving" or something like that…I don't know if I'd ever want to live with someone again. I found that that was just a hell of a lot of hassle! (laughs)…I'd be happy just to sit here, in this house, with Jeanie and the two kids and just live with my best friend for the rest of my life….But I'm just happy where I am and I really, really don't want to change it. But everyone thinks I'm still just denying, holding back and grief and all this stuff but I don't think I really want it. I'm just not like that, just prefer to drift through life with Zak [her son] now, you know? When he goes, just go, OK, I'll do this now rather than being held down by anything (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student, 1 child).

Susie also voiced the opinion that, although there is an assumption that 'times have changed', many young women's increased license to engage in casual sexual activity was actually centred on forging a dependent relationship with a man. She suggests that the difference for young women today is not a reduction in their need to have a man but in the behaviour that they will engage in to achieve this aim:

> I haven't been in the 1950s or anything like that, but, to me it just means that the women these days are desperate. I know it sounds really funny but women are compromising their own wants for a man or they're turning into sluts because they think that they're gonna get men from it…You know, you think it's only an olden days thing, where the women needs a man and that. It's just a different kind of woman looking for a man now. The women are actually putting out and stuff like that, to get the man. If they get the man they're just willing to stay with them. It really, really frustrates me (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student, 1 child).

For Gwen, who was one of the oldest participants in the research sample and one of the most career-focused, the experience of approaching heterosexual relationships in a self-interested

and autonomous manner had resulted in problematic liaisons and criticism from her boyfriends. In the following quote, she challenges men's stated desire for a self-sufficient and liberated woman. She has been negatively described as "cold" because of her disinclination to shoulder the expressive work which is expected of a naturally feminine woman (identified as 'emotion work' by Hochschild 1983, 1990 and 2003, and 'wifework' by Maushart 2001). The new emphasis on an assertive and independent femininity brings with it the complex and contradictory requirement for women to be both confident and demure in their relationships. As a result of her unwillingness to manage such demands, Gwen was purposefully avoiding a relationship during her postgraduate studies on the basis that it could distract her from her work focus and could potentially complicate her plans to work overseas after the completion of her research.

> Gwen: In general guys complain about girls being too emotional. The thing is, they think they want an independent woman until they have one. And then they're like, if they feel like they're not getting all the emotional support they want, they don't like having to ask for it. Yeah, actually I've often been told, "you're different to most girls." OK (laughs). They're, like, no, no, that's a good thing.
>
> Joanne: And have guys thought you've been too strong or too independent?
>
> Gwen: Yes, I think so. Like, one, my long-term relationship, at one stage he actually said that I was cold. I was, like, "OK, it's not that I don't care about you I just probably don't say it as much." And it wasn't that he said it a lot either, he was probably the same as me but he was used to being in a relationship where he was probably felt more appreciated verbally, I guess, than what I said (Gwen, 25, White Australian, Postgraduate Student).

Explanations for relationship problems

Explanations for difficulties in relationships were commonly individualised and biologised. Beth, a twenty-three year old white Australian postgraduate student described her dissatisfaction with the amount of unreciprocated nurturing that she provided to men in relationships and blamed herself for drawing needy men to her and then acting sacrificially, "I seem to attract these men. I think I tend to want to rescue, which I am trying not to do".

Alternatively, problems with relationships would be ascribed with biological interpretations, even in the midst of demonstrably unreasonable behaviour. For example, following their separation, Gina's partner regularly came to her house during the night, drunk and demanding entry, questioned the paternity of her unborn child and withheld child support payments.

However, his suspicious and controlling behaviour is not interpreted as an attempt to assert dominance over her but is minimised as "mind games and stuff" and Gina pejoratively judges herself as weak for acceding to his demands and explains this as a result of pregnancy-induced hormonal imbalance:

> I mean there's still games and stuff, like mind games and stuff happening. But I'm, through my pregnancy I've been a bit emotional and that so I think that that sort of played a big part in it. Like that I haven't been able to like, he turns up here after he's been drinking and stuff in the morning and all through the middle of the night and stuff and I haven't been big enough to go, no go away…I think my pregnancy has played a big part in that…So I'd say that hormones had a lot to do with the last six months (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

In a similar vein, Ashley's frustrations as a young mother who struggles with the burden of domestic work and childcare are interpreted as a biological response to the injected Depro Provera contraceptive and her attempts to obtain assistance from her partner are described in the pejoratively gendered terms of "nagging" and "harping":

> I myself think once it all dies down and the hormones from the needle are out of my system, I think we might be a bit better. I don't think we'll disagree as much. Like we'll still disagree because that's just us, we disagree about everything. We can disagree about Skye [their daughter]. But not as much as what we have been lately. Yesterday's disagreement was just pathetic. I don't even know what it was over it was that pathetic. But that's just me, harping at him and nagging at him. Because I'll say do something and he'll go, "Yeah, right, hang on a sec" and he's watching TV or doing something. Even playing with her. "Get off your arse and do it!" Like for no reason. And I just think to myself, I feel sorry for my poor neighbours. They must think I'm a total flip-out nutcase. But I think everyone has their days (Ashley, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Some of the young women's talk about relationships provides some support for the idea that marriage and other relationships are not experienced as matters of regulation and conformity to a moral norm, but as lifestyle decisions made by autonomous individuals (Rose 1999). Therefore, they are increasingly obliged to express their ongoing desire for marriage in ways that provide personal justifications for it that are not influenced by imposed expectations. Other complications to the notion of a radical transformation of intimate relationships include the pressure brought to bear on those young women who demonstrated a disinclination or

disinterest in finding a male partner, the continuing prevalence of male violence and the ongoing shouldering of emotional work by women.

Equality between women: A hierarchy of liberation

Discussions with participants about equality between women revealed a consistent framework of understanding that centred on a binary division between 'ambitious' and 'traditional' women. This identification could be self-ascribed, imposed by another or imagined. The women who were positioned as 'progressive' were represented as career-focused and as rejecting traditionally gendered roles. Those positioned as traditional or submissive were represented as continuing to value domestic responsibilities and identities. Often, either implicitly or explicitly, those positioned as traditional women felt scorned by those located as progressive because being a progressive woman, by definition, requires the rejection of traditionally gendered values. It was important, therefore, for young women to find ways to disidentify with such notions of submissiveness, or to question the value of progressiveness in women. For example, in the following extract, Gina describes an encounter with another mother. The disparity between their situations was evident, despite the similarity of their recent childbirth; Gina's primary occupation is home duties and she is seeking legal advice in relation to financial and behavioural problems that have occurred with her separation from the father of her children. The other woman is a partner in the law form and has returned to work after also very recently giving birth. Gina's criticism of the other woman's behaviour seems informed by mother-blaming attitudes, although she is keen to deny that her criticism is gendered with the phrase "whether it's your mother or anybody". Her disapproval centres on the charges of selfishness and abdication of responsibility and seems framed to protect her own positioning as a traditional rather than progressive woman:

> Like I went to my solicitors the other day and I'm taking the pram up the stairs and the partner in the law firm that I went to, the lady's gone to me oh how old's bub? And I went oh ten days and she goes oh mine's eight…and here she is back at work as a solicitor. I'm thinking, get stuffed, your baby's not even two weeks old and you're back at work. Like no, why are you planning on a family? Like, you should be at home with your baby. Like I couldn't, I can't work that out. I think it's really unfair on the kid. Like why have a baby if you're gonna get someone else to raise it anyway? Whether it's your mother or anybody. You're the parent, you're the person that's decided to have a child, come on (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

The following two extracts also illustrate the progressive versus submissive dichotomy. Charmaine and Jennifer both present themselves as liberated, modern women who stand up to any male behaviour designed to subordinate them, in contrast with subservient and compliant women who, due to personal failings, are not similarly able to stand up for themselves. Charmaine uses the example of male violence against women to denote female submissiveness and similar scenarios were drawn on by several other participants in order to demonstrate their own strength of will or its absence in other women:

> I think it has a lot to do with the person themselves, like the strength of the person themselves. Not physically, but the strength to say, "hey, listen here, this is not gonna happen". Do you know what I mean? Not even having to stand up. I know a lot of women are just too scared to even stand up. I believe, if they didn't, even if they didn't ask, like they do the things they want. Then the men will say, "well I'm gonna keep dominating now". It's like when a woman gets bashed and she just goes back and back and back and back. Well why wouldn't he keep hitting her, because she keeps going back (Charmaine, 25, White Australian, University Student, Home Duties and Part Time Care Worker, 2 children).

> I think some women have still got their own social conditioning to the fact that they do think that they should be in the kitchen, cooking and looking after their partner. And I personally find that I have come against a few women who are my age who have kind of said "oh, aren't you going to cook him some dinner?" or, "don't you do his washing for him?" I go, "no, I don't do his washing for him. He can do it himself, he's not incapable of doing it" (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser).

Rosie also draws on the differentiation of some women as 'progressive' and identifies this as a difference based on race. The following passage illustrates her perception that white women are distinguished from Indigenous women by their economic privilege and poor domestic skills and by their desire for social and economic status, "to be up":

> Wouldn't even be anywhere near their lives. Like wouldn't even touch the sides. Like that's a big thing…Well I think our lives are quite hard. It's not harder. I don't know how to say it. I feel like they're brought up with silver spoons in their mouths, we were brought up hand washing and cooking and cleaning from when I was probably Jade's age, I could clean up. When I was in preschool, I could cook rice, I could cook a meal. We are brought up to be mothers and to be family. Where white women are brought up to be ambitious, to be in control of their education and to want to be up. Where we're completely different. Like I

always say to my partner, because he's never been with any white women, 'cos I would never go with a white person myself, like a partner. I believe that I'm Torres Strait so I'd like my children to be Torres Strait. Not being prejudiced of other cultures and stuff like that. I said, "Would you ever go with a white woman? Would you ever be with a white woman?" He goes, "I don't think so because I wouldn't be able to cook for me." He says, "I'd be hungry every night!" (laughs) So that's all he thinks of (Rosie, 25, Torres Strait Islander, Home Duties and Part Time Administrator, 3 children).

Rosie's final remarks about her partner's disinclination to be with a white woman on account of her inability or disinclination to cook for her family were related to me with humour. I was left with the impression that she took some comfort from her partner's desire to be with a woman who did not spurn a gendered domestic role rather than someone whose perceived priorities were affluence and ambition (which would accord them status and advantage in other circumstances). Although several white Australian participants did identify inequities between women based on race, the Indigenous participants and women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds women were more aware of the marginal situatedness of their point of view (Ang 1995, Moreton-Robinson 2000):

> Because I am from [African country], I do not have everything like the women in this country. I think I do more for my family and not so much freedom in my culture (Nia, 22, African, Home Duties, 2 children).

> No, not same equality for me and Australian women because there is different culture. I think Australian women are more equal with their men, more than our culture (Meena, 23, Indonesian, Home Duties, 1 child).

In general, however, the recognition of racial and ethnic differences between women living in Australia was limited and was often countered by the observation that there was much less racism than before and that because everyone had educational opportunities the remnants of disadvantage could be overcome by determination and application. Here, Leena's emphatic comments about her positive experience as a Fijian Indian in Australia (although other parts of her interview seemed to contradict this) demonstrate again the tendency to disclaim any weakness or disadvantage in one's own circumstances:

> It's great here, especially me, growing up here. I've always, I've felt like an Australian. I was born here and I feel like my nationality has never held me back in any way whatsoever.

There's always been equal opportunities for me, as if I was an Anglo-Australian. Yeah, I think it's fine, it's great. But I think many Indigenous women seem to have more of a problem. There's a lot more prejudice towards them. But towards other ethnic groups, I don't think there is, whatsoever (Leena, 19, Fijian Indian Australian, University Student).

One of the race-based differences between women that the participants were most comfortable in identifying related to women living in Australia and those located in other countries, particularly those with a dominant culture based on Islam. The subordinate status of many women in such conditions was more commonly and confidently identified that the disadvantaged situations of Australian Indigenous women or ethnically diverse women in Australia:

> Jennifer: I think that in Australia they definitely have a lot better opportunities. I think that we live in a world now where race isn't necessarily looked at. If you're an Asian woman or an Aboriginal woman or you're an Italian woman. I think Australia's quite fair in giving the jobs to anyone. Obviously in certain communities in certain places there would still be a lot of traditions from their own countries, which would put restrictions upon that (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser).

When I engaged the participants in discussions about equality between and within groups, there was a commonly expressed view that oppressive attitudes and behaviour were now less frequent and that conditions for previously disadvantaged groups had improved. This view was expressed by each of the three young women in this research who identified as lesbian or bisexual in relation to attitudes about homosexuality. Inequality between lesbian and straight women was only mentioned by each of the three women who identified as lesbian or bisexual and their tendency to minimise it's ongoing disadvantage is illustrated by the following extract from Narina's interview:

> We just find woman as women. I don't find any of them more, you know, they stand out more than the other ones. Only the rich stand out more than the poor, but, you know, that's probably it. Maybe in some situations, girls that are in lesbian relationships might be disadvantaged to straight people. But it's not really like that anymore. The world's got a little bit more understanding than they were, like a decade ago, about things (Narina, 19, Torres Strait Islander and White Australian parentage, Unemployed).

Women can do anything: "It's up to you to make things happen"

Despite identifiable differences between women, the idea that potentially disadvantaging circumstances could be overcome was consistently stated. Again, there was evidence of a tendency for participants to disavow drawbacks that might personally relate to them. Toni was determined to "go a different way" than her mother who was drug addicted and to overcome the difficulties of her own background of state care and physical abuse. My discussions with Peta centred on her desire to transcend the restrictions of motherhood to find personal fulfilment in employment.

> I think we are equal. Sometimes they've been brought up [in difficult circumstances] but that doesn't matter 'cos, like, they have their own mind and they can go a different way than their background (Toni, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

> And I am capable of doing anything a career woman would do. OK, fair enough, I've got a few setbacks but I believe I can do, someone who's got no kids and a fantastic career, I can do the same thing with kids. My workload would be bigger than those that have the career. I'd have the job and the job at home to do as well, so (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

The concept of self-determination and personal responsibility was strongly endorsed by young women and was consistently invoked to suggest the limited impact of disadvantage on equality between women. The following two quotes are from the young women who identified themselves as lesbians:

> I actually hate it when women whine that they can't do something because I believe that it's up to you to make things happen. It comes down to who you are as a person, you know, your strength and belief in yourself. So if you are strong as a woman you can do anything, I reckon (Liz, 22, White Australian, TAFE Student).

> The way things are now, it's not about men holding women back. Some women hold themselves back, they haven't got that view that they can get out there, whereas they can now and they just have to realise that and not be so much into the kind of victim way of looking at it, you know, that sort of view of life where you don't believe in yourself. So I think that if women think they're not equal it's about themselves, not the old way of things when it was unfair (Dee, 20, White Australian, Restaurant Worker).

Studies have found that privileged young women in Britain and Australia express the idea that individual effort is the key factor in career opportunities and outcomes (Kenway 1990, Roker 1993; Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001). Where it is believed that opportunities are open to anybody, the educational and occupational hierarchy is seen to reflect individual ability and effort. Bates (1993) found that this discourse is powerful even among those in disadvantaged circumstances and with a lack of resources and this concurs with findings from this research. Both of the young women in the following quotes were mothers but while Sharne described a loving, affluent and supportive family background, Susie's life experiences included the early death of a parent, homelessness, domestic violence, criminal activity and problematic alcohol and drug use. Despite these differences, both speak of opportunities being open to all and that success is dependent on effort alone:

> I don't think things are unfair, I think it's more the choices that you make. Like I pretty much see it as anyone can do anything, it's whether you put your mind to it and follow through with that and you know, you'll do it. I believe that if you make yourself do it then you'll get where you want to go. If you don't you can't blame anyone but yourself. I don't really think that it's fair to say oh I couldn't do this, because of this. Like there are certain circumstances but if you're determined to do something I feel that you will find a way to do it, no matter what (Sharne, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

> If a mother teaches a girl just to stand up and take it, she's gonna do that no matter where she is, in married life, in school life, in work life where, you know, she's gonna get, like, behind. And if a woman's not willing to play the game and get up there then she's gonna get left behind, you know. And I don't think there's any inequalities between women and that, I just think it's more how much ambition you've got, how willing you are to get in there. And if someone is willing just to step back and go, "there you go", then of course they're gonna get left behind. I don't think its inequality. It's just ambition (Susie, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

In the previous extract, Susie places strong emphasis on personal motivation and drive. Mothers are accorded much responsibility for preparing their daughters for advancement as well as for self-protection against men's violence and exploitative behaviour. Susie's use of vocabulary associated with competitive sports ("play the game", "get in there" and "gonna get left behind") gives a sense of what she regards as the necessarily combative nature of women's assertiveness.

Indigenous young women also expressed a meritocratic view of the world, particularly but not solely those who were engaged in higher education projects:

> I believe anything is possible. If you really want something bad, you work hard for it and go and get it (Jasmine, 22, Torres Strait Islander, University Student).

> If you do the right thing you will get there one day. That's what I believe. If you work hard, you will. Even when it's hard you got to keep going and always work hard (Molly, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Home Duties, 4 children).

From my perspective, the most unanticipated feature of this research occurred during responses to my questions about equality between women. The question was usually introduced after some conversation about equality between men and women and was often explicitly linked to this discussion. I would commonly say, "I've asked what you think about equality between men and women, now I'd like to ask about equality between women." At this point there was a common tendency for the young women to interject with laughter or an exclamation characterised by animated exasperation which indicated that this was a 'big issue' about which they had a lot to say. The following extract from Paula's interview illustrates the typical features of this response. The manner of many of the participants was strikingly less restrained and self-conscious than when responding to other lines of inquiry. The most common reaction to this question was to assert that there was not equality between women because of the negative way in which many women treated each other in their interpersonal relationships, their "bitchiness":

> Yeah, women are the bitchiest people I know. I prefer men! A lot of my friends when I was growing up were guys. Simply because women are really bitchy and they're not accepting of others. There's not equality between them. Men aren't, I noticed in the town I grew up in, men weren't so snobby but women could be, like very "don't come into my circle", kind of thing. So there's a lot of differences between women (Paula, 19, White Australian, University Student).

The unpleasant features of relationships with other girls and women that were identified were disloyalty, exclusionary behaviour and competition. Clare was one participant who expressed this view quite vigorously, in contrast to her uneasiness with the subject of equality between men and women (because she never "felt like women were really restricted" and possibly

thought I would disagree or not understand her standpoint). Her description of the competitiveness of girls and women assisted her to explain the position she took in our previous discussion about whether or not women were disadvantaged in relation to men:

> Clare: I don't think we're all equal. I feel women are in competition with each other. I think, I think, well this is me anyway. I've never felt like I was in competition with a guy so I'm not sure how other women have felt but I have sensed competition from other girls, with me. Or, you know, you, I'll look at them and sense it. There's huge competition with girls with regards to everything like who you're with, like I guess popularity back in high school, relationships, guys, uni, when it comes to doing well in classes, there's competition with who gets the better marks. It's a really, that's why I never really felt like women were really restricted 'cos women are just so, well the ones I'm exposed to here [at university], it's very competitive (Clare, 24, White Australian, Veterinary Nurse).

The use of young women's undermining and competitive behaviour to challenge or destabilise notions of inequality between the sexes was also drawn on by Beth. Her strongly individualised account of antagonism between women suggests that it is personal failings within girls and women that lead them to be particularly hurt by the behaviour of their female peers:

> You know I really feel that it's not, I think some of the biggest struggles, problems, my opinion anyway, some of the biggest problems that these young women have, may necessarily be related to equality. I think a lot of the problems we have come from within us. I mean, a lot of the time I find when I go out find I get dressed for women not men. You know, like, and in school, I mean yeah, there's a lot of guys that put a lot of pressure on you or call you fat but nothing hurts more than when one of the other girls calls you fat (Beth, 23, White Australian, Postgraduate Student).

The idea that women are as aggressive as boys may be an appealing idea for some because it offers some relief from previous representations and expectations which emphasised female meekness and subordination. It also challenges the feminised view of girls and women as *only* caring, relational and connected to others. My conversations with the young women who participated in this research alerted me to the significance of women's competitive and bullying behaviour. However, the increased attention and analytical focus on this issue, noted in the literature review, are troubling and require further examination. Feminist commentators have often pointed out that boys and men are regarded as having a right to aggression

whereas girls and women don't (for example Cox, Stabb and Bruckner 1999; Greer 1999; Tavris 1989). Initially harnessing this feminist perspective, Lamb (2001), Simmons (2002) and Oakes-Ash (2003) identify that western culture refuses girls access to open conflict. In spite of this, their analysis of and response to the issue tends to position masculinised aggression and self-interest as the standard for girls and women to aspire to in order to avoid more covert relational aggression. In their desire to free girls and women from gendered prescriptions of acceptable behaviour which deny angry impulses, aggression (rather than assertiveness) is normalised rather than challenged. I would suggest that, notwithstanding the anguish that results from relational aggression, such non-physical aggression is the weapon of those who are positioned as weaker than the dominant group. It reflects the relative powerlessness of girls and women in a culture characterised by masculine dominance as much as their capacity for meanness. The literature review considered connections made by Jessica Ringrose (2004) between a focus on the mean behaviour of girls and the aim to claim parity between male and female aggression. These claims are particularly pertinent in light of the dearth of empathy for women who have been victimized by male violence which was consistently expressed by many participants in this research and the disconcerting enthusiasm for the subject of negative female behaviour.

McRobbie (1991c) emphasises the role of class in women's anger, contending that when girls get angry or aggressive for no apparent reason, it is often over issues of social class, although this is framed obliquely. Socio-economic status or class was occasionally raised as occasioning differences between women, but was referred to in oblique and euphemistic ways. Here, in response to my probing, Monique describes the cultural capital of confidence that often accompanies higher levels of socio-economic status. Her opposition to snobbish behaviour is based on its incompatibility with her beliefs in meritocracy, social mobility and self-production which are indicated in the phrase "you are what you make yourself":

> Monique: Well you just get some people and you know that they think they're better than everybody else. You really do and they really get on my nerves because I think that you are who you make yourself. Anyone can come in and go to uni so they shouldn't sort of walk in here and go, "oh you don't deserve to be here", because everyone deserves to be here. And you can just see that that's what they think they've never actually said it but you can just tell.
> Joanne: Is it about looks?
> Monique: Yeah, looks and brains.
> Joanne: Money?

Monique: Yeah, like they're richer, they think they're smarter or prettier than you. They just seem to have a little thing about them. They walk around going, yeah I deserve to be here and other people don't (Monique, 18, White Australian, University Student).

The following extract from my conversation with Leanne drew on differences between women due to their occupation. She identifies a clear hierarchy between women with a career and those engaged in home duties ('professional' women here are not expected to be mothers). Again, there are distinctly classed overtones to her pecking order, with the "pretty low" young mothers at the bottom and the "top brand of a lady" with a career further up. Nevertheless, this difference is identified as being mostly due to education, the tool of self-improvement and the most commonly identified way in which one can improve one's circumstances. The need to disavow any inherent or insurmountable disadvantage in one's own circumstances is again in evidence. A key feature of Leanne's life story as she related it to me was her belief that she could transcend her own family's nomadic lifestyle, poverty, substance abuse and experience of violence through her own commitment to education.

But with women you've got the professional women then you've got the mothers and just there is a hierarchy and I think that everybody sort of knows where they fit into that hierarchy…a woman who is a professional, who is earning a higher salary or whatever, she would be, I would consider that as the top brand of a lady and say a home wife or whatever, I would see that as lower, this is probably me, but I don't think it's really professionally, financially, though, I think it's more education I suppose. You know, the little fifteen-year-old girls sitting at home with the baby. That to me is pretty low whereas a woman that's been to uni is here [gestures to a higher level with hands]. I suppose, knowledge is power. The more education you have, the better off you are (Leanne, 21, White Australian, University Student and Home Duties, 1 child).

During participants' talk about women's relationship to one another, there existed a general reluctance to examine structural differences within women's experience. The absence of identification of racial privilege on the part of white women was noticeable. However, interpersonal differences between women were articulated more freely. In similarity to findings reported in the 'Motherhood and domesticity' and 'Employment and education' chapters, this emphasis on individual determination frequently included a particular renunciation of disadvantage that might relate to themselves.

Friendships with boys and men: "So we're equal because we're friends"

In addition to the frequent criticisms of their relationships with girls and women, it was common for participants to describe friendships with boys in positive terms which included comments about the flaws and failings of girls. Many of the young women believed that non-sexual friendships with boys were more relaxed and honest than relationships with other girls because they were less emotionally intense and competitive, echoing a finding of social commentator Hugh Mackay in his examination of generational differences (1997, 167).

> I actually have more guy friends than girl friends. I think because the competition's there. I think girls are too competitive. At least with guys you know that you can talk about them. I think girls are all bitchy these days too. At least with guys you get the honest answer. As long as they know you've got a boyfriend they don't try anything on you, it's good. I find most of them are genuine and I've had a few friends who have gone behind my back with guys I've been going out with and I don't really trust a lot of my friends, that's a bad thing (Bronwyn, 21, White Australian, Real Estate Administrator).

> I have a lot of male friends and I get along quite well with men. I think sometimes it's almost easier to be friends with men, in respect to what we were speaking about earlier where females can hold each other back a bit more. And in general I've found that female friends are a lot more emotional than male friends. I'm not a very emotional person either and that probably is another reason why I get on well with male friends (Gwen, 25, White Australian, Postgraduate Student).

There were suggestions that (old-fashioned?) debates about relationships between the sexes were less relevant for girls and young women who were used to having friendships with boys. For Monique, the affirming experience of having boys as long-term friends means that she is less concerned by inequality between men and women and doesn't "look at it that much":

> It's better than it was but still not completely equal. I don't think it ever will be, not totally, but it could definitely get better. But I have pretty good relationships with guys anyway so I don't look at it that much…The guys that I know, like my best mates, I've been friends with them for about seven years since I did cadets and we've just grown up together. So we are equal because we're friends and they just expect that I'm gonna go to uni. I'm hopefully going to pass and my other girlfriends are gonna do well at uni too and they just know it.

They just think that it's cool, they think it's great (Monique, 18, White Australian, University Student).

Similarly, Holly emphasises the change in circumstances where it is more common for girls and boys to be friends. A clear distinction was identified by the participants who took up this theme, between 'nice guys' and those who identified with 'macho' masculinised behaviour. The young women's talk of boys as friends provided support for claims that masculinity is increasingly represented and experienced in terms associated with femininity (Kimmel 1994, Segal 1990). In order to support the view that distinctions between men and women are reducing, self-adornment and grooming were also cited as no longer specifically female activities. According to Holly, one of the outcomes of inter-sex friendships is that nice guys can be positively influenced by their girl friends and take on feminised behaviours, "become sensitive and things like that":

All their friends aren't just guys anymore. Women are their friends as well. They can become sensitive and things like that. I think men and women are much more friends now…With guys, I'm friends with guys and girls but you just, the ones that you are friends with, they're different to the other guys that don't have any girlfriends. Like they're not as hard. And think girls, because we are becoming stronger, we can hang with the guys. Like they guys find us just as funny as their friends and things like that (Holly, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Holly's final comments about girls now being regarded as fitting companions for boys indicates that this is seen as a sign of achievement, of admission to the winning team, the group with higher status. Feminist academics have discussed the conditions in which girls and women may seek male approval. Lyn Mikel Brown (1999) has argued that girls who struggle to exist in a male-dominated culture may align themselves with dominant voices, attempting to be on the winning side to reach safety and security. Similarly, in her examination of women who reject feminism, Robin Rowland has written how women may decide to court powerful (male) forces to succeed and may need to reject other women in order to prove their allegiances to male power (1989).

An overwhelming feature of the responses to questions about equality between men and women was the naming of significant interpersonal problems between young women which was commonly paired with the identification of more positive experiences of friendship with

young men. The intention of these consistent observations seemed to be to challenge notions of women as commonly supportive of each other and as powerless or submissive in comparison to men. Indeed, their mean behaviour was often described as competitive. Men, on the other hand, were often represented as becoming more feminised through their relationships with women.

Chapter summary and conclusion

The findings reported in this chapter urge a more qualified assessment of a widely represented transformation of intimacy such as that proposed by Giddens (1992). What is more pronounced in the young women's views about relationships is the gap between continuing structured inequality and the new cultural ideal of egalitarian relationships. Despite many changes to the extent of their opportunities that appear monumental when compared with previous generations, continuing manifestations of male domination, including significant experience of men's violence in various forms, mean that young women must still navigate contradictions associated with desires for independence and the wish to have a partner (and children) one day.

The majority of young women and those with high educational capital in particular, have strong expectations for their intimate relationships based on mutuality and emotional fulfilment. There was evidence, however, that women continue to carry the burdens of systematic gender inequality, often through their 'emotion work', but recast it as personal or biological pathology. The identification of inequality between women based on race was minimal and tentative and the disadvantage of not identifying with the dominant heterosexual group was only raised by the lesbian and bisexual women, in order to reduce its contemporary impact. However, personal disparities between women were expressed more confidently and vociferously than women's inequality with men and the role of a popularised focus on girls' meanness in contributing to this tendency was discussed.

Chapter seven

Politics

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to examine young women's identification with and understanding of feminist politics. The literature review chapter outlined how young people's political identification has become a reasonably well-researched area and, amidst claims of a post-feminist era and a conservative backlash against feminism, analysis of young women's allegiance with feminism has flourished in the past decade. Writing about feminism commonly positions it as a disempowered political movement with limited currency for younger generations of women (Bailey 2002). The conclusion of much research and popularised commentary is that young women are politically apathetic (Bellafante 1998, Summers 1994), disenchanted or disconnected from feminist philosophy and activism (Denfeld 1995, Pipher 1994). The specific focus of this chapter is to examine young women's relationship to feminism in a socio-political climate deeply influenced by the ideology of neo-liberalism, in particular its valorisation of free choice and underpinning assumptions of individualistic political beliefs and behaviour.

The achievement of equality (just about)

Views about women's equality with men formed the backdrop to young women's understandings of and relationship to feminism and these discussions usually took place just prior to the issue of feminism being introduced to the conversation. Most young women in this research responded to requests for their views about equality with men by reflecting on the significant expansion of freedoms and opportunities for young women today. They expressed support for the way in which subordinating stereotypes and traditions associated with women had been challenged. Their own circumstances were commonly measured against what they regarded as blatantly unfair conditions that previous generations of women were subjected to. For many, the existence of legislation which confirmed women's equal status with men was taken as indicating the large-scale eradication of discrimination. While four young women thought there was significant inequality between men and women, the general assertion was that equality had "just about" been achieved. Expressions such as "we're getting there" and "everything's pretty much on an even keel" were used. When the existence of any inequity was voiced, this was generally done in ways that diminished its significance, "you still encounter sexism every now and then" and there is still "the odd bad

seed". Inequality was described as a residual and temporary problem and an unproblematic trajectory towards equality was imagined.

Ways of inquiring about feminism

Much thought was given to the method of engaging in conversations with young women about their understanding and identification with feminism. Some social psychology research has emphasised the importance of not relying on self-identification in research on feminist consciousness (Henderson-King and Stewart 1994, 1997, 1999) and the literature review noted that greater support is generally found for covert rather than overt support for feminism, where participants in research studies are much more willing to agree with feminist ideas than to identify themselves as feminists (Burn, Aboud and Moyles 2000). I wanted to avoid a reductive and dichotomous approach in which support for feminism is either reported as present or absent. Rather, I was more interested in the *ways* in which young women spoke (or did not speak) about feminism, the range of views they held and whether or not they identified their views as feminist.

There was limited unsolicited mention of feminism and when this occurred it was always introduced by women with educational capital and usually by those who had a generally positive view of feminist politics. Most commonly, however, I raised this issue after the participants had spoken more broadly about their lives and about equality between men and women. I generally introduced this topic to the conversation by asking what feminism meant to them. The conversation would usually then turn to the query about whether or not they would say they had feminist views. I found myself retreating from the assumption of knowledge about feminism implicit in the phrasing of this opening question when I interviewed young women with limited formal education. Under these circumstances, I would first ask whether the young woman had heard of feminism. This was posed in the form of an interested and curious inquiry in an attempt to avoid a presumption of knowledge or the impression that I was testing their intelligence. Molly's response below was typical of this group of young women who would commonly reply that they had not heard of feminism or that they were uncertain about what it was. Despite my efforts to avoid this outcome, some young women did demonstrate some self-consciousness or embarrassment about the absence of this particular knowledge. Most of these young women would, however, ask me what feminism was and I tended to answer in the following way:

Joanne: I was wondering if you had heard of feminism.

Molly: No. (pause) What's that then?

Joanne: The Women's Movement, ideas about women and where they are in society.

Molly: Like Blacks in America, fighting for their rights?

Joanne: Yes, like that.

Molly: What was that word you asked again?

Joanne: Feminism.

Molly: I've never heard of that. But I wouldn't, would I? (laughs) I never had much education and stuff (Molly, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Home Duties, 4 children).

Molly identifies that the limits of her schooling have meant she is less likely to have found out about feminism. The following section examines the relationship between education and familiarity with feminism.

Feminism and privilege

Participants with limited formal education frequently demonstrated some awkwardness about their level of knowledge about feminism. In the following quote, Peta identifies it as a form of political terminology used by "high people" and struggles to compose what she would like to be a suitably informed and articulate answer to my query:

Joanne: Have you heard of feminism?

Peta: I have.

Joanne: What does it mean to you?

Peta: Just a political word (pause). Oh, I know what I want to say, it's not coming out. I know it's like a political jargon word that, like, you know, the high people use. That's what I think. They use it just to say, like another way of saying, women can't do this or women should be doing this. Like women should be staying home and like they say, stereotypical, that women should be staying home and doing the cooking and cleaning and looking after the children while the men do all the work (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Every young woman who had higher educational experience and both of the young women for whom English was a second language exhibited some comprehension of a meaning of feminism and understood it to be a reaction (often in an historical sense) to the status of women in comparison to men. This was not always the case for young women with limited educational capital. Some of these participants, including Peta in the quote above and Ashley

in the following extract, identified feminism as a manifestation of rather than a response to sexism, sometimes using it interchangeably with sexism:

> Joanne: Have you heard of feminism?
>
> Ashley: Yes.
>
> Joanne: What does it mean to you?
>
> Ashley: I don't really understand.
>
> Joanne: What do you think of when you hear the word?
>
> Ashley: Feminism? They're sexist against girls sort of thing. Yeah, like, yeah. Like males are sexist against girls. Whether they're anywhere, like in the workforce or wherever. And if young girls walk down the street in their skimpy clothes, the males whistle at them or whatever. That's feministic isn't it?
>
> Joanne: It's what feminists have talked about as being a problem.
>
> Ashley: Yep, OK, yep.
>
> Joanne: The women's movement. Feminism's kind of about that.
>
> Ashley: I don't know, I haven't really ever thought about that I've just, because I've always got along with the boys so well I've never really had a problem with it (Ashley, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Ashley's comment about feminism having little relevance to her because of her affinity with boys recalls the discussion of friendships with boys in the 'Relationships' chapter. Participants' positive experiences of mixed sex friendships seemed to promote perceptions of an unproblematic existence of equal status for women and men. From Ashley's point of view, her ability to develop friendly attachments with boys has negated the need to question gender relations. In fact, Ashley had told me earlier in the interview that she was raped during her early teens by a boy who was a friend. This resulted in a pregnancy which she terminated. I do not suggest that it is impossible for girls and young women to have positive male friendships, or that Ashley should have stopped having such relationships after her violent experience. However, it is worth noting that Ashley does not connect her experience of enjoying friendships with boys to her rape by such a friend and goes on to make the point that her getting on well with boys discounts her need for a feminist politics. Perhaps what this situation highlights is the propensity for experiences of male violence to *primarily* be viewed as unfortunate, solitary incidents which can be obscured by more benign experiences. Of course, individual women like Ashley may only experience an isolated experience of sexual violence, but it is the positioning of such an experience as an anomalous event which obscures its endemic occurrence for women as a group. It is the privatising of fundamentally

gendered experiences such as rape that poses a challenge for the ongoing relevance of an emancipatory politics such as feminism.

Young women's responses to my enquiries about feminism commonly revealed its association with the privilege of race, class or occupational status. Lacey described herself as open-minded about feminism and linked it with women's progressive career aspirations (which she also shared). Beth also articulated an understanding of feminism that emphasised women's increased participation in public life:

> I think a feminist is somebody that will, like, go out there and get a good job and more power to them, whatever. Like I see a career woman these days as a feminist (Lacey, 18, White Australian, Restaurant Worker).

> Strong women. Doing it by themselves. I don't really have anything against getting married, having children, being a housewife at all. But when I think of feminism I think of women doing it the same as men. Being out in the workplace and stuff like that (Beth, 23, White Australian, Postgraduate Student, Science).

Beth dissociates herself from the disapproval of child-rearing and domesticity that is attributed to (radical and socialist) feminism, a tendency that is discussed later in this chapter. Other participants, such as Jennifer and Holly who are quoted below, also demonstrated their understanding of a primary connection between feminism and women's employment or, more specifically, the careers of middle class or highly educated women. It was common for this understanding of feminism to include an impression of women as "dominant females", to use Jennifer's words or as 'strong women', 'being in control'. Both of these young women express their allegiance to equality rather than feminism.

> Joanne: You kind of mentioned this before Jennifer, But do you consider yourself to have feminist beliefs?
> Jennifer: To a certain degree. I think I look for more, equality. That a woman should be given the opportunity to do a man's job. Shouldn't be restricted just because of your sex. So I guess I would have certain feministic views. Definitely.
> Joanne: What does feminism mean to you? If I say the word to you?
> Jennifer: More dominant females! (laughter). Definitely (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser).

Joanne: So would you consider yourself to have feminist beliefs?

Holly: Yeah. (laughs) Yeah. I think women are just as strong as men and it's proven through the way we work now. Like there's women that are engineers and I think if it wasn't for us thinking that we are as strong we wouldn't have got as far. So I do think we are as equal as men. Sometimes men try to think that they're better than us but everyone's equal. I don't know if I'm more feminist, but I just think everyone should be classed, should be treated equally. I don't know if that's a feminist point of view, but, that's the way it should be (Holly, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Rosie appeared initially uncomfortable and dismissive of the subject of feminism. Earlier in the interview she had described her aspirations as oriented to her family rather than to her own educational or employment ambitions. She is unsure whether the meaning of feminism is congruent with her values but perceives it to be self-indulgent and distanced from issues of importance to her:

Rosie: Feminism doesn't really mean anything to me. I don't feel anything when it comes to that word. I don't understand it and I don't think I would like to understand it. I'm just happy being me and that's about it. Just respecting women and women just respecting themselves is something that's completely different. Well it could be feminism, I'm not quite sure.

Joanne: You're not quite sure if that's feminism?

Rosie: Yeah, I'm not quite sure if that's what it is. But worldwide feminism and 'women can do anything'. Women can do anything but I don't think that they need to have a sticker about it. I don't know. Or have big world women meetings, you know, I don't think that it's that important. Yeah, that's about it for feminism…Yeah because they have that women's day, International Day of the Woman or something like that. Everybody at work, all the ladies, you've got to bring something in and buy a badge or whatever it is. I'll just sit there for the food. I don't sit there and listen to anything that they say. I just think, you should be glad that you're actually alive rather than worrying about woman's days and that sort of stuff (Rosie, 25, Torres Strait Islander, Home Duties and Part Time Administrator, 3 children).

This research found that there is continuing salience for the idea that feminism is for privileged and/or white women. Women of colour and working class women have provided important critiques of feminism and the Women's Movement. In Australia, Indigenous women have documented reasons for their limited and cautious involvement with feminism, which include their prioritising of racism and supporting Indigenous men and the racism of white feminists (for example Huggins 1994; Lucashenko 1994). However, the association of

feminism with elitism (represented by independent, educated, childless women) contributes to an undermining of feminism as an emancipatory politics for all women. Marion Sawer (2003c) argues that such views have their origins in populist, anti-elitist discourse which suggests that feminists are contemptuous of 'ordinary' women. Similarly, Dena Attar challenges the misrepresentation of feminism as having neglected poor women, citing its early demands for free, universal access to contraception and childcare and campaigns for equal pay (1992).

Can feminists be women?

Young women consistently described particular behavioural ascriptions that they connected with feminism. Some of these attributions concerned behaviour that they thought was prohibited or expected by feminism. In the extract below, Courtney associates feminism with self-assertion (which is a trait that she understands herself to have). She also couples feminism with disapproval of women's nurturing roles in relationships (which she values for herself). Therefore, her response to my question about whether she had feminist beliefs is a qualified negative because it is important that she presents herself as a modern, 'enlightened' young woman who does not allow herself to be dominated by men:

> Joanne: So, have you heard of feminism?
> Courtney: Yes.
> Joanne: Would you say that you had feminist beliefs?
> Courtney: Not really. Like I'm opinionated and I like to stick up for myself, but I'm also the person who likes to be the wife in the relationship. I like to be that kind of person. I'm not huge on I have to do this and I have to that because I'm a girl, ra, ra, ra. But at the same time I do have opinions of my own that I do like to voice (Courtney, 21, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Other responses to this question elicited similar sentiments. In the following quotes from Leanne and Sharne, feminism is correlated with a rejection of men's chivalrous or protective conduct towards women (which they enjoy). It is simultaneously associated with challenging the positioning of women as weak or limited by their sex (which they both support):

> Joanne: You mentioned feminism, would you say that you have feminist beliefs?

Leanne: Um, yeah, I don't really know. I think I'm probably a contradiction, I know I'm probably doing things that I say that we shouldn't be doing. But I like, when Den and I go out, I like him to open my car door, I like him to, you know, have his arm around me, you know, those types of things. But if someone else was to do that for me I'd probably be like, you know, I can open my own door. But, so I don't know if I really, I don't know if it's really a thing that a guy has to open a door for me or whether it's just something that I want Den to do for me. But yeah, I don't call myself a raving feminist or anything but yeah; I would be offended if they were to treat me like I was a delicate little petal or something (Leanne, 21, White Australian, University Student and Home Duties, 1 child).

I suppose I've always been taught that I can do anything just as well as any man so, from my mother. So, you know, I haven't really been one to say I can't do that, that's a man's job…But um, so yeah, like, but at the same time I'm also someone who likes to feel protected and I like to have, I like to have a man in my life and I like the feeling of security that he gives me. So I'm kind of both. Like I always feel, I never feel scared or anything like that. Like he gives me a great sense of security (Sharne, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

After expressing approval of many of the changes that feminist politics had brought to women's lives, Greta then moved to qualify her support. Her phrase, "but I quite like being a woman, you know" suggests that she associates feminist thought with a move towards masculinised behaviour and rejection of women's conventional roles, which she expresses value and desire for:

Greta: But I quite like being a woman, you know. I quite like the idea of having kids and being home and being a mother and looking after them and being a nurturing person.
Joanne: And do you think that feminism's given the idea that those things aren't right for women?
Greta: I think there are people who are quite happy to sit at home and have children and never leave my hometown. I know I say, "how can you do that?" kind of thing. But then I think that's our decision, their decision. People do what they want. But yeah, they're sort of looked down on, I feel. Sort of, it's not right to be an at-home mother anymore, barefoot and pregnant in the kitchen is bad (Greta, 22, White Australian, Nurse).

What these responses seem to indicate is an individualistic interpretation of feminist analysis of the potentially oppressive nature of heterosexual relationships and domestic responsibility. Budgeon (2001) reported that the young women in her research did not speak of the abstract

woman of feminist discourse and that was largely the case in this research too. Young women's assessment of feminism occurred almost totally through the prism of their own life and personality. Structural feminist critique is thus likely to be read as a disparagement of their individual values. This has combined with the visible (and certainly more acceptable) feminist influence in the sphere of women's employment to produce the interpretation of feminism as pro-career and anti-family.

Free to choose? Barriers to feminism

Feminism was often described in terms of its stigmatic associations, whether or not the young women considered that they had some positive identification with feminism. Many of the negative connotations of feminists that were identified demonstrated the intransigence of hostility towards lesbianism, despite references in other parts of interviews that emphasised the increasing acceptance of 'difference' such as homosexuality.

> I just don't think it's that big a deal anymore, to be lesbian or gay or whatever. People don't care about that stuff anymore. You should just be who you want to be (Dee, 20, White Australian, Restaurant Worker, identified herself as a lesbian).

The other two young women who identified as lesbian or bisexual all made statements similar to that of Dee, above, that minimised the potential disadvantage of their sexuality. However, the power of heterosexism and homophobia were apparent from the frequency of young women's reports that reported being perceived as a lesbian to be a significant barrier to feminist identification:

> But before I had feminist views, when you heard the word feminism when you were younger, especially when I was younger, you'd think of women making trouble. And then there's the old, the old thought of the hairy legs, hairy-armed lesbians, things like that. And they're still very strong in our society. People still think like that. And when you say feminist to somebody there's usually quite a nasty reaction from them (Kate, 21, White Australian, University Student).

> It's a common attitude that feminists are, you know, from the seventies, and they just want this and this and they are being ridiculous and all this. And you know, like, they're lesbians and they have this and this group (Eva, 25, White European, University Student, 1 child).

A lot of people automatically assume that a feminist is a lesbian or butch, someone very masculine. That's not necessarily the case. People, you can just look at some and go, "you're a feminist". But you can't always pick them and I don't think it's right to stereotype people by the way they look (Julie, 19, White Australian, Real Estate Administrator).

Lesbianism was commonly linked to physical characteristics that are not associated with conventional frameworks of femininity, such as body hair. Feminists/lesbians were commonly positioned as spurning western beauty practices by wearing loose-fitting, androgynous or masculine clothing, being associated with bra-burning and having unstyled (often short) hair and faces bare of make-up. Indeed, many women (who may identify as lesbian and/or feminist) do consciously oppose the burden of restrictive clothing and footwear, reject time-consuming beauty practices and may be informed by a feminist analysis of the sexually objectifying nature of such conventions (for example, see Jeffreys 2005). However, such preferences do not seem to be widely accepted manifestations of choice or individuality. They are marked as deviant and implicitly or explicitly anti-men. Indeed, the lack of acceptance of lesbianism and for those transgressing the beauty practices associated with conventional femininity meant that even those young women who were sympathetic to or supportive of feminist politics qualified the circumstances under which they would express such views:

Joanne: I'll ask you about feminism now because you brought it up. So do you consider yourself to have feminist beliefs?
Bella: Yeah, definitely. But I'm at the stage where I'm being careful of who's around me if I was to say I was a feminist. I don't think I would say that in front of certain people whereas other people I'd be comfortable I could feel that I wasn't being judged by that label (Bella, 20, Aboriginal Australian, University Student).

Joanne: Are there any things that would make it difficult for a young woman to either say she was a feminist or be interested in feminist issues?
Beth: Definitely. I probably wouldn't come out with it. Especially in my work [a male dominated science field]. I think you would get laughed at. And yes, I think, definitely, I think it's a very difficult thing to do (Beth, 23, White Australian, Postgraduate Student, Science).

A significant aspect of the difficulty of identifying as a feminist was its reputation for promoting anti-male views. Some participants who were supportive of feminist politics were

wary of this characteristic and its impact on their relationships with boys and men. Young women who were not sympathetic to feminism usually drew on criticisms of extremism and man-hating as reasons for their disapproval:

> I think feminism's a bit, I think that it's kind of lost track of the meaning. Like there's not really a real meaning for feminism anymore. It's just ball-busters. Like feminism has become, it's not about women anymore, it's about men. To me feminism is more about men than women so that's why I've never really followed that sort of thing because to me it's more about men (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

> But you get some people that are really anti-male and stuff. I've noticed that the women's days, people get up there and are scorning men and putting them down like women were superior and all this sort of thing. And I think men are people too and equally as important in the procreation of life and everything, they have their place (Jana, 21, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

However, as Madeleine Jowett found in her research with young women in Britain, the ways in which feminism is disavowed have changed (2004). Previous analyses (such as Griffin 1989 and Lees 1993) identified that young women recognise merit in feminist ideas but disclaim feminist identities in order to avoid the negative stereotypes associated with man-hating and lesbianism. This research has found that these stigmas still carry significant currency. In addition to this and in common with Jowett (2004), this research found that participants' assessment of feminism was influenced by the celebratory discourses about young women and assumptions about the achievement (almost) of equality with men. Young women explained to me that they no longer regard women as downtrodden and in need of liberation, that men don't enjoy unquestioned authority or have the ability to impose restraint on women's lives. Against these new triumphs and cultural ideals, the 'wrong' kind of feminism denotes melodramatic and out-of date whining and irrelevance and an unseemly attachment to the notion of victimhood. In addition to this, three young women told me that they identified as feminists *despite* the general view that women now "had it all", evidenced by Ellie's reflection below:

> I really get annoyed when girls say, "I'm not a feminist, I'm not feminist" and I feel like saying to them, like, "OK, so you really shouldn't be enrolled at uni then and you really shouldn't even go into a bar, should be driving (Ellie, 25, White Australian, University Student).

An additional dimension to the perception of anti-male sentiment was the view that such apparent man-hating was accompanied by a desire for female superiority and dominance, which is seen as wrong and antithetical to equality and individual freedom. Where there is understood to be equality (almost), the continuation of feminism may be interpreted as a desire to replace equality with a female ascendency:

> I mean, I understand feminists and their views, like when I hear the word feminist I think of women trying to get, well I don't see them trying to get equal with men actually, I see them try to get ahead of men. That's what I think they're trying to do (Suzanne, 21, White Australian, Administrator).

> The way I see it, in a few years, like we've got so far, we are equal to men now, I think, I think it's just gonna stay constant for a while but sometimes I think women are gonna become too feminist. Like they're gonna be overpowering. Like it will probably be in a few years, but women will put the men below them (Holly, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Here, Holly suggests that the trajectory of women's gains is so powerful that, if it continues in the same way, it will result in their dominance over men. I suggest that disapproval of the outcome that Holly imagines is not merely the result of its conflict with the participants' unanimous support for notions of sexual equality. Primarily, it seems a reaction that is disproportionate to the limited gains made by specific groups of women through feminist political activism and is perhaps best explained through reference to the concept of a marked category. A group (such as women) that is identified by its difference to the white masculine norm exists as a marked category (Harding 1986, hooks 1984, Wittig 1982). Whereas, for a person in a dominant class, identity is usually incidental to their situation or representation, any perceived deviance from a marked category group carries more proportional weight. The perceived advancement of women is therefore prone to exaggeration and regarded as fundamentally unnatural.

Just a bit of fun: Disparaging feminism through humour

In her examination of young women's relationship to feminism, Angela McRobbie contends that feminism is simultaneously unpopular, marginalised and normalised, "a kind of legitimate banter between men and women" (2000, 212). Some of the participants in this research made reference to such teasing from men during their consideration of feminism:

And you hear a lot of jokes, like feminist jokes and you're like, "that really wasn't that funny", "oh come on, where's your sense of humour?" or like when people actually taunt you, like "oh women should just be at home", after they've had tiffs and stuff (Annette, 20, Aboriginal Australian, University Student).

Joanne: So what's it like, being a young woman who's a feminist?
Alice: I get laughed at a little bit. Not criticised or anything. Just because people just assume it's just me being different again. But, I don't know, not many people want to say they're a feminist. People make jokes about me like one of the guys I hang around with goes "oh don't talk to her she's a feminist, she'll take you down", you know what I mean. But like other people around me don't seem to care. It's just not passionate to them. And they actually have, like, feminist values, like they'll agree with me. But they won't say they're feminists because they're not passionate about it…and they won't waste their time on feminist issues and stuff because they're not passionate about it.
Joanne: So it's not an easy label to have?
Alice: Oh, well. I don't have any problems with it. I know that people make jokes but it's just light-hearted. No one's ever made a serious critical remark about it or had a go at me for being a feminist or anything like that. So I haven't had any trouble with it (Alice, 20, White Australian, University Student).

And I know my male friends they all look at women as equal, they might have jokes at us, every so often, but we joke back at them, so (Clare, 24, White Australian, Veterinary Nurse).

The nature of the banter was commonly about women and domestic work and men's fear of women they perceived as aggressive. Commonly, the young women who described such scenarios assured me that the men didn't really think those things, recalling Iris Marion Young's (1990) observation that that jokes are a particularly effective way of perpetrating discrimination because they are so difficult to rebut.   Brendan Gough also found that men market themselves as non-sexist whilst espousing prejudiced views (1998). However, each of these young women wanted me to understand that this joking was not something that they felt diminished by or unable to cope with. Alice in particular does not want the teasing to be interpreted by me as serious or damaging. In fact Clare's response that "we joke back at them" was illustrative of the way in which many of the young women defensively engaged with sexist insults spoken in a context of friendly humour.

There were occasions where the compulsion to engage with sexist humour was indisputably more disturbing, although still responded to with the same patterns of minimisation and compulsion to 'see the funny side'. Beth, a postgraduate student, described experiences with "offensive" behaviour of men in her academic field as well as the conflicting discomfort of positioning herself as in any way disadvantaged by such a culture. Thus, she veered between tolerating or joining in with sexist humour and being critical of this culture which devalued and denigrated her sex. In the following extract, she relates a story about her successful application for a bursary as a female student in a field of science and the response of some of her male peers to this:

> Beth: I felt really guilty about applying for that bursary. And a few guys in the department gave me a lot of stick about it.
> Joanne: Guys as men.
> Beth: Yeah men, the PhD students.
> Joanne: And what kind of stick did they give you?
> Beth: They called it a lesbian grant (laughs). Joking around, I didn't really take it seriously. 'Cos they're all pretty funny in that department, you know what the guys are like. They're pretty young. But um,
> Joanne: Was the basis of their criticism that it was unfair?
> Beth: They thought it was unfair because the money was there for girls but not for them to apply for. And I can understand that. 'Cos I didn't really, I don't feel like I probably, I don't know if I deserved it. Like, all it is, I didn't say anything like "oh life is so hard as a woman". I actually write a lot about positive experiences. I think that what got me the money was my marks, I've had good marks and just being a new student. I mean I think if I applied for it again next year I wouldn't get it. But yeah, they were really upset about that. One of them actually wrote an email. You know there's a website that you can go onto and, it was pretty funny, and you can [fraudulently] write emails from other people's addresses. It must, it probably sounds really wrong to you but he went on there and he wrote this email from the Equal Opportunities office to me. And it said, "Dear Beth, we wish to let you know that you have not been accepted for the equal opportunities bursary due to your lesbian activities." And, the funny thing about this guy is that he was asking me out on dates and he's still calling me a lesbian. But it was just, he was so upset that, you know, that I'd actually applied for it and I'd been given a grant (Beth, 23, White Australian, Postgraduate Student, Science).

In this situation the male students feel justified in attacking support that is targeted at women because it is a form of affirmative action and, in their view, unfair. Such an incident exposes

the vulnerability of such programs to criticism from groups that do not recognise their own structural advantage in relation to others. Beth's discomfort with the bursary award gives an insight to the dilemma faced by women who may perceive some need to redress inequities in male dominated arenas, but who struggle to personally identify their own position as one that is deserving of special consideration and assistance. Indeed, Beth reassures herself that the final determinant of her application is not due to any hardship on her part, but is in fact recognition of her intellectual ability. Such disavowal of personal disadvantage has been a consistent theme running through the findings of this research. It emerged again during discussions about feminism and was particularly linked to criticism of victimhood, which is examined in the next section.

Avoiding victimhood: "I can handle it"

It was notable that those young women who were particularly critical of positioning women as victims (themselves or others) were located in largely male-dominated areas of work or study. Here, I continue with Beth's struggle to reconcile her experience of being devalued by the culture of her academic school and occupational field and the need to 'fit in' as much as possible in order to avoid more unbearable treatment and ridicule. Her response to my query about whether she would describe her beliefs as feminist reveals her association of a feminist approach with criticism of others (because it is "hard on other people"). This contrasts with her inclination towards self-reliance and self-blame:

> Beth: Yeah. I mean maybe not as, you know, feminist as… I think I do have strong beliefs in that stuff. I think I'm more hard on myself than I am on other people. So if I found myself in a situation like where I felt really completely disgusted with somebody else, me myself I would beat myself up. I think a lot of women are like, they find themselves in a situation, you think "oh no I can handle it, I can handle it" (Beth, 23, White Australian, Postgraduate Student, Science).

Karen's response to the issue of feminism also revealed a preoccupation with the notion of victimhood, in particular her perception of women's unethical and dishonest positioning of themselves as victims of male violence:

> Joanne: So Karen, would you say you had feminist beliefs?
> Karen: Um, if you asked my male friends they'd say yes! (laughs) they would say definitely. I don't think so. I don't think I have really strong feminist beliefs. I just believe if you believe

in something or if you think you can do something you should go ahead and do it whether you're male or female, no matter what age or anything. And I just believe in a lot of situations females should probably stand up for themselves more. Like for example the whole situation with the footballers. I honestly believe that those girls who say they got raped, even though they may have got raped, they put themselves in the situation themselves. You see girls all the time throwing themselves at movie stars, football players. And then if something bad happens, they call a foul. But in all honesty they put themselves in that situation. So I think in some ways females use the fact that they are females to get what they want. But when it doesn't turn out they'll call a foul. And I think that's wrong (Karen, 23, White Australian, Army Support Services Worker).

Karen expresses value for personal achievement in the context of a discussion about feminism as well as a preference for a gender-neutral orientation to such matters, "you should go ahead and do it whether you're male or female". Her assertion that, "I just believe in a lot of situations females should probably stand up for themselves more" suggests that, in her view, feminist politics is not as pertinent as women's individual responsibility to prevent the experience of male violence. The view that young women were often responsible for sexualised violence was expressed by several participants, often in the context of their clothing or consumption of alcohol; "no wonder they get raped" (Charmaine, 25, White Australian, University Student, Home Duties and Part Time Care Worker, 2 children).

Acceptable (liberal) feminism: "To a certain extent"
The range of young women's reactions to discussion about feminism did not include any outright condemnation of feminism as a whole. It was clear, however, that what young women felt comfortable in criticising and rejecting was radical feminism and what was accepted was the liberal variant of feminism. Given radical feminists' identification of the ideology and systems of male domination as the cause of women's lesser status and oppression, it has been most easily designated as extreme and man-hating (Thompson 2001). Following some criticism of privileged male behaviour and violence against women which she articulated, I asked Helen if she identified her opinions as being based on feminism:

Joanne: Would you say you have feminist beliefs, Helen?
Helen: Well, from what I've just said I guess I am a bad feminist.
Joanne: A bad feminist?
Helen: You know, really strong, too dominant (Helen, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Helen's definition of herself as a "bad feminist" recognises the limited acceptability of criticism of male supremacist ideology and its association with transgressive female behaviour that is "really strong, too dominant". The following selection of quotes demonstrate that the feminist positions which were most consistently and comfortably endorsed were a rejection of the imposition of explicit, exploitative commands by men and support for equality (particularly legislative protection in relation to employment issues):

> Joanne: Do you consider yourself to have feminist beliefs?
> Jasmine: A bit. I think women should be equal with men. Feminism is a strong word. I would think twice about bringing it up (Jasmine, 22, Torres Strait Islander, University Student).

> Joanne: Sharne, would you consider yourself to have feminist beliefs?
> Sharne: To a certain extent, I would think. Probably more equalist beliefs (short laugh) (Sharne, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

> Emma: I think all girls do [support feminism] to a certain extent. Like you wouldn't, it would be hard finding a girl who bows down to what every man says to her or, even if it's not so strong, it's definitely there. I think that you don't find many girls that want to be a homemaker or everyone's got a career that they're going to compete against the male to get. I think that affirms the ideal to a certain extent because you're saying I can do what a male does. And I think, I do have feminist, not strong, strong ones but yes certainly, feminist beliefs (Emma, 20, White Australian, University Student).

> I guess I'm not like necessarily a woman who goes out and holds a placard (laughs). I guess I do have feminist beliefs if you see it as respect and equality amongst women and men in the workforce (Gwen, 25, White Australian, Postgraduate Student).

The majority did not identify feminism as a politics that asserts that women are systematically harmed or disadvantaged. Instead, there was strong evidence that the majority of the young women who expressed understanding and support of feminist philosophy were most approving of an interpretation which emphasised feminism as an expression of individual choice and the actualisation of personal potential:

I actually think that a lot of feminism is quite a good thing because it's just giving more power to women to make themselves happier in a sense. Like, to do what they want to do for a career, to do what they really want to do. It's all about your options and I think that the more outspoken that women get, the more options come forward. Because they say well what if I want to do, what if I really do want to be a decorator and well, why can't I? And I think that girl power's kind of had a good influence in that respect (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser).

As outlined in the literature review, evaluations of the strength and usefulness of an individualistic interpretation of feminism have varied. Budgeon (2001) and Bail (1996), for example, suggest that an individualised version of feminism allows young women to engage with feminist philosophy at the micro-political level of daily activity and personal choice (2001). I share the scepticism of Skeggs (1995) and McRobbie (2000) who question the implications of an interpretation of feminist philosophy that emphasises individual pleasure and entitlement at the expense of a broader gender analysis and group consciousness.

High regard for legislative equality was frequently expressed. The findings of this research have shown that many young women consider that women 'just about' have equality with men and that full gender equality is a slightly incomplete project. Therefore, their political understanding is that there is little left for women as a group to challenge formally and the requirement now is for them to individually avail themselves of the opportunities that were previously limited or closed to them. Although there were many expressions of appreciation of past feminist activism, they attempted to explain to me how any strong involvement in feminist politics now has a sense of irrelevance and unseemliness about it. For example, Clare's mother explicitly identified with lesbian feminist politics and discussed these views with her daughter. Although Clare was certainly proud of her mother and respectful about feminist activism, its contemporary relevance and incorporation into her life as a young woman was a point of tension between mother and daughter that Clare took efforts to explain in her interview:

We've grown up in a different generation as opposed to my mum. So we've never felt discriminated in the sense of when you're at school and when we went to university after school. So I think, you don't, I don't know whether that's why, cos I only really thought about it because of Mum. But then when I was growing up I didn't really think too much about what happened to you. I think it's because you've always had doors open for you,

you've never felt put down or discriminated against because you're a female. And I'm much, my theory is that as time goes on, less girls are going to be thinking it, in a sense, of if you're thinking equal opportunities, you're a feminist.

Joanne: They don't put the two together?

Clare: Yeah, it's just the way life is. But that's the way I look at it. That's how I look at my life, I haven't had any, I've just had the exposure with Mum, but I haven't had any exposure of anything happening in my life as an experience. To me, it's just the way life is. It's pretty, I know it's not equal, every area, but me personally, I've never been discriminated against, because of my sex. I think, the term feminist now, well I don't think it gets used as much as what it did, a few years ago (Clare, 24, White Australian, Veterinary Nurse).

Clare is making the point that assumptions about and experiences of equality are now unobtrusively integral to women's lives. It is therefore hard for her to understand why explicit allegiance to feminism is required. There is no longer a need to draw attention to the equal worth and ability of women and men because it is now so apparent and widely accepted.

The problem of labels

Some of the participants took up the subject of labels in order to explain young women's resistance to identifying themselves explicitly as feminists, despite widespread agreement that many young women did hold opinions that could be associated with feminism:

Emma: I don't know if they'd actually call themselves feminists or not. Maybe if you sat down with a definition they might go oh yeah, that's what I think, yeah. But I don't think they'd actually come in and say they are a feminist.

Joanne: What are some of the obstacles to saying that? What would impede you from saying yeah, I'm a feminist.

Emma: I don't think there are any obstacles I think if you want to be one you are like you know. I think it would be difficult for me to say every day, like I vote for Labour or, like it's something you hold. Or I'm a Catholic. You know, I don't go around saying that everyday. It's not that you back away but you believe. You don't go around with labels (Emma, 20, White Australian, University Student).

Ruth: I believe that women have a right, to be equal, to make choices. But I think when anything gets taken to that level where you're out on the streets protesting, being really vocal about it, people tend to start ignoring you. Because they just see, oh you're a feminist. So you're labelled and that's what they're gonna see you as. Pretty much taking it to themselves.

Joanne: I was going to ask you, is the feminist label a good label or a bad label to have these days?

Ruth: I think it's a label. Any label's a bad label. I think we should have, we should be able to be ourselves, not be a label. I suppose it's to your own self be true. Like somebody, if that's their view and their role in life, that's fine. It's just personally not one I would take (Ruth, 20, White Australian, University Student).

These young women make the point that it is acceptable to hold feminist views but that a public espousal of a particular code of beliefs, religion or political movement is not common practice but is somehow unbecoming and out of step with the contemporary behaviour of young people. The use of a self-identifying label which designates some kind of group membership seems to challenge the powerful ideology of individualism. This concurs with Mackay's (1997) finding that young people are resistant to suggestions that they are 'typical' and can be categorised. Maria Pallotta Chiarolli also found that young women preferred self-ascribed meanings to pre-assigned labels (1998). Individualism delegitimises the consignment of individuals to groups. The use of a label or category to identify oneself (and therefore to give insight into one's beliefs and values) is perceived as limiting and therefore incongruent with a widely favoured fluid, optimistic and adaptive approach to life. Individuality allows them to support the highly supported concept of diversity. One participant described herself as living in a "pick and choose culture". The findings of this chapter indicate that individuality is the preferred expression of political will for participants in this research.

Another form of opposition to the feminist label was articulated by Susie. Her unconventional styling, love for the heavy metal music scene, experience of drug use, male violence and her status as a single mother meant that she considered an additional stigmatic association as unwise:

Susie: I don't know, it's just the stereotype around it, you hate men and stuff like that. I think it comes back to this whole 'women need men' type of thing and if you're a feminist you're not gonna get a man and your life's not gonna be complete. Yeah, I just think it goes back to that. The whole head game, yeah I think that's what it is. I don't call myself a feminist because it's not just feminist issues that I'm passionate about it's drug issues and stuff like that and because I don't focus totally on women. I think if I started labelling myself something I've already got stereotypes on me, that if I started labelling myself, other

stereotypes would come on me, I'd not know where to turn! (Laughter) (Susie, 22, White Australian, University Student and Home Duties, 1 child).

These comments resonate with some reasons given for the aversion of Beverley Skeggs' young women participants to a feminist identity (1997). Their affinity with men of their class and desire for respectability rather than working class stigma rendered being positioned as a feminist an unattractive burden that they would rather avoid.

Feminism and women's studies in a neo-liberal climate

A fundamental challenge for those asserting the importance of radical feminist critique, as well as other structural analyses of the world, is the epistemological dominance of individualism. The propensity for political argument to be reinterpreted in individualistic terms was prevalent throughout my interviews with participants. Within an individualistic interpretation of social life, it is individuals and not wider social processes which structure the world and give it meaning and any critique of institutions is therefore regarded as a critique of individuals. Sociologist Melanie Moore has noted that students often dismiss theory that contradicts their "sense of social order" and this often involves disregarding structural forces in favour of individualistic explanations (1997, 128). Within this context, a particular challenge for radical feminism's critique of the politics and culture of male supremacy is very quickly confused with a denigration of individuals. This was particularly apparent in the conflation of feminism and censure of domesticity, for example. In addition to charges of the deprecation of individuals (men), a political critique that emphasises structural inequity is viewed as one that portrays individuals as powerless dupes who are then defended as free agents making uncoerced decisions. This interpretation is highlighted throughout this research by young women's resistance to associations of weakness and disadvantage and by their disparagement of notions of victimhood.

The literature review chapter noted the periodic emergence of debates about whether or not feminism continues to be relevant to the lives of girls and women. These debates are often considered through the prism of young women's engagement with feminism and are commonly motivated by the desire to undermine its politics. Whilst I resist interrogating young women's relationship to feminist thought in ways which admonish and belittle their worldviews, the themes which underpin their responses to feminism evidence the dominance of individualism and undermine the viability of structural feminist theory.

Contemporary challenges to feminism in the academy been documented by feminists. Such analyses have included reports on young women's rejection of overt feminism in academic settings. '*Don't be so feminist*' (Webber 2005) and '*Stop making it such a big issue*' (Morrison, Bourke and Kelley 2005) are the titles of articles which explore student responses to feminist content in higher education and encapsulate the commonality of resistance to it. Jordan Titus argues that resistance to feminist discussion may serve to "avoid any closer examination of their own lives" so resistance "offers some degree of emotional protection" (2000, 27). She also notes that female students hold to the notion of a meritocracy and 'having it all'. Jane Kenway and Diana Langmead (1999) have described the incursion of neo-liberalism into universities. Their analysis illustrates the struggle to undertake feminist work in conditions that, while increasingly hostile to it, increase the need for it. Joan Wallach Scott is concerned that individualism challenges the discipline of women's studies through its de-legitimation of the conceptualisation of women as a group with shared needs and interests that merit collective attention (1997). Wendy Brown (1997) also considers that women's studies courses are vulnerable when the coherence or boundedness of the object of its study is destabilised. The influence of individualism therefore has consequences for the ongoing feasibility of the academic discipline of women's studies (already manifest in the move to 'gender studies') and, more broadly, for the acceptance of radical feminist and other structural forms of feminist theory.

Chapter summary and conclusion

The findings reported in this chapter demonstrate how the ideal of free choice is found to be limited in the arena of political identification. Young women identified, both implicitly and explicitly, modes of opposition to feminist thought. The barriers to broad approval of feminism centred on misogynist attitudes to lesbianism and constructions of female appearance. Young women consider feminism against powerful discourses of progress, achievement and optimism and this contributes to negative perceptions of its continuing relevance. Any inequities are thus considered as residual and temporary problems and that the possibilities of women's lives now increasingly rest in their own hands. Where feminism is positively endorsed, it is largely favoured for its promotion of female success and personal fulfilment.

I have argued that this powerful interpretive framework of individualism pervades young women's analyses of the feminist thought they come into contact with and therefore provides a fundamental barrier to the ways in which structural feminist critique might inform their personal lives and understandings. The prevalence of neo-liberal thought has strengthened individualist modes of interpreting the social world. Individualism is therefore vital to the ideological mechanisms that maintain the central relations of domination, by repelling structural criticism.

Chapter eight

Neo-liberalism and the burdens of liberty

Introduction

Previous chapters have examined the influence of neo-liberalism on various aspects of young women's lives; mothering and domesticity, education and employment, relationships and politics. This chapter provides a synthesis of these findings through a broad consideration of young women as neo-liberal subjects. Although young women have been positioned as catalysts for the uptake of neo-liberal values (Harris 2004), being female under neo-liberalism is not a simple matter of experiencing the opening up of choices and can-do philosophy of girl power. Indeed, an argument is built in this chapter that the celebratory notions of modern femininity disavow the difficult freedoms of neo-liberalism and deny the conflicts and contradictions of late modernity for women.

Subjects of choice

Theorists of late modernity have identified the increased call for decision-making in societies where there is a move away from tradition and habitual practice. Women are particularly caught up in this requirement because it is they who are seen as the major beneficiaries of the posited retreat from circumscribed social roles and expectations. Feminism is associated with choice, particularly through invocation of this concept in the challenge for reproductive rights for women. Indeed, they have been regaled as exemplary decision-makers (Harris 2004). Previous chapters of this thesis have outlined the ways in which young women report their lives as being strongly characterised by voluntarism and that their roles and occupations are regarded as being acquired through choice rather than ascription (Beck 2002). As the young women who participated in this research spoke about their experiences and aspirations, I asked them to reflect on the issue of choice and its place in their lives. Unsurprisingly, the participants endorsed the importance of choice although it was possible to discern distinct differences in the enthusiasm and confidence with which they responded to it. Several young women demonstrated a particular keenness for choice:

> I hate looking at things just the one way. So I like choices. I don't know, I think that's what life's about. If you don't have a choice then you're not really living, if that makes sense (Clare, 24, White Australian, Veterinary Nurse).

Lacey, an eighteen year old white Australian restaurant worker spoke of the opening up of options for women as "exciting" and "an adventure". She did also remark that the removal of restrictions placed an onus on young women to "make things happen for themselves" but spoke of this as a "challenge" that she was stimulated by. Although choice was universally regarded as a valuable aspect of their lives and often compared with previous restrictions on women and girls, it was very common for participants to qualify their positive statements about it. The following quote from Lin is illustrative of the ambivalence that many young women expressed about expanding options:

> It's good that there's a big choice [of roles and occupations for young women]. Just makes it harder to pick what you want, though. But yeah, it's good to have a good range of choices and you're not stuck doing, 'cos you're a girl you have to do this. It's good living now, you don't have to stick by that (Lin, 19, Filipino-Australian, TAFE Student).

Lin's comment that choice "makes it harder to pick" was echoed by about a half of the young women who displayed any doubts about the benefits of choice. Most (but not all) of this group had a sound level of educational attainment. These participants did not identify choice as an unproblematic freedom but spoke of the responsibilities and stresses that it entailed, particularly with respect to making decisions about career paths and child-rearing:

> Jennifer: I think that when you get into your 20s you start realising that you've got a lot of choices to make and you don't want too much pressure on you of what decisions to make. And I think there's still a lot of that. Definitely.
> Joanne: So this is quite a difficult time in your life then, because of the amount of choices that come your way?
> Jennifer: Definitely. And I think that you're just starting to learn that you've got choices so you want to be able to make your mind up by yourself but there's so much pressure. You know, are you going to be a career person or are you not? Are you going to be at home and look after kids and stuff (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser)?

> At times I think there's a lot of pressures on females though, because we do have so many options now. And things like having kids, having a career, things like that, we have to balance it all out, still be a mother (Leena, 19, Fijian Indian Australian, University Student).

In these extracts, Jennifer and Leena both mention the "pressure" associated with encountering choice, some of which seems to emanate from confronting the dualistic

positioning of career and domesticity for women. The partial release from compulsion allows the entry of doubt and the need to weigh up options. Elsewhere in her interview, Jennifer spoke of the difficulties associated with "choosing properly" and "making the right choice". The idea that choice can be burdensome and anxiety-provoking as well as freeing was apparent in participants' comments that there was sometimes "too much choice" and is reflected in recent writing on the subject (Schwartz 2004). One participant offered an important counterpoint to the identification of the problems associated with encountering an abundance of options. Mary's parents had settled in Australia as refugees from Vietnam and her knowledge of the repression they had suffered in their homeland reminded her of the fundamental privilege of having choice:

> I guess for some people, knowing, having all those options can be overwhelming, but for other people it can be great. Yeah. Like I knew where my parents came from and second-hand, I knew about the poverty so when I think, having to adjust to certain things growing up and hearing some of their stories, I knew things could be a lot worse than having a lot of options (Mary, 24, Vietnamese Australian, Artist).

In my conversations with the young women, I pursued the topic of choice further by asking how they enacted their choices and made decisions. They responded to this area of inquiry with familiarity and some sheepishness. It was often clear that they had given prior, mostly anxious, consideration to their decision-making. Their responses often proceeded with comments like "oh, that's a good question to ask *me*" or "well my family and friends know I'm no good at making decisions". The preponderance of self-criticism in the area of decision-making was striking; the participants almost universally assessed themselves as poor decision makers. Thus, the social difficulties of neo-liberal subjecthood are lived as psychic (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001) and "we are our own critics" (Rose 1990, 239). Many participants, like Julie in the extract below, consistently drew on the psychological discourse of being "indecisive":

> Joanne: How do you make decisions about what you are going to do with your life, like what job you're going to do?
> Julie: I don't. I hate it because I'm so indecisive and every week I want to do something else with my life and so I've never actually stuck at doing one thing. I've been all over the place. I think I'm waiting for a sign to say, 'this is what you have to do with your life'. But I don't know, it probably won't happen. Just got to stick with something long enough…And I find I

don't say what I want to do as much anymore because I know people are thinking, you do it for a week and then you won't do it anymore. That annoys me but it is my fault because I've never stuck at anything long enough to know (Julie, 19, White Australian, Real Estate Administrator).

Julie's uncomplimentary assessment of herself was based on the fact that she had already experienced a number of different jobs and an unsuccessful attempt at a university course. An exterior confirmation, a sign, would therefore relieve her of the obligation of making the 'right' decision. The participants' pejorative accounts of their decision-making took a number of forms. Some young women considered that they acted too spontaneously and were not analytical enough and criticised themselves for "jumping in" or delaying a decision until the imminent approach of a deadline. Others identified their fault as thinking about things "obsessively" over a long period of time. Narina berated herself for being *overly* analytical and *too* ponderous:

> From birth Mum said I was always a thinker. I think too much and then I get myself frustrated. 'Cos I just can't go straight in and say, "I want to do this, right now." I've got to sit back and think first. I don't know why, I just do that… Yeah, I thinked and thinked and thinked. Until it drove me really insane. Yeah, it helps yourself, you've got to do it yourself, you can't get other people to do it for you. I just find it easier that way. In every area of my life. I've got to help myself before I can help anyone else. Sort of situation with everything. If I want to get a job, I know I can get a job, nothing's stopping me, it's just me giving myself time to think about what I want to do and then go ahead. I just can't jump straight in. I'll say something but I won't jump straight in. Give me time and I'll think about it (Narina, 19, Torres Strait Islander and White Australian parentage, Unemployed).

In this extract Narina suggests that she can gain employment if she has enough time to consider her options and make a decision and her comment, "you've got to do it yourself" indicates that she considers personal responsibility as central to her situation. This explanation of her unemployment belies aspects of her life that position her unfavourably in the labour market; such as her limited education (to Year 9) and work experience, her Indigenous status and the fact that she is openly bisexual, currently in a lesbian relationship. Her perception of her inability to simply decide what she wants to do and then get on with it is particularly unforgiving considering that her life experiences so far have included family and domestic violence as a child and violence in her heterosexual intimate relationships as a

young woman, racial violence in the suburb where she lived and several attempts at taking her own life.

Other deprecatory assessments of decision-making included an over-reliance on others for input and help, "this is really bad but I consult my mum" (Bronwyn, 21, White Australian, Real Estate Administrator), "I talk to my mum but I guess at some stage I'm gonna have to become my own person" (Liz, 22, White Australian, TAFE Student). Conversely, some berated themselves for an inability to take others' advice, "I probably should listen to others people a bit more. I try and make my own mind up too much", (Dee, 20, White Australian, Restaurant Worker). The reactions of others were also identified as contributing to difficulties with decision-making. Participants reported being "scared" to act on a decision because of its impact on someone else, including one young woman breaking off a wedding at a very late stage despite having decided not to go ahead with it some considerable time earlier. Several participants, including Julianne and Peta in the following quotes, indicated that decision-making was complicated by taking others into account:

> I'm probably the worst person for making decisions. I'm really bad; I weigh things up, look at the bad and the good and still can't decide. I leave things 'til the last minute so often and I ask a lot of people what they think…I'm no good at making decisions…I take a lot into consideration. That's the problem with decision-making. I don't just think about myself when I make a decision (Julianne, 21, White Australian, Nurse).

> I sort of sit down and think about it, through with myself and sort of look at it like, OK, am I doing this for me or am I doing this for the whole family? I've got to consider the two kids, got to consider Finn and his work and things like that (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

There were also concerns expressed about not being "pushy enough to get what I want, kind of thing" (Bronwyn, 21, White Australian, Real Estate Administrator). The existence of a widening of options is not a sufficient condition to being able to avail oneself of those possibilities:

> I think there are a lot of choices that are available to me but I think it's a matter of *going* for those choices and, I don't know if it's to do with not having enough confidence or just not having confidence in my abilities and things like that, to actually go out and be involved in

things. It's like, you know there's probably someone bigger and better (Annette, 20, Aboriginal Australian, University Student).

Many of the findings reported in this thesis illustrate the poor fit between young women's experiences and the abstract voluntarism, goal-seeking and purposive behaviour of rational choice theory. Participants' critical appraisals of their reliance on others for assistance with decision-making and their propensity for taking others into account (usually children and male partners) indicate uneasiness with their relationships of dependence and their connections with others. They represent impediments to the neo-liberal imperative of defining an autonomous self and result in a stream of references to being or becoming their 'own person'. An ethic of care is thus threatened under neo-liberalism, an issue which is considered in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

There was some small but noteworthy evidence of young women utilising strategies such as tarot card readings and fortune-telling to support their difficulties with decision-making. Several participants also described their use of "gut instincts" to explain the way in which they approached decision-making. Some of the participants' remarks about choices and decision-making referred to technological changes which affected the availability, quantity and transmission of information. Ashley described the difficulties associated with processing and risk-assessing contradictory information:

> Ashley: On the news they were leading, I don't know, they were leading something to breast cancer. What was it? I don't know, I can't remember...But they're leading everything to breast cancer. They're leading wearing the wrong bra to breast cancer, I mean come on.
> Joanne: You wonder what to do sometimes?
> Ashley: And what to eat and stuff. I don't know. Sort of confusing, today's society. You don't know what to eat, you don't know what to wear, who to talk to or whatever. It's just crazy (Ashley, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

Peta expressed her frustrations at trying to "keep up" in the economy. She struggled, as the primary carer of two small children, to access and complete training courses that might assist her in a competitive job market but had found that requirements changed quicker than her capacity to adapt to them:

It's hard when the economy is just; oh it's hard to explain the economy. It's just growing so rapidly and things are changing so quickly that you can't keep up. You think you know what you're doing and it has to change again because the economy changes. I've had to do that a few times (Peta, 22, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Several young women commented that information about risk and unpredictability is intrusive and difficult to avoid, with one considering that young people were "acutely aware of the problems in the world", many of which were characterised by uncertainty (Mary, 24, Vietnamese Australian, Artist). Greta and Julianne offered similar reflections:

You can't be ignorant anymore and happy in the world. You try not to think of it, you try and just go about your daily business and get rudely interrupted when something happens. You can't worry about it every day (Greta, 22, White Australian, Nurse).

I try not to worry about that kind of thing. I try to deal with things as they come along. I suppose there's the whole terrorism thing and all that. But I try not to. But you can't help but see it on the TV and the news. All the bad things that are happening in the world to people. Even in Australia, even in Townsville. I try to live my life in the moment and not get too bogged down in all that kind of thing, just deal with my own life (Julianne, 21, White Australian, Nurse).

For Amy, the young woman living with her violent ex-partner, Sean, against her will, her access to information and her capacity to make decisions was severely restricted. Amy was worried about being a "step behind" in the labour market as a result of her circumstances. She did not even have the choice of what channel was played on her television because Sean's wishes always prevailed:

Because I haven't been in the outside world, I don't know what's going on out there unless it's on television. I know more about sports because I have to put up with that. I get worried about the fact that maybe when I do get out in the end that people are gonna think of me differently because I was so young and I had two children and I'll be single and raising two kids and trying to get a good job and maybe whether that'll be a step behind anyone else that hasn't had to go through that. Even lots of little things like getting loans. I don't know because I haven't even, I haven't had the chance to think of what's out there. I don't know (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Contingency and reluctant adulthood

Much of the data about choice and decision-making reflected the pressure on young women to confidently seize their new freedoms by making the right choices. The majority of participants in this research perceived that there were multiple options available to them and that it was important to be able to make choices. Given this investment in choice, it is terrifying to make the wrong decision and young women made common reference to fear and being scared as they spoke about making decisions. Some of the difficulties associated with choice were manifested in reluctance on the part of many of the young women to commit to firm decisions or courses of action:

> If you're doing everything, like if you've got everything planned out, if something happens and you can't get to a step that you have planned, what are you gonna do? Like it's just gonna muck you up. But if you only know what you're doing now with a possibility for the future in the end, if something happens you can always find a way to work it out (Ruth, 20, White Australian, University Student).

> I don't really have a goal, I haven't set myself a goal, like that's five years away or something like that, five year plan or anything like that. I have little things that I want to do and I don't know what my big picture is, I don't know what I want. I just live it how it's going, like take each day as it comes. 'Cos you never know what's gonna happen, that's the way I see it (Holly, 19, White Australian, University Student).

> I like being able to just do things spur of the moment…'cos generally when you plan it out it doesn't work anyway (Lin, 19, Filipino-Australian, TAFE Student).

Richard Sennett (drawing mainly on men's views) writes about how the requirement of flexibility arouses anxiety because people can't be certain about what paths to pursue and do not know what risks will pay off (1998, 17). Where there is a strong sense of impermanence and unpredictability, successful adaptability requires a yielding and tensile strength and it makes sense, therefore, for young people to shape their biographies around contingency and openness (du Bois Raymond 1998). However, such indeterminism and pleasure-seeking amidst uncertainty are often interpreted as irresponsibility and hedonism. Greta's preference for openness, contingency and the prioritising of enjoyment, which she identifies as a personal trait, "I know it's not my personality to be strict", exposed a generational difference between her and her father:

My father always, was, like, if you really wanted to do something you should have done this, this and this. He lives a lot in the past. By then you should have done another degree or saved up enough money. And I could have really. I could have toughed it out for a year, lived in a caravan park and saved up all my money. But I'd rather enjoy life and he doesn't quite understand that. He thinks I'm too easy and slack. I'm not someone who could do that, I know it's not my personality to be strict, I like changing and moving around. I suppose if there was something I really, really wanted I might do it (Greta, 22, White Australian, Nurse).

I have speculated about what the implications of endless contingency and openness might be for young women. I also noted a yearning for contentment amidst their adaptability and uncertainty. Many of the participants, such as Greta, described how they wanted to "enjoy life" or stated that they "just want to be happy" with whatever future directions they take.

Most of the comments about contingency related to avoiding the responsibilities of adulthood for some time and were overwhelmingly made by the young women who did not have children and were engaged in higher education projects. Traditional markers of adulthood such as child-rearing, having a committed intimate relationship, a permanent job and owning a home were not regarded as imminently desirable or feasible, with some participants saying they were "freaked out" by such thoughts. Many expected to "settle down" after a protracted period of independence in which they wanted to have fun and explore the options that were open to them. Manuela du Bois Raymond identifies these preferences and attitudes as indicating the emergence of post-adolescence (1998). She describes this as a new phase of the life course which is associated with the privileged class position of highly educated and aspirational young adults who have high expectations of their careers.

I'm not ready to settle down and have a family just yet. I've got the rest of my life. I want to get out there. As soon as I finish my degree and I've got some more money I'm going back overseas travelling again. Yeah, I want to get out there and do everything. Then settle down probably (laughs) (Trina, 19, White Australian, University Student).

In comparison, Rosie had never experienced such a period of post-adolescence. Her life experiences had catapulted her into early adulthood. Following some problematic drug and alcohol use and the suicide of her first child's father, she was raising three children and also cared for her eleven year old brother and disabled grandmother. Rosie was self-conscious

about her lack of a carefree attitude and lifestyle and fashionable clothes. In the following extract she describes being teased for this by friends and family:

> You act like you're so old, talk like you're old, don't dress like you're young. I've got so much pressure from them saying I'm this old lady. And I do, I feel so tired, I feel like I don't need to do that sort of stuff. I've already done enough in my life I think, sort of thing. My life is just so complicated, I feel. I don't know if anybody else's is like mine. But yeah, mine is just so big and it doesn't stop. You say one thing and it turns into twelve things (Rosie, 25, Torres Strait Islander, Home Duties and Part Time Administrator, 3 children).

Reflective and self-managing subjects: You are what you make yourself

Self-regulation is central to the neo-liberal project. This means having the skills and qualities that are necessary to succeed in the demanding new economy. Our circumstances and identities are not static but can be worked on to better the self and produce change; in Giddens' words, "we are, not what we are, but what we make of ourselves" (1991, 68). The injunction to a self-produced life was widely accepted by participants in this research, "I believe that you make your own life; you make your own fate" (Jeanie, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Unemployed, 1 child). The desire to live up to notions of transformative self-improvement offered hope for disadvantaged young women like Amy, trapped by violence and poverty and Toni, determined not to become drug addicted and physically abusive, like her mother:

> I know I'll get somewhere with myself. I know that I'm not gonna be sitting on the pension forever because I don't want to be. I'm pretty persistent you know…So I will get somewhere, I know that. It's just gonna take time (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

> Hard but I'm getting there. I'm working towards my life, getting my life (Toni, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

The sociologist James Côté asserts that there has been a general raising of people's expectations about what their life course can offer them in terms of personal development and achievement, but that this is contingent on their effective responses to the individualised requirements of late modernity (2002). So those who invest in themselves more actively are likely to fare better. Jennifer was a participant who had taken up the obligation to work on herself, in order to be the best and most fulfilled person she could be:

'Cos we've kind of been thrown in at the deep end with the choice factor. We've gone from having very, very limited choices to a lot of choices. And yeah, that's why I probably see it as you've got to really find out what you want. Because the more you look within yourself, the easier it is to make decisions for yourself and for your future (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser).

Jennifer worked in a hair salon which was stocked with every woman's interest magazine on the market, as well as various lifestyle publications that focused on health and psychology. She read these voraciously because she applied their content to her life and supplemented them with astrological and tarot card readings as well as motivational and self-improvement seminars. Jennifer's hairdressing job entailed talking to clients and the subjects of these conversations centred on the knowledge and techniques they used to manage their lives, particularly their relationships, their careers and their appearance. She described her intense interest in magazines and lifestyle as "an overwhelming sort of learning phase that you go through that you just try to suck in all the information and then think about it and see where it leads you" (Jennifer, 22, White Australian, Hairdresser).

Such responses have been conceptualised by post-structural philosopher Michel Foucault as 'technologies of the self' which "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct and way of being so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection or immortality" (1988, 18). So these techniques or mechanisms allow people to work on themselves by regulating their bodies, their thoughts and their conduct and represent a partial (not total) shift from external practices of policing and regulation to technologies of self-regulation in which people come to understand themselves as responsible for their own regulation. Giddens (1991) has linked the intense interest in therapy and counselling as an outcome of an increased emphasis on self-regulation and self-management. Valerie Walkerdine has identified that psychology has a particular role in 'propping up' the self-invented subject (2003, 241) and Heidi Rimke (2000) explores the role that self-help literature plays in the insistence on self management and expert consultation and incursion. The desire to improve and the imperative to not appear marginalised or disadvantaged negate the need for explicit coercion to engage in this.

Upward mobility and hybridity

Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody have conceptualised the new labour market requirements as demands for upward mobility (Walkerdine 2003; Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003). The persistent drive to self-improvement takes place in a society that, while still structurally unequal, is increasingly characterised by permeability. The expansion of service work that has been taken up by women, together with wider access to higher education, increases the possibility of a life representative of middle class status. The middle class values inherent in neo-liberal orthodoxy have also been noted by scholars such as Reay (2004), Taylor-Gooby (2001). Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine argue that the new labour market demands can be understood as attempts to produce an adaptive, productive autonomous liberal subject in the image of the middle class (2003, 239). They draw attention to the implications of the social mobility required for successful neo-liberal subjecthood for young women from working class and disadvantaged racial backgrounds. The emphasis on the possibility of breaking through previously insurmountable restrictions tends to deny the costs of such mobility and they assert that psychically, there are "no easy hybrids" (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003, 286).

There was some evidence in this research of the difficulties and benefits associated with hybridity. In particular, the attainment of educational success or improved economic status for Indigenous young women was not an unproblematic upward mobility and in this research, it was the Indigenous young women who were the most "uneasy hybrids" (Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine 2003). For them, their aspirations and success through educational and economic achievement resulted in both pleasurable and painful experiences, often through being linked with material goods or achievements that were associated with whiteness. For Bella, the anticipated completion of a law degree and commencement of her legal apprenticeship meant moving into a white, masculinised profession that posed particular challenges for her as a black young woman. Not only was she moving out of an Aboriginal and working class realm, she was moving into a traditionally masculine occupational sphere. Whilst this was a considerable source of pride for her family Bella wonders, "what if I'm the only black lawyer in this firm?" Although she is clearly aware, both in this extract and at other times in my interview with her, of the structurally entrenched nature of racism, her final comment seeks consolation in an individualised account of the potential prejudice she might face, "if that's how someone feels, that's how they feel":

I get really anxious about it…I've heard horror stories about other female articled clerks and their experiences that really scared me. I've really taken their advice on board. I've just heard stories about like, they were at the bigger firms and the partners would really pressure them to, you know, work late hours and, just stories like taking the male clients out for dinner…And it's purely a business thing but, and so I was a bit funny about that. I think I would be more comfortable myself working in a small firm because doing your articles there, the partners would be more concerned with your learning as opposed to how much money you're making. Yeah, I had a real issue about that.

Joanne: What do you think about being an Aboriginal woman in the law?

Bella: Towards my family it's like, '"yes, we're going to have a lawyer in the family. But to me it's like "oh my god what if I'm the only black lawyer in this firm?" So I'm a bit concerned about it but I'm still proud of who I am. But I guess being aware of other people's feelings towards racism or prejudice and just I guess managing it. You know, if that's how someone feels, that's how they feel (Bella, 20, Aboriginal Australian, University Student).

Although Rosie lived in a largely impoverished suburb, her home had only recently been built and was furnished with modern furniture that was in good condition. This was regarded as a transgression from the normative conditions in which her family and friends lived and was regularly commented on, "they call me a white girl because they think my home is like [that of] a white person" (Rosie, 25, Torres Strait Islander, Home Duties and Part Time Administrator, 3 children). Similarly, because Jeanie (22, Aboriginal Australian, Unemployed, 1 child) did not use Pidgin English, other Aboriginal people referred to her as a wannabee who was aspiring to white cultural status. In frustration, she described to me how she was "shunned both ways". The attention she paid to her dress and beauty routine and the standard of housing that she lived in did not conform to stereotypes of Aboriginality. Although this did not protect her from white people's racism, it did set her apart from Aboriginal friends and family members. Lucey, Melody and Walkerdine suggest that the "uneasiness" of hybridity through social mobility "stems partly from the difficulties of negotiating the emotions, negative as well as positive, that are aroused when aspiration and success mean becoming and being profoundly different to your family and peer group" (2003,286).

Both Narina and Rosie identified as Torres Strait Islanders and both had a White Australian father. This resulted in a complex racial hybridity for them. Rosie stated, "being me is completely different from being just black". Narina was told "don't live like those

blackfellas" when her bedroom was untidy, leading her to disidentify with her Torres Strait Islander heritage, "I just looked at them as dirty people". At high school, her life was "transformed" by black girls who allowed her to join in with their aggressive and rebellious behaviour. She described moving between black and white identities, "I have black days and I have white days".

The demands of upward mobility were not without costs for the white middle class young women in this research. The pressure to be academically and occupationally successful also appeared to create some difficult pressures for them. Roker (1993), Kenway (1990) and Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody (2001) have problematised the notion of successful girls by reporting that they are increasingly compelled to succeed along quite circumscribed academic and occupational lines. Such compulsions bring a fear of failure, as well as the sense of never being quite good enough or doing enough to live up to such high hopes. Some young women were therefore worried that they could not sustain such effort and maintain motivation. Anxiety about not being 'good enough' abounded amongst the middle class girls in this sample:

> What if I don't turn out the way I wanted to turn out? What if I disappoint people? Especially my parents because they've been really good to me (Paula, 19, White Australian, University Student).

> I think the stress comes from the fact that we put so much pressure on ourselves to do well, and it's like, horrible, if you don't do as well as you want to do. But I think that's just the stress we put on ourselves pretty much. No one else forced this on us (Emma, 20, White Australian, University Student).

> Basically all my life, I've been a very much head down, bum up girl. Never gone out, never partied, never had many friends, certainly never had a boyfriend (Nicole, 21, White Australian, Nurse).

Johanna Wyn comments that academic achievement can function as a kind of "straitjacket" for middle class girls, who feel the weight of their parents' hopes and expectations (2000 65-66). Luthar and Becker (2002) found unusually high internalising symptoms and substance use among American affluent suburban high school students. In particular, they found high rates of clinically significant depressive symptoms that were associated with achievement

pressures (particularly excessive perfectionistic strivings). Australian research suggests that women aged between 18 and 24 suffer anxiety at three times the rate for men in this age group (ABS 1997).

A culture of victimhood? Making meaning in difficult times

The life stories that young women shared in this research provided an opportunity to hear how they made meaning and coped with adversity and difficult circumstances. Despite claims by writers as disparate as Rene Denfeld (1995), Naomi Wolf (1994) and Susan Maushart (2005) that women are encouraged, by feminism, to regard themselves as victims, this research found that young women actually went to great lengths to do the exact opposite. The sociologist Frank Furedi also draws on the notion of a 'culture of victimhood' amidst what he regards as the development of a 'cult of human vulnerability', where an increased focus on risk has led to the emergence of a reduction in personal responsibility and a reliance on dependency-inducing counselling (1997 and 2003). The interpretations that participants in this research made of disadvantage and difficult circumstances provide a stark contrast to this notion of a prevailing sense of victimhood. This section of the chapter details a number of strategies that were used by young women to minimise the nature and extent of their exploitation and difficulty and to distance themselves from being identified as disadvantaged. It is understandable that participants would want to present themselves in the best possible light in a research interview. Research respondents' desire to give socially desirable responses and to look good in the presence of a researcher is noted in literature about qualitative research (for example Padgett 1998, 66). What is of theoretical significance to this research is the means they used to do so.

The neo-liberal emphasis on personal responsibility that has been highlighted throughout this research leads to the representation of negative circumstances as personal failings or inadequacies. Given the increased likelihood, in a climate dominated by neo-liberalism, that difficulties will be interpreted in essentially personal and psychological terms, it makes sense for individuals to try to avoid unflattering interpretations of their own circumstances and it was notable that the least advantaged young women in this research made the strongest use of techniques that reinterpreted or somehow distanced them from the spectre of disadvantage.

Perplexing optimism and unrealistic ambition

A "perplexing optimism" that commonly characterises the outlook of young people was noted by Dwyer and Wyn (2001, 83) and endorsed by youth researchers Furlong and Cartmel (1997). Wicks and Mishra (1998) found a mismatch between young women's employment aspirations and current occupational realities, with the employment aspirations of young women from areas associated with low socio-economic status being higher than the current female participation rates in professional occupations. All of these researchers note that the degree of positivity they have identified is surprising given the uncertain futures that many young people face.

During the process of interviewing participants for this research I was also struck by a general tenor of optimism amongst the young women despite their regular remarks about the uncertainty of modern times and the significant difficulty and disadvantage that characterised the lives of many of them. This broad optimism was also interspersed with some conspicuous and poignant examples of ambitions that I could only suppose would be highly unlikely to materialise. The most notable was Rebecca's goal to do a (highly competitive) marine biology degree and work with dolphins. Her bedroom was decorated with dolphin pictures. The obstacles that she would need to surmount in order to achieve this are considerable. She left school in Year 9 in order to take care of her nine siblings. Her father had left the family and her mother was frequently incapacitated by alcohol and was beaten by her boyfriend who physically abused Rebecca. She was currently studying for her Year 10 certificate at TAFE and was struggling to manage this alongside her family's continuing requirements of her. She had been sexually abused as a child, raped as a teenager, experienced domestic violence from a boyfriend and was taking medication for depression.

I found Rebecca's determination and vision in the face of adversity remarkable and humbling but I also felt anguish when she told me her dreams because they seemed so improbable and likely to result in painful disappointment. I have reflected that such optimism against the odds allows the imagination of a better future in which things can be different. It is also consistent with the strong belief in a meritocratic system that rewards motivation and persistence that was exhibited by the majority of participants in this research. The psychological concept of self-deception or the ability to view oneself in a positive yet unrealistic way may contribute to resiliency through the increase of happiness and productivity (Alexander 1979, Lockard 1980 and Surbey 2005) and the mitigation of trauma (Baruma 1994 and Kroll, Habenicht and

McKenzie 1989). It may therefore play an important role in sustaining happiness and hope. Self-deception seems to be an adaptive mechanism particularly suited to punitive times.

Volitional imperative

The 'Motherhood and domesticity' chapter described how young mothers commonly described their unplanned children as sources of resilience for them. In this way, they were able to reconstruct the difficult situation of an unintentional pregnancy at a young age as one which had provided some fortuitous outcomes. Under neo-liberalism, obstacles and disadvantage are likely to be responded to through arduous self-invention and self-transformation. Thus, young mothers in particular engaged in individual psychological manoeuvring in order to rewrite painful experiences and used volitional explanations in order to reinterpret testing and unpremeditated paths as paths of preference and eventual good fortune. Callahan, Rutman, Strega and Dominelli's research with young mothers in care found that 'looking promising' to social workers involved the aspiration and potential ability to meet middle class values (2005). Such management of disadvantage can also be read as the striving for middle class conformity and therefore acceptance. Here, Gina describes her unplanned pregnancy at sixteen as having given her life direction. It had required her to become conscientious and accountable in ways that were not possible while she was using drugs and alcohol heavily:

> I'm glad that my energy's been pushed towards raising a family. Because it could have gone anywhere and I don't think it would have been for the better. Because I'd left home and I don't think anything would have pushed me to go back. I mean you never know, like I could have like gone oh wake up, if I had of terminated or something. It could have made me go, right, hang on but I don't think it would have, not at 16. I was too young and full of attitude. It's taken a long time to go oh this is where life should go, this is where my responsibilities are now. I've learnt a lot from a lot of people around me so it could have been much worse. I think at least I'm at 22 going right; this is where I need to go. I could have just spent the last 6 years going where do I need to go? And still be going oh my god, what am I doing with my life. Or have not even asked the question yet. Could still have blinkers on. Just following day to day life. When I think about the last 6 to 12 months before I had Jake or before I fell pregnant. I can't put a lot of that point in time together. Like I can't go that happened before that happened or this is where I was. I can't even remember the timeframes of what house I lived in first once I left home. Where did I go first, where was I next? I can't even piece together where those things were, just from using drugs and drinking. So it's just all a big blur until I had Jake (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties).

Such strategies contain some similarities to what Lynn Phillips calls 'controlling the damage' (2000). She describes the strategies that young women used following sexual assault, which often involved accepting the unpleasant consequences of what they interpreted as their own decisions, in order to maintain feelings of control, and to discount themselves from victim status. Rather than denoting the disadvantage of experiencing an adverse action or circumstance, in the most common discourses, being a victim means being passive, weak and unable to deal with your own situation. In this sense, victimhood deprives a person of agency and authority which is an unappealing and threatening position to be in; as long as we believe we can influence the conditions of our lives, we have a defence against threats to our own control and to psychological chaos. In this way, the ideology of neo-liberalism manages "potentially unruly and dissatisfied subjects" (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001, 2).

Pragmatic fatalism

The acceptance of difficulty was sometimes facilitated through a pragmatic fatalism in which circumstances were understood as predestined rather than exploitative and unfair. Participants variously described failed exams, living a long distance from family support and leaving home or school at a young age as things that were "meant to be" or, which, in Gina's words, happened "for a reason":

> Like there are the times when I go what would life have been like if I had of just like, if I hadn't have had a baby. And then I think I would have been in a lot worse of a situation if I hadn't had Jake. And everything happens for a reason. Like I could have been on umpteen amounts of drugs and just losing the plot or dead or something if I had of stayed in Newcastle and not had a baby. Like anything could have happened (Gina, 22, White Australian, Home Duties).

Although the least advantaged participants in this research were the most invested in these techniques, pragmatic fatalism featured in the comments of many of the young women, including those engaged in higher education and career-building projects. In these cases, pragmatic fatalism was most often invoked to provide some comfort from their anxieties about failing. As Lacey talks about finding the 'right' job, she moves between her belief in meritocratic outcomes whilst also drawing on notions of fate where things happen (or don't happen) for a reason and which might provide some protection from the possibility of disappointment:

I think you've got to make it happen. But you put that effort in and if it doesn't come out at the end then it just wasn't meant to happen. If everything's not right, they weren't meant to happen but I believe you can make it happen in a way (Lacey, 18, White Australian, Restaurant Worker).

Well I took, I did first year and I didn't do well at all. I just did *not* do well. And I took last year off and I worked for 6 months and then I went travelling for 4 months, just did the east coast of Australia and I thought, I knew I wanted to come back to university 'cos I didn't, I know you need to have a degree to get a good job. Now I've come back and I went to a counsellor for 2 weeks, trying to figure out what I wanted to do and everything led to marketing so I took it on again 'cos I thought I'd do education but everything said I'd be better at marketing. So I thought I was *meant* to be there. So it all happened for a reason, I suppose (Holly, 19, White Australian, University Student).

Strength and learning through adversity

Theorists of late modernity have identified the importance of being able to "turn potential threats into rewarding challenges" (Giddens 1994, 192). Beck also regards the ability to make new starts as crucial to engagement with the conditions of late modernity (2002). There was a strong tendency in this research for young women to interpret disadvantaging circumstances as providing opportunities for educational development and strength-building. To express it colloquially, their responses reflected the turning lemons into lemonade approach to adversity where an individual can overcome anything with the right drive and attitude. In this way, difficulties are to be incorporated into projects of self-improvement. Thus, Lucy, who had been struggling emotionally since recalling her father's repeated rapes of her as a young child reflected that it "builds you as a person as well. Like to go through all the tough times" (Lucy, 18, White Australian, Hairdresser). Rebecca had been physically abused by her mother and left school early in order to look after her siblings and considered that this had taught her how to care for children and that she had learned about the dangers of drinking from her mother's problematic use of alcohol. In the following extract where Leena considers her family's response to racism, the discourse of becoming stronger through the 'shedding' of adverse experiences is also articulated:

I mean me and my brother experienced incidents at school. Like I remember he punched a boy after school for saying something. Like we'd kind of come home and we'd discuss that with each other. But we'd always just brush it off. It was never, like, "oh boo hoo, someone's

216

being racist to me." It was more like, oh well, they're idiots, let's get on with our lives. It was more something that you've just got to shed, not worry about it. And so at school I encountered it [racism] and it wasn't. It was upsetting at the time but now I'm actually glad that it happened. It actually made me a really stronger person (Leena, 19, Fijian Indian Australian, University Student).

Comparative adversity

Many of the young women in this research drew on the concept of other people being worse off than themselves as a way of bearing their own difficulties. This was one of a limited number of times when empathy for others, albeit of a rather general and undefined nature, was expressed. In these instances participants recognised the disadvantage of others in order to distance themselves from their own difficulties and to represent themselves as fortunate in comparison:

Sometimes you sit back and look at your life and then you feel sorry for yourself, basically, and then you look at other people's lives and you know, they've got so much less than you. And it's like, what are you whinging for? (Shelly, 21, South Sea Islander, University Student)

Because there's a lot of people out there that's had worse lives than me and I didn't take my problems into consideration for myself. I thought, oh well, everyone goes through it (Rebecca, 19, White Australian, TAFE Student).

My whole motto in life at the moment is, it doesn't matter how hard life gets, there's always someone out there that's worse off than you. I try and think that every day so I don't sit there and pity myself. You know when some people wake up and go, "I'm so broke or I'm so lonely or I'm so sad." I try and think in my head, it doesn't matter what you do, or what happens in life, there's always someone out there that's worse off than you, you know? That's what I try and think, every day (Jeanie, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Unemployed, 1 child).

An atypical case: Not denying disadvantage

One young woman who took part in this research provided an uncharacteristic and therefore conspicuous contrast to the typical responses to disadvantage that have been outlined. Research methods texts note the importance of negative case examples to the refutation and revision of emerging hypotheses during data analysis (for example D'Cruz and Jones 2004; Kidder and Judd 1986; Strauss and Corbin 1998). In this instance, the atypical case served as an exception that reinforced the identification of a more general rule (Patton 1990). It brought

the regularity of alternative responses into sharper relief and as a result facilitated my understanding of many of the participants' tendency to discount disadvantage by various means. During the actual interview and its transcription, I was struck by the contrasts between my conversations with her and the other young women, particularly those who were also mothering in difficult circumstances. Sophie's life was characterised by poverty and violence. Her step-father beat her mother and he and his father sexually abused Sophie as a child and at age fifteen she was also raped by a boy she went to school with. Following the rape and subsequent, unsuccessful prosecution of the case in court, Sophie was subjected to physical and emotional bullying at school by the boy's friends and family. She found it very difficult to attend to her education and left in Year 9. She had only found very limited employment in poorly paid and insecure retail jobs and was now raising two young children with limited financial resources and little practical or emotional help from the father of her children with whom she lived. What was different about Sophie's story was not so much the extent of her disadvantage, although it was considerable and harrowing, but the absence of optimistic revisions to her circumstances. Sophie speculated about links between the harm done to her by the sexual violence and subsequent poor educational outcomes and continuing distress. She did not state that the violence had strengthened her, provided useful life lessons or that she had 'moved on':

> People say they sort of forget it, like what happened and stuff, in their life, but you don't forget it, you still picture it and you still fear over it (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Sophie attempted to complete her Year 10 certificate when she was twenty, but the disadvantages of her childhood and her resulting lack of confidence were obstacles that she could not surmount at that time:

> Yeah, I tried to go, tried to go to get my Year 10 pass when I had Callie [her four year old daughter] and I just couldn't do it. I don't know why but, like, I went there and a few months down the track I just, just lost all the hopes and stuff. I don't know if it was because of what I've been through and like, people saying you can't do that ra, ra, ra. You're not brainy enough and like putting you down all the time (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Sophie described her boyfriend (the father of her children) as domestically uninvolved and unsupportive. In contrast to the other young women who were mothering, she did not counter her descriptions of its difficulties with phrases that tempered her experience of disadvantage and she made no attempts to construct the domestic division of labour as at all equitable or consented to. It was simply portrayed as unfair and particularly hard on her as a result of the unfairness.

In addition to being the only participant who did not redefine her circumstances to emphasise volition or fortuitous outcomes, Sophie was the only young women to openly state regret about what had happened to her and to contemplate at any length how things might have been different. Here, she wonders if her schooling would have been more successful if she had been removed completely from her troubling environment:

> If I could change my whole life, my whole world, for one I'd go right through schooling. Like I'd probably just get my mother and my step-father to send me to boarding school or something. Just so I could have finished school, so I could get a good job. I probably would, if I did get a good job I would have waited to have children (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Other than this wistful reflection, she had very little sense that her life would change significantly but hoped to be able to provide her two children with a loving and secure upbringing. Sophie did not employ any of the interpretive strategies that other participants utilised in order to distance themselves from pathologising associations with disadvantage and therefore provided a negative case example through which to consider the ubiquity of the other responses.

In contrast to the chilling of empathy that is described in the next section of this chapter, it was also notable that Sophie was sympathetic to others who had suffered difficult life events. She voiced none of the commonly expressed expectations that individual strength could overcome great disadvantage, but rather identified the ongoing difficulties that can result from the experience of being sexually abused (Sophie uses the term 'sexually active' to refer to sexual abuse), for example:

> And people should believe, people should believe young children that are getting sexually active about it. That it's not just a thing they say. Even though they might be making it up but

they should be sat down and really talked to about it. Instead of just saying oh yeah, whatever, and push them aside. And that's why these things happen today. Their parents sexually active them or they end up getting raped while they're out. And the world, and no-one knows about it because no one wants to listen to them. And that's why, like, people end up suiciding themselves over stuff like that, over abusive families or relationships and stuff like that (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

It was also interesting that Sophie's refusal to obscure or revise the extent of her disadvantage and its profound impact on her life allowed her to challenge the notion of women having achieved parity with men:

It's good that you got into this [research about young women's lives today] 'cos now you know that women don't have everything, it's mainly males that have everything. It would be good if women did have everything because life wouldn't be so much complicated (Sophie, 24, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

I have pondered about the possible explanations for Sophie's disinclination to use the discounting strategies so typically employed by others. My only suggestion is that because she grew up in poverty in a remote township in Far North Queensland, she experienced a more limited exposure to some of the means by which the cultural ideals of self-invention and individualised resilience are disseminated.

A Chilling of Empathy

These findings suggest that there are problematic consequences of individualised resiliency. The flipside of such single-minded veneration of individual achievement can be an attitude of impatience with those who don't similarly 'make it' and 'rise above' their disadvantage. Examples of unempathic responses to 'other' young mothers and women experiencing violence have already been highlighted in this thesis. A similar absence of compassion was also evident in comments about the unemployed and Indigenous Australians:

I don't see why they find it hard to get a job. I think some people are really picky and a lot of people won't take what they can, to get a job. You just need to go, apply and get a job. I don't see why people would be struggling (Lacey, 18, White Australian, Restaurant Worker).

But I reckon if they [Indigenous Australians] pulled their act together then they could start getting treated equally (Melanie, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child).

There were also some examples of limited compassion for people who suicided, "You get angry. You think, look what you've put other people through, it ruins a lot of people's lives. Like the girlfriend. Anger that they can be so selfish" (Greta, 22, White Australian, Nurse). The chilling of empathy was less pronounced among Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse participants, but still present for some:

> I think a lot of women have to open their eyes up, make a couple of phone calls, do a couple of things. And if the place isn't working for them, go somewhere else and make it work (Jeanie, 22, Aboriginal Australian, Unemployed, 1 child).

A chilling of empathy towards disadvantaged others provides a warning about the relational implications of the fetishising of personal responsibility. Belief in a narrow individualism comes at a price for the disadvantaged where it stifles compassion and enhances social differentiation rather than commonality. This research found that empathy was often in shorter supply for women rather than men, whose difficulties were more likely to be contextualised and sympathised with.

A politics of resentment

In addition to a chilling of empathy, this research also found evidence for a 'politics of resentment', a term that has been used to describe the mobilisation of contempt against disadvantaged groups which flourishes amidst anxiety and insecure global neo-liberalism (Kenway and Kraack 2003 and McCarthy and Dimitriadus 2000). In this research, there were consistent examples of negative comments about Indigenous Australians, asylum seekers, unemployed people and young single mothers. It was most common for such comments to be directed at their receipt of welfare support and the way in which it is used and for a downward envy to feature in their disapproval (Bryson 1992).

Greta was an unpartnered nurse who was uncertain about whether she would have children because of financial constraints, aspirations to travel and the need to find a compatible and suitable father for her children. She too spoke at some length about the unfairness she perceived with mothers being entitled to what she thought were numerous financial benefits while she paid off her HECS debt and made little financial progress through her employment:

You're better off having no money, having a child and then you get paid your rent, you get paid your electricity, you get paid your phone, you get paid to go to TAFE, you get free childcare. Like my friend who is with a partner, he was trying to work and she gets half those benefits. So it doesn't really motivate them to do the right thing and I think that's what the real issue is. And then they have children, their children see that and so why would they bother to go get an education if they can sit at home and do what they want and have the same benefits? Sometimes I feel like that too. Well, why am I doing all this? I'm not getting anywhere (Greta, 22, White Australian, Nurse).

There was also evidence from participants that they felt the impact of such attitudes and, indeed, internalised some of the resentment:

They make you feel bad because you're on the pension and it's like just because the baby came out of you, why should you get paid for nothing. All you do is sit around on your arse and this and that. I work my butt off. I sit down for about an hour a day, you know, that's it and the rest of the day I'm cleaning, I'm looking after kids, this and that. And I feel bad, I do, I feel bad being on the pension, because it's mainly coming from taxpayers (Amy, 19, White Australian, Home Duties, 2 children).

Kenway and Kraack (2003) consider that such resentment reflects the micro level socio-cultural divisions created by the uncertainties of neo-liberal economic globalisation. Greta's comments illustrate the ways in which personal anxieties about vulnerability are displaced onto others and are transformed into bitterness and derision. Neo-liberalism brings "envy and resentments" which are impediments to the expression of compassion (Hugman 2005, 65). McCarthy and Dimitriadus (2000, 1) describe a politics of resentment by which one's identity is defined through the negation of the other. Such contempt then functions to reduce any moral obligation to those who are derided and the welfare state is blamed for the cultivation of dependency (Bauman 1998). In the following extract, Thea, a poor mother who left school in Year 9, expresses delight in the impending abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (the legislation for which was proclaimed in March 2005) based on her perception of its support of Indigenous Australian as unjustifiable. The stigma attached to Indigenous welfare recipients is apparent in her partner's reluctance to make such a claim and her assertion that he's "as white as me":

His dad's [her partner's father] got Aboriginal in him so he gets everything from ATSIC. There's no ATSIC anymore so ha ha. Steven has never claimed off ATSIC, so.

Joanne: Although he could?

Thea: He reckons it's too much paperwork to go through. I'm not worried; I reckon there's too many people that bludge off ATSIC. But Steven's as white as me as far as I'm concerned. But he doesn't really deserve, I don't reckon any of them deserve it really.

Joanne: Why do you reckon that?

Thea: Well, we apparently took over their land years and years ago and they're not slaves anymore or anything like that. We've forgiven, we've said sorry and that. They say all they want is a written apology and that would be over with but as soon as we take their money away they're gonna crack a big shit. Plus all Aboriginals today treat us like shit. I don't reckon they deserve anything, we should be equals now. We've paid for our mistake for long enough, I reckon. It's time to be fair again.

Joanne: So the ATSIC news is good, in your view, then.

Thea: Oh you should hear my dad go on about it. He'll sit there for three or four hours going on and on and on how he hates Aboriginals (Thea, 20, White Australian, Home Duties, 1 child and pregnant).

Plainly, a human consequence of neo-liberalism is the fracturing of understanding and compassion for those who are leading difficult and disadvantaged lives, often on the part of those who are also living difficult lives. Again, it was noteworthy that the Indigenous participants and the participants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds did not express such sentiments. The disparity between the finding of a widespread orientation to altruistic occupations and impediments to compassion is interesting. One explanation is that the wish to undertake work in a caring field does not mean that all people would necessarily be regarded as equally 'deserving' of concern or assistance. In addition to this, there was a tendency for many of those aspiring to such work to express the desire to pass on what they had learnt through their own difficult times, which may involve the projection of their own views about individual determination and resiliency.

Resilience, structure and social welfare practice

The construction of resilience generally connotes positive adaptation by individuals despite experiences of significant adversity; good outcomes in the face of hardship and misfortune. Although agency is not synonymous with constructive coping and hardiness, there are some parallels between the increased interest in resilience and the shift in the social sciences from social structures to the individual and the significance of agents and agency. Therefore, a heightened preoccupation with agency and notions such as resilience is one manifestation of

the prevailing influence of individualism. The elevation of interest in resilience (for example Deveson 2003), particularly in the area of children and young people's well-being (Daniel and Wassell 2002) has occurred in tandem with an increased focus on strengths-based approaches in social welfare practice. The move to a strengths-based paradigm has been important in the context of questioning deficit-focused social welfare theory and practice and instead invokes people's resources, competencies and potentialities (Saleebey 1992 and 1996). The desire to give emphasis to people's proactivity, resilience and resourcefulness is an understandable reaction to the pathologising and problematising of the passive and dependent welfare subject (Titterton 1992).

However, some researchers have cautioned against the uncritical use of the concept of resilience (Daniel and Wassell 2002 and Luthar, Ciccetti and Becker 2000). The desire to challenge pathology and recognise capacity for action and hardiness within constraint can mean that the comparative privileges enjoyed by some groups continue unremarked because the emphasis switches to the capacity for resistance and resilience amongst the disadvantaged. The focus is placed on the ability to manage despite being disadvantaged. Rigsby (1994) describes an 'Americanization' of resilience and emphasises the importance of placing resilience in a broad cultural context where there is an emphasis on individualism and striving for upward mobility. Literature in this area also cautions against simplistic assumptions about resilience that regard it as a fixed personal attribute without variance over time or in different situations (Kinard 1998). Resilience does not necessarily equate with emotional health, particularly in terms of internalised problems such as anxiety and depression (Luthar and Zigler 1991). Individuals can experience emotional distress despite displaying 'apparent resilience' and behavioural competence (Luthar 1991). While it is not possible to argue for any specific correlation between the coping mechanisms described in this chapter and participants' experience of internalised problems, as many as a quarter of them did report anxiety and depression and the use of anti-depressant medication. Thus, it is not unreasonable to speculate about the mental health implications of an insistence on autonomous subjectivity. Brynner, Elias, McKnight, Pan and Pierre (2002) argue there has been a relative decline in the psychological health of young people, especially young women, in the previous 12 years. Wyn and Dwyer (2000) also point to a link between autonomous subjects who willingly reinvent themselves and high rates of mental illness among young people. Walkerdine and her colleagues also comment on the high levels of anxiety demonstrated by the middle class girls in particular in their sample (2001).

Differing views about the relative significance of agency and structure underpin approaches to concepts such as resilience. Criticisms of structural accounts of society consider them to be overly deterministic and that in giving primacy to the power of structural forces, individuals' actions are overlooked. Conversely, accounts of agency are considered by critics to not take sufficient account of issues of social structure. Some theorists have attempted to provide alternatives to the dichotomous opposition of agency and structure. For example, Giddens' (1979 and 1984) theory of structuration characterises structure and agency as mutually constitutive and therefore inseparable elements of social life. Bourdieu (1997) conceptualised agency as embedded in and structured by social inequality in his work on the 'reflexive choice of the necessary'. In a similar vein, Evans, Rudd, Behrens, Kaluza and Wooley (2001) have described bounded or socially situated agency. Seyla Benhabib's account of subjectivity considers that individuals have agency not because they choose their circumstances, but rather because they make sense of them (1999, 344-45).

I consider that both structure and agency interact to influence people's lives. In this research, two participants who were sisters provided examples of individualised responses to life events. Alice and Susie were confronted by their parents' divorce and the death of their mother from illness shortly afterwards. Although they faced the same difficult life events, their contrasting personal responses led to very different outcomes. Susie began drinking heavily and using drugs, left school early and moved out of the home that she shared with her sisters. She went to live with her boyfriend who also used drugs and who physically assaulted her regularly. He coerced her into becoming pregnant and following the birth of her baby she left him and spent some months in a women's refuge. This ex-boyfriend had recently died as the result of a drugs overdose. Her sister Alice was so distressed by what was happening to Susie that she deliberately eschewed alcohol and drug use and avoided intimate relationships with men because of her fear of violence:

> I kind of looked at her and how upset she used to make me so what I was endeavouring to do was *not* to do that. I didn't want to be like one of the stereotype girls around us kind of thing. So I took on responsibility and tried to stay mature about it all (Alice, 20, White Australian, University Student).

It is crucial to be aware that a focus on agency or resilience under oppression can result in an overemphasis on the individual responsibility expected of people in difficult circumstances. This is not to say that it is not possible for people to exercise resourcefulness and moral agency under duress, as Alice was able to do, but this should not diminish the importance of a sympathetic awareness of the constraints of their situation. However, it is understandings of success which emphasise the agency of the striving spirit of the individual and disregard structural considerations which strongly characterise the views of many of the young women in this research. The strong and consistent tendency for participants to minimise their own hardship and demonstrate traits of resilience is indicative of a widespread preference for decontextualised and individualised understandings of social distress and disadvantage.

I have concerns that, unless specifically guarded against, the enthusiasm for strengths-based practice in social welfare work can easily slip into such simplistic and individualised diminishing of the social causes of individually experienced problems. In their longitudinal study of social work students and practitioners in Australia, Jan Fook, Martin Ryan and Linette Hawkins (2000) noted their distinct preference for explaining problems in individualistic ways, which could often be described as victim-blaming. They demonstrated limited acknowledgment of situational context and tended to remain socially and emotionally distanced from people using welfare services and insulated from the pain and injustice of their predicaments. The researchers also highlighted the predilection for an atheoretical advice-giving approach which was reminiscent of popularised psychology and agony aunts and hinged on guidance such as "don't dwell on the past" (2000, 155-6). While well-meaning, such approaches reflect a cultural preference for helping that polices and corrects individual deviancy. This represents a departure, facilitated by neo-liberal values, from radical forms of social welfare practice which are driven by an ethic of challenging the root causes of social distress and injustice (Crimeen and Wilson 1997). The findings of this research suggest, therefore, that the importance of the influence of neo-liberal subjectivities on help-seeking and social welfare provision might usefully be incorporated into training and practice and that there is scope for further research in this area.

Chapter summary and conclusion

In this chapter, young women's experiences as neo-liberal subjects expose the difficulties and tensions that are obscured by the seductive concepts of individual choice and personal responsibility and the promise of achievement and an improved life. Young women from

vastly differing backgrounds, life experiences and degrees of resources are materially polarised. Despite this, they are subjected to the same discourses of flexibility, choice and personal transformation, and their interpretive frameworks converge. The difficulties and costs associated with the requirements of choice and social mobility are reported in this chapter and centre on neo-liberalism's central assumption of a psychologically rational and unitary subject of choice.

The neo-liberal insistence that both failures and successes are understood as having occurred through an individual's own making and pathology leads to the development of strategies by which disadvantage can be discounted and self-improvement emphasised. This is an understandable response to the punitive judgement associated with not being a neo-liberal success. However, this chapter argues that these individualised strategies of resistance are associated with a chilling of empathy and a politics of resentment towards those who are also unfavourably positioned under neo-liberalism. Unfairness is more likely to be articulated through a politics of resentment against those who are even more poorly off but are perceived as generously treated by a welfare state that that encourages dependency. This fracturing of compassion signals the way in which the concepts of relationality and interdependence are being undermined and represents one of the most worrying human consequences of neo-liberalism.

The celebratory rhetoric of neo-liberalism sits alongside varying degrees of resources and opportunities and the ascendency of its can-do philosophy glosses over parallel increases in inequalities (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). While the material possibilities of an ostensibly equitable and meritocratic society are differently experienced by young women according to their socio-economic circumstances and cultural capital, the space for interpreting these differences as unfairness has been closed down, effectively privatising personal experience that is structurally produced.

The remaining two chapters of this thesis closely examine the implications and possible responses to the findings reported in the chapters dealing with the mothering, occupational, relational and political areas of young women's lives.

Chapter nine

Make your own way there: Social policy and the neo-liberal agenda

Introduction

In this chapter, the experiences and aspirations of the participants in this research will be analysed against the current Australian social policy climate. The title of this chapter, 'Make your own way there' is the current advertising slogan of Sportsgirl, an Australian women's fashion store. It has been used elsewhere to describe the way in which social policy for young people is increasingly focused on individual journeys and personal responsibility (Spierings 2002). The majority of young women who took part in this research strongly endorsed individualism as a legitimate interpretive framework for their own lives and the lives of others. They also voiced support for the liberal feminist goals of legislative equality and the removal of formal exclusions to women's public participation. It will be argued in this chapter that, despite much of the congruence between young women's epistemological preferences and neo-liberalism, current social policy approaches are not in fact operating in their best interests.

Individual choice and post-feminist social policy

The main goal for social policy in current times is to centre individual choice and responsibility. Individualism is able to flourish when a belief exists that structural constraints to equality are extremely limited or do not exist. Such a view finds support in the post-feminist discourse which states that an approach to policy that is informed by feminism is no longer necessary because equality has been achieved through equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation. Australian social policy scholar, Lois Bryson, notes that it is only post-feminism that is used to focus explicitly on women's position in contemporary policy debates (2001, 21). Indeed, the post-feminist position is one which is (gleefully) endorsed by the Prime Minister, John Howard, in a newspaper interview:

> We are in the post-feminist stage of the debate. The good thing about this stage is that I think we have broken through some of the old stereotypes. I find that for the under-30s women…the feminist battle has been won. That is not an issue. Of course a woman has a right to a career. Of course, women are as good as men. Of course, they are entitled to the same promotion and they can do it as well. Of course. That is accepted and what they are

looking for now is a set of circumstances and a range of policies that allow them to exercise the choices they want (Howard, in Hewett 2003, 45).

The Prime Minister echoes the widespread understanding that equality between men and women is self-evident and unquestionable. He then uses the ubiquitous rhetoric of choice to signal that it is now up to women, in this era of unproblematic equality, to individually avail themselves of the options that are open to them. In addition to the persuasive discourse of post-feminism where special concern for girls and women is obsolete, any problems that they *do* experience can be laid at the door of feminism. Janet Albrechtson, a conservative commentator for *The Australian* newspaper, has made a consistent and substantial contribution to this line of thinking. For example in 'No commitment to breed' the by-line is "blame feminism for falling fertility rates and family breakdown in Australia" (2002, 11). Very recently in the same publication Angela Shanahan asserts that "the feminist obsession with 'career' not motherhood as the central element of women's self-definition made fertility the enemy" (2005, 29). Virginia Haussegger's public lament "I am childless and I am angry...that I was so foolish to take the word of my feminist mothers as gospel" (2002, 11) provided the basis for her book which questions the continuing salience of feminism (2005). In another Albrechtson article entitled 'Feminists don't know what women want', feminist analysis is dismissed through reference to personal choice. She argues that what looks like workplace discrimination, according to feminists, is in fact a "reflection of women's choices. Some women prefer the playground to the boardroom. Some women use the professions as a marriage market. Some women like to be kept" (2003, 15).

The post-feminist discourse rests on the assumption that the liberal feminist goals, of undoing past exclusions to women's participation in public life and ensuring legal recognition of sex equality, have not only been fully and unproblematically achieved but are sufficient to end the subordinate status of women. The flaws of a liberal agenda of individual rights and anti-discrimination have been noted from an Indigenous perspective. The focus on individual rather than collective rights is identified as undermining Indigenous moral and social values (for example, Libesman, Pearce and Kelly 1999). Bryson argues that the limits of a liberal feminist agenda are apparent when the contemporary social policy climate for women is examined because these gains have resulted in limited change to the ways in which gender relations are constructed (2001). While there have been advantages for women in greater access to economic independence and a greater foothold on involvement in the public sphere,

Carol Pateman's classic analysis of the public/private divide has ongoing salience. She has asserted the fundamental problems with seeking to incorporate women into work structures that are designed around a male biography, which presumes the domestic support of a wife at home (1981). Thus, the majority of women have been absorbed into lower paying and less powerful positions and, as this research found, continue to carry the responsibility for domestic work and childcare, conditions which are increasingly regarded as reflections of choice.

The ready co-option of liberal feminist aims to a neo-liberal politics has also been noted (Bryson 2001; McRobbie 2001). The neo-liberal requirement for a flexible workforce has cohered with liberal feminism's pragmatic goal of opening up labour market opportunities for women. The absence of formal exclusions to public life can be drawn on to support the ideology of individualism because the rhetoric of equal opportunity provides a cosmetic accountability which can be used to suggest that obstacles no longer exist and that women are now unhindered competitors. Their increased participation in the labour market was crucially sanctioned by the economic imperatives of a need for more flexible workers, which leads Angela McRobbie to argue that women's demands have been depoliticised and made compatible with the ethics of an economic agenda (2001).

The existence of formal equality and the rhetoric of individual responsibility influentially suggest that anything is possible for women who are able to effectively manage these new freedoms. While the findings of this research suggest that young women's lives remain strongly influenced by social divisions such as race, class and gender, these are distinctions that are downplayed or denied by neo-liberal discourse in social policy. Parallel to the continuing importance of structural factors, there is a strengthening of the tendency to diminish their importance and to hold strong beliefs in the capacity of individuals to negotiate and shape their futures through personal application and making the most of your choices.

The requirement for anti-dependency rhetoric

I have stated that the ascendancy of neo-liberalism as an ideology driving social policy relies strongly on the widespread endorsement of individualism. An individualist analysis is particularly important in moving an understanding of an individual's circumstances away from social inequities and structural disadvantage to a focus on personal inadequacy. Writers such as Adam Jamrozik (2005) and Michael Pusey (2003) have pointed out that the purpose

of welfare and economic reform has been to make people less dependent on states and governments and more dependent on economies, markets and themselves. The inequities that are generated by restructuring and competitive free markets fall to a diminished welfare state to attend to (Jamrozik 2005; Kaplan 1996). Claims on the welfare state are made by individuals which further reinforces the idea that individuals are increasingly responsible for their lives (Beck 2002) under increasingly consumerist principles of citizenship (Lister 2003). In order to legitimise the neo-liberal reform agenda, it has been necessary to invoke a discourse whereby welfare provision is seen as an undeserved prop for those who, through their own failings, do not provide for themselves. Indeed, these views were represented in the expressions of resentment that were directed at disadvantaged groups in this research. Stigmatised dependency is the opposite of valorised individual independence in what Wacquant terms "a Darwinian state that makes a fetish of competition and celebrates individual responsibility" (2001, 405). 'Make your own way there' encompasses the message that you are stronger and more successful if you don't rely on others, no matter what the conditions and consequences.

Where there is a focus on the notion of welfare as an unearned hand-out for the parasitical, which is financed by the worthy, government efforts to improve the rights of people collectively through public spending are de-legitimised. Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon have noted the widespread and largely unquestioning criticism of 'welfare dependency' and trace how the association of state assistance with dependency has replaced debates about poverty and inequality (1994, 78). The spoken and written language of welfare reform in Australia, particularly that associated with mutual obligation, is saturated with references to how the social support system has failed those it was designed to help by encouraging dependency (for example Pearson 2000). The focus on self-reliance moves discussion away from the implications for social justice of work restructuring and casualisation to rhetoric about enhancing capacity for participation so that un(der)employment is described as a problem of missing 'work skills'. Conversely, the principle of social solidarity is grounded in a view that individuals have obligations to their fellow human beings which go beyond the negative freedom of respecting their liberty and extend into mutual assistance and support. The reporting in this thesis of a chilling of empathy signals the increasingly discredited notion of interdependence between people.

The negative connotations of welfare dependency are another arena in which tensions between structure and agency are debated. For example, Giddens' theorising about a 'Third Way' for contemporary politics includes a critique of welfare dependency and argues for a greater focus on agency within social welfare provision (1998). Scholars have again argued that the focus on agency is a much-needed corrective to previous accounts of welfare subjects which followed a deficit model and stressed powerlessness (Le Grand 1997; Titterton 1992). Whilst there is some merit in the argument that previous approaches to social welfare have been grounded in pathologising frameworks, this is not, in my view, usefully countered where the recognition of agency is used to justify the neglect of ongoing (indeed deepening) structural inequities. The focus on an agentic welfare subject – where it is to the detriment of recognition of social determinations – is reflective of the way in which decontextualised individuals are increasingly viewed as responsible for the management of their lives. Social welfare is progressively more a matter of private responsibility and personal security whereby people encounter socially produced problems and risks individually.

Although the principles of individualism and antipathy to dependency received robust and extensive support from the participants in this research, the dismantling of the welfare state which is legitimised by these values has particularly worrying implications for young women both now and in the future. It has been argued in this thesis that neo-liberalism is an essentially masculinist ideology in terms of the assumptions on which it is based and Marian Sawer's (2003a) persuasive account of the gendered nature of welfare reform and the dismantling of the 'nanny state' was referred to in the literature review. The material outcomes that result from the neo-liberal welfare reform agenda are also gendered. Since women are over-represented among low-income groups in society, they are disproportionately affected by cuts to social security and welfare services. Women carry out the majority of unpaid domestic work and childcare as well as a greater share of the care of unwell or infirm family members (ABS 2000; Disability Services Queensland 2000). Therefore, reduced expenditure on health, aged care, welfare and community services will also have an impact on women as the duty of care is pushed back onto the private sphere. In addition to this, reduced government investment in the public health system places an uneven burden on young women of reproductive age. These broad observations about the implications of neo-liberal welfare reform for women are now extended to consider the ways in which specific areas of current social policy in Australia act on young women's lives.

Making your own way there in education and employment

Despite the faith invested in education and the free market as the arbiters of economic success and social mobility, this research indicates that girls and young women are not equally and freely able to avail themselves of such opportunities. Where participants' childhoods were characterised by experiences of poverty, domestic and family violence, parents' problematic drug and alcohol use, homelessness and physical and sexual abuse, their ability to achieve success in the education system was significantly affected. Becoming mothers at a young age was associated with childhood disadvantage and often curtailed the education and employment projects of these young women. Educational researchers Dwyer and Wyn (2001) state that although there are a significant number of students who do not complete their final years of schooling, the Howard Government's heavy promotion of an image of success associated with the mainstream masks the continuing inequalities experienced by those marginalised from education. A smokescreen of meritocracy conceals complex and critical issues. A failed transition between school and work is estimated to account for the labour market disadvantage of a fifth of people who are long-term unemployed in Australia (Boston Consulting Group 2000). Dwyer and Wyn (2001) point to a lack of useful supports and pathways for early school leavers. Spierings also notes that institutional forms of assistance in education, training and employment are "worn, fragmented and often dated" (2002, 1). Additionally, involvement in higher education is increasingly slanted to those with the social and educational means to navigate and take on the risks associated with a user-pays system.

The role of the state is increasingly limited to reducing barriers to entry into the labour market, where individuals must avail themselves of the opportunities for upward mobility that await those willing to 'make the effort'. If individuals do not successfully take up the opportunities offered to them by the market they become, in effect, responsible for their own inequality through moral or psychological failings. Young people seem to be taking on these understandings and expectations. Despite an increasingly competitive, deregulated labour market, young people, including the young women in this research, often demonstrate a paradoxical optimism about their prospects (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; Wicks and Mishra 1998; Dwyer and Wyn 2001). Research with young people commonly notes their willingness to reinvent their skills and personality in order to meet labour market demands (for example McDonald 1999). It may be that the belief in their ability to negotiate and shape their lives

explains the disparity between their aspirations and their actual employment scenarios and likely outcomes.

The deregulation and casualisation of the workforce is often assessed as particularly beneficial for women who may require flexible working hours that enable them to combine child-rearing with employment. Such a view fails to take account of the disadvantages of casual employment which is often characterised by unpredictability, poor working conditions and little opportunity for advancement (Pocock, Prosser and Bridge 2004; Wynhausen 2005). The neo-liberal valorisation of the free market and labour market participation is fundamentally disadvantaging to women who are unable to trade their labour in the same way as men because of the naturalised devolution of responsibility to them for the majority of the unpaid and unvalued domestic and childcare work. The social and economic value of women's unpaid contributions is largely unacknowledged and uncalculated. The economic effects of these contributions on women become apparent when their superannuation levels (Olsberg 2005) and lifetime earnings and career trajectories are compared with men's (King 1999). Women are more likely than men to move in and out of the workforce (due to pregnancy and caring responsibilities) and to earn less money in more insecure jobs and to be on minimum award wages. It is probable that women will be unfavourably affected by the stripping back of awards and the push towards individual contracts under the Federal Government's proposed industrial relations reforms. The reforms continue the neo-liberal trend of reducing the role and capacity of protectors of collective interests such as unions and tribunals and have been rather predictably named WorkChoices in order to conjure up ideas of personal power and positive options. The assumption that all workers can bargain effectively with employers is questionable when the inequitable work conditions for female workers in comparison to male workers are examined (Van Gramberg 1999). Recent analysis of ABS figures by David Peetz (2005) shows that while the difference between earnings on individually negotiated Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) compared to registered collective agreements was not significant for men, women on AWAs had wages 11% less than women on collective agreements, and earned less than men on both kinds of agreements. Such a system favours those with scarce or special skills. Those with limited skills and family responsibilities are likely to have limited bargaining power in workplaces and are unlikely therefore to benefit from signing individual contracts based on one-on-one negotiations with their employer. This research has described the obstacles to young women behaving in ways that denote purposeful self-interest and has noted that their actions are often shaped by their

care for and consideration of others. A recent South Australian report, *Dirt Cheap and Disposable* (SA Unions 2005), also points to the particular vulnerability of young people to workplace exploitation. The emphasis on agreement-making as a way to obtain favourable working conditions and family friendly practices demonstrates a policy reliance on individualism. However, research into family friendly practice points to very limited progress in the attainment of positive provisions by this means (Burgess and Strachan 2005; Pocock 2003). It is highly skilled and remunerated workers who are most likely to benefit through such processes. The stress on individualism fails to recognise the constraints that act on the bargaining power of workers on award wages and those with caring responsibilities. Concerns about disadvantaged groups are displaced by the imperatives of economic progress and international competitiveness.

Having children and achieving a work/life balance

The childrearing aspirations of young women have featured in social policy debate through the recent focus on the declining fertility rate of Western industrialised countries, including Australia (McDonald 2000; Hugo 2000). Feminist history has documented the periodic concern with falling birthrates. Connections have been made between the focus on such anxieties and perceptions about the increased social and economic power of women (Mackinnon 1997), and the homophobia and contradictions inherent in governments' simultaneous attempts to limit and control the fertility of women outside the hetero-nuclear family norm (Faludi 1992). Peter Costello, Treasurer for the Federal Government of Australia, has urged women to have three children, "one for your wife, one for your husband and one for the country" (Costello in Price 2004, 1). In line with previous politicians, patriotism is invoked to suggest that women of childbearing age have a national duty to increase their procreation. The dangers of delaying child-rearing are also consistently debated in the public sphere. As I write this chapter, news broadcasts are giving extensive coverage to a new article in the British Medical Journal which highlights the medical and infertility problems associated with delaying child-rearing in order to prioritise a career (Bewley, Davies and Braude 2005). While it is legitimate to consider the health implications of pregnancy and childbirth for older women, much of the reporting on this issue appears to serve the function of reminding women of the perils of their new-found freedoms and often neglects the personal, economic and social policy context in which women are making decisions about whether and when to have children. The declining fertility of men (for example Gray 2002) receives much less attention.

Despite fear-mongering about falling fertility rates, the findings of this and other Australian research (Wicks and Mishra 1998) suggest that a strong majority of young women actually do wish to have children. Additionally, a significant disinclination for small families was expressed by participants in this research, with many young women expressing a preference for three and more children in order to emulate their own experience of several siblings. When findings such as these are compared with reduced family sizes, it is reasonable to suggest that declining birth rates point to a tension between the family caring role for women and the difficulties of combing this with personal interests and employment ambitions rather than any large scale shift in young women's desires for children (Bryson 2001; Probert 2002; Summers 2003). Young women in this research expect to combine their planned child-rearing with employment. It is likely, as Bryson (2001) suggests, that when they move closer to actually experiencing employment and child-rearing, they may revise their previously held aspirations to either not have children at all or not to have as many children as they had hoped for.

The anticipation of childlessness in this research is lower than is predicted for women in Australia. Demographer Peter McDonald predicts that of the 25% of women who will remain childless in the future, only 7% will have chosen this, with another 7% being infertile and 11% being childless for reasons other than infertility (1998). In her qualitative examination of women who find themselves childless by circumstance rather than choice, Leslie Cannold (2005) argues that falling fertility rates in Australia don't reflect what women want in terms of child-rearing. She points to the circumstances that constrain women's opportunity to have children, including unrealistic expectations of what it takes to be a 'good' mother, a lack of family friendly workplaces and male partners who are reluctant to be fathers.

As I have stated already in this chapter, much of the discussion about falling fertility rates and delayed childrearing does seem to indicate concern about the transgression of traditional femininity inherent in the increased possibilities for women to reflexively consider their reproductive lives. Whilst I resist such an analysis of the changed ways in which young women now encounter reproduction, there are economic, medical and social implications for the delaying of child-rearing that it is important to consider. Economically, one of the repercussions of women delaying their child-rearing is that the workforce loses the skills and experience of such workers when they take maternity leave or reduce their hours of

employment (HREOC 2002). In addition to the health implications of later pregnancies outlined in the mainstream medical literature (for example Bewley, Davies and Braude 2005), radical feminist scholarship has questioned the widely accepted increase of laboratory assisted fertility treatment in women's lives. According to this area of scholarship, one of the costs for women of the 'freedom' to delay childrearing is their growing involvement in a reproductive technology industry where there is potential for emotional and financial exploitation (Klein 1989; Raymond 1993; Rowland 1992). Women's attempts to become pregnant later in their lives, when their fertility is reduced, raise the likelihood of their use of methods such as in vitro fertilisation. This procedure does not guarantee successful conception (but can result in unanticipated multiple births) and has been identified as an invasive and difficult process at best with potentially dangerous, but under-researched, medical side-effects at worst

In addition to these health and workforce considerations, it is worth speculating about the prospects for women who have grown up with assumptions about the entitlements of modernised femininity and who enter parenthood after years of independence from its demands. Angela McRobbie (2001) has signalled the potential for young women's decisions about and experiences of child-rearing to be a key site of tension and possible rupture in the competitive individualist discourse. She suggests that the ruthless forms of female individualism fostered by neo-liberalism may "buckle" when the de-individualising that continues to be expected of sacrificial mothering is encountered (2001, 363). This research has noted the material disparity between young women who are already parenting with their peers who plan to raise children following the achievement of personal and occupational ambitions. The experiences of the young mothers did not support the notion of the existence of the pervasive and increased practical involvement of fathers or the equitable division of domestic labour. Rather, this area of experience is characterised by young women's hopes and expectations of a de-traditionalised private sphere. Therefore, I share McRobbie's fears that future motherhood for contemporary young women may be typified by disappointments and difficult adaptations.

Commentary and research about contemporary work conditions also give cause for some pessimism about young women's intentions of combining employment with mothering (Pocock 2003; HREOC 2005). Anne Summers (2003) reports that in 2001, the number of complaints of pregnancy discrimination under Sex Discrimination Act increased by 150%

from 86 the previous year to 212. Willett observes that there are now inflated standards for excellence and productivity in the professions and that the longer hours necessary to meet these demands have coincided as women have entered the professions in greater numbers (2002, 119). Linda Hancock also notes the intensification of work for those in full-time employment, with Australian employees second in the world for working extended hours (2005, 5) and Barbara Pocock documents the difficulties of such intensification for parenting and relationships (2003). Many of the future mothers in this research envision an unproblematic, flexible movement between parenting and employment, with many intending to reduce their work hours while their children are young and return to full-time employment when they are old enough to attend school. Recent Australian research casts doubt on their ability to do this. Drago, Black and Wooden (2004) analysed data from the Australian HILDA survey which provides information on usual and desired working time. They developed the concepts of drop ceilings and trap-door floors. The notion of drop ceilings is based on the assumption that employees who choose part time work are stigmatised as non-ideal workers and refers to the situation where full-time employees who switch to reduced hours thereafter face an hours ceiling which makes a return to full time employment difficult. Trap-door floors may be experienced by full-time employees who are denied the opportunity to reduce their hours and instead face a choice between full time employment and quitting their job. The researchers' key finding that women face drop ceilings significantly more often than men has worrying implications for the young women who expressed a desire to work part-time in their chosen occupation for periods of time while raising a family. They also found that trap-door floors are confronted significantly more often by professionals and managers. Constraints such as this may result in 'mummy track' career paths described by Wacjman (1999) and Hochschild (1990) which are characterised by stifled opportunities.

In addition to the economic requirement for flexible labour, demographic changes have also provided some incentive to ensure that more women participate in paid employment in order to counter the ageing of many western populations (Cotis 2003). Despite the growing importance of women's labour market involvement, the absence of support for them to combine this with their child-rearing aspirations is conspicuous. This goes deeper than systemic deficiencies in parental support but reveals the conflicted values that underpin policy approaches to women in the labour market. This is particularly apparent through the differential ways in which women who are mothers find their relationship to the labour market mediated according to their partnered status. Neo-liberal approaches to social policy

are not morally neutral and the contrasting treatment of partnered and single parents exposes tensions between socially conservative 'family values' and the need for a flexible work force. Family policy enacted through Family Tax Benefit A and B assumes that paid work for one parent in a couple is secondary, part-time and non-compulsory and actively encourages partnered mothers to concentrate on mothering. Sole mothers' relationship to the paid workforce, in contrast, is acted on through welfare policy. Writers in Britain (Bullen, Kenway and Hey 2000), New Zealand (Uttley 2000), Canada (Andruske 2000) and Australia (Walter 2005; Whitehouse 2005) have identified that the involvement of single mothers in the paid workforce has been a particular target for welfare reform. Framed by the justification of reducing welfare dependency, the 2004 Budget announced that the Parenting Payment (Single) will be subject to mutual obligation principles and breaching provisions when the youngest child is six.

There is evidence to suggest, however, that sole mothers are less likely than partnered mothers to be out of the labour market through maternal choice (Walter 2005). Many studies state that major factors constraining sole mothers' involvement with paid work include limited family support and difficulties in obtaining childcare (for example Probert and MacDonald 1997; Smith and Ewer 2001; Walter 2005). The Taskforce on Care Costs (2005) found that the high cost of care has a direct relationship with the levels of women's workforce participation. Despite the rhetoric of non-intervention and free choice, the Howard Government has used policy in order to skew women's employment choices because not all mothers are to receive similar incentives (or obligations) and disincentives to be in paid work. Barbara Pocock (2003) identifies the divisiveness of such an approach. Indeed, this research has identified the existence of defensiveness and resentment on the part of young women who are stigmatised as mothers. Furthermore, Pocock suggests that the 'mother wars' which it provokes are beneficial for those who wish to evade constructive policy debate about the contemporary conditions of parenting (2003, 104).

The desire of most of the participants in this research to concurrently raise children and engage in paid work signals the need for a robust child-care sector and a range of policies and work practices which support families. An increasingly deregulated labour market and the displacement of a commitment to subsidised community childcare centres by a market-driven approach signal a move in the opposite direction (Brennan 1999). There is scarce availability in some areas and inflation figures show that price of childcare jumped 9.1% in the year to

September, more than 3 times the inflation rate, with a 60% increase in the last four years (Wade 2005). The inadequacy of parental leave in Australia, the only OECD country apart from the United States without a national paid maternity scheme, has been well-documented (for example HREOC 2002, Pocock 2003, Summers 2003; Weeks 2004). The OECD has documented a marked "dampening effect" of motherhood on women's employment in Australia (2002, 77-8). In her examination of the dilemmas surrounding the achievement of a balance between employment and family responsibilities, Barbara Pocock has highlighted the unresponsiveness of institutions in the face of increasingly more visible and well-articulated needs for family-friendly workplaces and practices (2003). A range of ideas for developing family friendly workplaces include flexible start and finish times, the opportunity to bank and reclaim additional hours worked, the opportunity to do some work at home, a compressed working week with longer days and more hours off, job sharing and part-time jobs with pro-rata benefits and promotional opportunities comparable with full-time status (Burgess and Strachan 2005; Pocock 2003). So while concerns about Australia's falling birth rates and an ageing population have prompted calls for young women to procreate in greater numbers, continuing underinvestment in childcare, reluctance to instigate a national parental leave scheme, and intransigent employment practices provide little practical support for them to do so.

The central values of the Howard Government are in conflict when it comes to women, employment and childrearing. The class-driven nature of the call for increased family sizes is apparent when the differential social policy responses to partnered and single parents are considered. The desire is clearly for more children to be born to women who are in formal relationships with affluently employed men on whom they are or can become financially dependent. While labour market imperatives require the increased participation of women, conservative family values ensure that the government is also eager to reinscribe domesticity upon women, particularly to reassociate middle class women with children and families. Angela McRobbie describes this as the "double entanglement" of liberal choice and conservative family values (2004c, 514). Gillian Pascall (1997) argues that the limits of individualist philosophy are revealed in the New Right's defence of the heterosexual nuclear family in order to secure women's nurturance and unpaid labour. In this system women are "neither major protagonists nor beneficiaries; on the contrary, they bear the costs of individualism" (1997, 12).

A home of one's own

The widespread desire for home ownership in Australia is predicated on permanent, full-time employment. This describes the employment status of only half of Australia's workforce, with a quarter being described as having precarious employment (Borland, Gregory and Sheehan 2001). Nevertheless, nearly every participant in this research articulated a clear aspiration for home ownership and its symbolism of economic security and desirable social status. However, Maryann Wulff (2001) describes the shift from government intervention in the provision of affordable housing to a private individual and market responsibility. Using census data from 1981 and 1996, she demonstrates that home ownership for people aged twenty five to thirty four dropped by 10% during these census periods. Younger generations are earning less than their parents in real terms and the length of time it takes to buy a house has lengthened. Concern about the availability of affordable housing for potential first home buyers has prompted a recent Productivity Commission Inquiry into first home ownership. The final report found a decline in housing affordability which is largely attributable to fiscal measures conducive to investment purchasers rather than first home buyers (Productivity Commission 2004). The increasingly common burden of a HECS debt for young women is an additional barrier to their goal of home ownership (Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations 2003; National Union of Students 2003).

Violence against women: Australia says no?

Male violence emerged as a prevalent and significant experience for young women in this research. However, their reluctance to recognise or articulate violence against women as a manifestation of inequality has been noted in this thesis. Rather, their individualistic interpretations of it occur in a context where this key feminist issue has been depoliticised and de-gendered. Despite changes in public awareness about violence against women and the development of policies and services to address it, there appears to have been little change in its occurrence. Indeed, some research suggests that the incidence of violence against women is more prevalent because it now encompasses the behaviour of men physically fighting back against women's (perceived) equality (Caputi and Russell 1992; Riley-Smith 1992). Putting aside the moral imperatives of this issue, when violence against women is subjected to an economic rationalist examination, a compelling case for its elimination emerges. A recent study has calculated the economic costs of domestic violence in Australia at $8 million per year (Access Economics 2004). An Australian state health department study examined the health costs associated with domestic violence. It conceptualised intimate partner violence as

a major public health issue that is responsible for more ill-health and premature death among Victorian women under the age of forty five than any other well known risk factors including high blood pressure, obesity and smoking (VicHealth 2004). Despite forceful economic reasons for harnessing the most informed policy and practice responses to this social issue, analysis of the Howard Government's performance in this area suggests that the desire to disempower such responses has been the primary aim guiding policy.

Ruth Phillips (2004) and Catherine Itzin (2000) both argue that the most credible and effective theoretical and practical understandings of and responses to domestic violence can be attributed to feminist scholarship and activism. Second wave feminist success in placing the hidden 'private' problem of domestic violence (as well as rape and child abuse) on the public agenda resulted in legislation and services for women victimised by male violence. Recent feminist social policy analysis has identified the move away from feminist conceptualisations of such violence as a reflection of social, economic, political and cultural values and a return to individualised, pathologised understandings and interventions (for example Itzin 2000; Phillips 2004; Sawer 2003b). A content analysis of ten years of psychological research in the area of violence against women found that the individualising and decontextualising approach of such research maintained rather than challenged the problem (Salazar and Cook 2002). Current social policy responses to domestic violence can be best understood as a dismantling of such knowledge and approaches which are legitimised by post-feminist assumptions and anti-feminist motives. Although radical feminist scholarship has provided the most trenchant analysis of violence against women (Itzin 2000; Thorpe and Irwin 1996) which conceptualises men's violence to women as functional, intentional and patterned (Daly 1984, Dobash and Dobash 1979; MacKinnon 1989), this has been increasingly eclipsed by a liberal focus on education and awareness which allows individual women to leave violence and avail themselves of the services that have been established to support them. Such individualisation is aided by the "deliberate dismantling of domestic violence as a women's issue" through the move from a focus on male violence against women to ungendered community or family violence (Phillips 2004, 30). Itzin agrees that the language in which violence is framed "determines what is seen and known and done about it in policy and in practice" (2000, 374).

Although I am concerned at the move to the privileging of de-gendered language and analyses of domestic violence, I acknowledge that the term 'family violence' is commonly

preferred by Indigenous people and communities. This term is often regarded as better reflecting the inter-linking and inter-generational impacts of violence in Indigenous communities where violence is defined as a whole of community problem which is not necessarily captured by the understandings of gender and power that inform many feminist approaches to domestic violence (Libesman, Pearce and Kelly 1999).

The strategic policy response to domestic violence has been the Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV) joint state and federal government initiative. Lee Fitzroy (1999) identifies this policy as one which encapsulates the individualised and de-gendered approach to domestic violence. PADV was initially introduced with the sub-heading of 'Helping Families Under Pressure' and statements about this policy omitted clear statements about men being the majority of perpetrators and women the majority of victims (ABS 1996, VicHealth 2004). Fitzroy suggests that the family focus reproduces a conservative ideology and traditional theoretical analysis of violence against women which directs attention to 'dysfunctional' families (1999). This revives the notion of the "pathological man" rather than a broader social analysis of why such violence occurs. The specific wording of families 'under pressure' implies that violence against women occurs in specific cultural and class locations. Through this policy orientation, women are reinscribed as traditional guardians of the family, with responsibility to keep their families safe and functional.

PADV has also been criticised for its concentration on the production of reports and pilot projects on various aspects of domestic and family violence but does not represent an ongoing commitment to funding grassroots organisations assisting women and children (Summers 2003 and 2004). Recent reports have drawn attention to the inadequately funded services for women and children escaping violence which are unable to assist every second women who seeks accommodation at a refuge (AIHW 2004) and the unsafe and unsupportive use of motels and caravan parks to house such women and children (WESNET 2004). The tendency to hire preferred consultants has been criticised for providing an often conservative, commodified and corporatised response to male violence. Indeed, the Howard Government's commitment to PADV, let alone the issue of domestic violence, was called into question when it emerged that 'unspent' PADV funds were used to fund the 2003 'Be alert but not alarmed' anti-terrorist fridge magnet campaign although the annual domestic homicide toll of nearly 100 adults and children produces a higher death toll than terrorism in Australia (Summers 2004, 19-20).

Feminist scholars and commentators have identified other methods by which violence against women has been depoliticised. Under the guise of reducing the influence of 'special interest' groups it reduced women's policy infrastructure, undermining femocrat gains, and made non-feminist appointments (Sawer 2003b and Summers 2003). It has undermined women's activism by cutting the funding to some explicitly feminist organisations and preferentially funding conservative women's groups. The overtly feminist peak body Women's Emergency Services Network (WESNET) has been defunded under the Howard Government and the four women's organisations that now receive federal funding to provide a secretariat function in its place were obliged to sign a contract prohibiting them from making any public statement relating to women without first receiving the approval of the Prime Minister or the Office of the Status of Women (Summers 2004, 16). In contrast to this dismantling of feminist influence (ostensibly in order to counter the influence of special interests on government policy), Marion Sawer has noted the redirection of public funds to men's rights organisations and their favourable treatment as a lobby group (1999). Recent changes to Family Law in Australia reflect a successful inclusion of their interests. There has been a prioritising of the claims of fathers' rights groups that they are maliciously refused the opportunity to share the care of their children and that mothers falsely allege violence and abuse, despite national and international research repeatedly confirming that domestic violence is gendered, prevalent, severe and under-reported in family breakdown disputes (Flood 2004).

The Howard Government's approach to social policy reflects tensions between ideological and economic imperatives. The issue of domestic violence provides an example of how conservative, anti-feminist ideological imperatives drive policy despite convincing economic reasons to clearly respond to it as a fundamentally gendered phenomenon.

Chapter summary and conclusion

The dominant cultural message about making your own way there is powerfully entrenched and was widely approved of by participants in this research. This chapter has examined how current social policy puts this cultural message into practice. Individualism provides the important function of legitimising the devolution of government responsibility onto the free market and justifying the plight of those who can not thrive under such conditions. Liberal individualism has also increased women's sense of entitlement to participate more fully in

public life in conjunction with their desire to raise children, and the intersection of neo-liberal and post/feminist ideology has created a complex social policy environment for girls and young women. Their highly popularised, newly 'empowered' status exists in a climate of post-welfarism and the contradictory discourses of neo-liberal economic individualism and conservative family values. While there are fragile opportunities for young women able to position themselves favourably in the education system and labour market, these exist in tension with policy orientations which render the combination of interpersonal and occupational responsibilities difficult. It is conditions such as these which lead me to express some concerns about the implications of potentially disappointed outcomes for the well-being of young women. My sentiments concur with the reflections of the Women's Health Australia researchers Deirdre Wicks and Gita Mishra, "It would be disappointing to find that our longitudinal research is focused on tracking the health effects of thwarted aspirations rather than on the rich interplay of individual hopes and plans in the context of a full range of life opportunities" (1998, 98).

The final 'Discussion and conclusion' chapter considers the overarching implications of the main themes that have emerged in this research; the strong epistemological preference for individualism and a parallel discounting of social determinants; discourses about female individualisation which emphasise progress and liberation and the way in which these broad themes contribute to an undermining of feminism.

Chapter ten

Discussion and conclusion

This research study has examined the ways in which young women's lives have taken on new social and cultural meanings. These new aspects of young women's lives have their roots in the changed social, political and economic conditions associated with late modernity where suggestions of the increasing power of social actors are set against the declining determinism and significance of structural forces. Women are widely regarded as the main beneficiaries of this ostensible release of agency from structure because they are considered to have been freed from some of the constraining traditions associated with a subordinated femininity. Second wave feminism successfully laid claims to women's equality with men which brought widespread, apparent acceptance of their right to inclusion and participation in public life and achieved recognition of prevalent but hidden issues such as men's violence against women and challenged women's naturalised and normalised responsibility for childcare and domestic work. The changed ways in which young women's lives are constituted are also embedded in the widespread uptake of neo-liberal values. The concepts of self-production and consumerism so fundamental to neo-liberalism are fused with palatable elements of a liberal feminism and result in an enticingly individualised and popularised mutation of feminism in which femininity is no longer devalued but triumphantly affirmed. Thus, the prevailing ideology of neo-liberalism achieves a strong foothold in the way in which young women are positioned and experience their lives. Along with the conditions associated with late modernity and refashionings of feminism, this brings a complex ideological shift in conceptions of women's position in the world. I have argued in this thesis that these distinctive new elements are fundamental to an understanding of young women's lives in the twenty-first century.

A review of the findings

This thesis reports on the collection and analysis of qualitative data which reveals the tangible ways in which the dominant ideology of current times results in particular material, subjective and relational outcomes for young women. In the 'Motherhood and domesticity' chapter, the majority of young mothers revealed the often unplanned, intrusive and constraining nature of motherhood. The association between early motherhood, disadvantaged and unhappy home lives and low levels of educational attainment was described. The young mothers' stories of parenting exposed the intransigence of sacrificial

mothering ideology and its essential incompatibility with the rational and unified subjecthood posited by neo-liberalism. Despite the frankness with which the participants shared their disappointments and frustrations with parenthood, their circumstances were rarely described with regret or as characterised by unfairness. Rather, the challenges and sacrifices of an unintentional pregnancy were described as ultimately propitious, and uneven contributions to child care and domestic work were constructed as representing the results of choice and negotiation with male partners. Those participants who did not have children reported a strong, ongoing desire for a family in the future, which they hope to experience in equitable conditions.

The 'Education and employment' chapter further documents the incongruity of young women's existing and planned parenting with purposeful and autonomous labour market involvement. The adjustments and diminution of self-interested behaviour associated with both current and imagined mothering were again interpreted within a framework of individual choice. The findings reported in this chapter also suggest that despite the undoubted widening of educational and employment options for women, participants in this research were primarily operating within a sphere associated with altruistic and people-focused imperatives which applied across varying levels of educational capital and even within traditionally masculinised areas such as business and science. These preferences were understood to be manifestations of their distinct personality rather than any reflection of socially approved occupational roles for women. The parameters and constraints in which educational and occupational choices are made were outlined in this chapter and the difficulties associated with a broadening of options were noted.

In the 'Relationships' chapter, young women described an ongoing commitment to the previously habitual practice of marriage even as they identified it as obsolete. A framework of individualised interpretation was again heavily and widely drawn on as the young women reinterpreted the continuation of traditional preferences as individual choices that reflected their distinct personality. The extent of young women's experience of male violence was reported in this chapter and its disproportionate impact on Indigenous young women and women from non-English speaking backgrounds was noted. Problems in intimate relationships were given biological and psychological explanations and an individualised analysis extended to the experience of violence in a relationship. This chapter revealed some relational divisions between women. Following a line of questioning about participants'

perceptions of equality between women, a limited identification of socio-economic and race-based differences was eclipsed by many young women's enthusiastic contributions to a theme of interpersonal cruelty between girls and women. This was paralleled by the common identification of boys as easier to have friendly relationships with. A hierarchy of liberation also emerged, which positioned modern young women as either progressive or submissive, depending on their personal capacity to avail themselves positively of the options now open to them. The equation of success or failure with ambitiousness and determination rather than relative privilege or disadvantage was found to motivate young women to find ways to 'live up to' expectations of equality.

An individualised approach to women's equality was further elaborated in the 'Politics' chapter. Those young women who were able to articulate an understanding of and relationship with feminism overwhelmingly supported its (neo-)liberal version, endorsing its emphasis on individual achievement and absence of restraint. A feminism which was associated with victimhood or the claiming of special status for women was positioned as unattractive and redundant for the majority of participants. Any limits to full equality were interpreted as remnants of a slightly incomplete project. Each of these themes contributes to an undoing of feminism in any structural form and the implications of this challenge to feminism's currency were discussed.

In 'Neo-liberalism and the burdens of liberty', the specific ways in which the ideology of neo-liberalism acts on young women to create particular subjective and relational outcomes were outlined. The burdens and complications associated with choice and the assumption of a unitary and rational subject revealed tensions and costs inherent in the demands of neo-liberalism. The concept of social mobility which is so integral to neo-liberal rhetoric was identified as a requirement of middle class whiteness which necessitated problematic transgressions of class and race for some young women. In this chapter, the various ways in which participants distanced themselves from notions of disadvantage were described in some detail and connections were made between these manifestations of individualised resilience and some young women's expressions of resentment and dispassion for other disadvantaged groups.

The individualism at the core of public policy was highlighted in 'Make your own way there: Social policy and the neo-liberal agenda'. Current Australian social policy was considered in

the light of some of the findings from this research. The concurrent influence of neo-liberalism and social conservatism were identified as creating contradictory policy imperatives which are particularly problematic for young women who overwhelmingly express the desire to raise children and participate meaningfully in the labour force. Although participants strongly endorsed the individualism and anti-dependency values of neo-liberalism, such ideologically driven policies do not provide favourable conditions in which their aspirations may be realised.

In material terms, the lives and opportunities of the young women in this research were strongly mediated by their sex, race, class and educational experience and were significantly complicated for some by their primary responsibility for parenting and domestic work. This evidence of purportedly outmoded but evidently robust structural regularity runs counter to the epistemological preference for individualist interpretations that were vigorously endorsed by the vast majority of participants, whatever their relative privilege or disadvantage. While the material circumstances of these young women were often polarised, their interpretive frameworks converged. This favouring of the notion of an individuated personhood was a consistent and potent feature of the subjectivity of the young women and it influenced assessments of their own and others' experiences and outcomes. It underpinned their political viewpoints, particularly in respect to feminism and gave weight to an often dispassionate politics of resentment against disadvantaged groups. Therefore, this thesis reports that the subjective reliance on individualism has quite profound relational implications.

The review of this thesis now moves to a discussion of how the key features of these young women's interpretative frameworks contribute to an understanding of the ways in which power and domination are restructured and reproduced in current times. The implications of this for the well-being of young women, for their relationship with feminism and, more broadly, for social justice are considered.

Neo-liberalism as hegemony
The changes associated with late modernity and emancipatory social movements such as feminism have ushered in a commitment to the ideal of equality, which has in turn necessitated new ways of managing ongoing inequality. The findings reported in this thesis suggest that the dominant beliefs associated with neo-liberalism are particularly effective in dulling the awareness of exploitation. Neo-liberalism is therefore highly suited to the

maintenance of disparity. The benefits of neo-liberal economic success are packaged as progress that is available to all and are sold through incitements to lifestyle and consumption. The egalitarian nature of this sense of entitlement has facilitated and legitimised the expansion of aspiration and ambition so that an individualised discourse of meritocracy can exist across divisions such as sex, class and race. Thus, the least privileged are invited to engage in their own oppression by understanding any difficulties and differences to no longer be socially produced. Rather, they *must* be included in the project of neo-liberalism and allowed access to the notion of meritocracy in order to give credence to the discourses of open and unrestricted possibility and success.

The democratisation of neo-liberal entitlement is strongly reminiscent of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemonic ideology and its power, particularly its synthesis of coercion and consent. Hegemony refers to the ways in which dominant social groups maintain their ascendency over subordinate groups (Gramsci 1971). This is achieved by securing the 'spontaneous consent' of subordinate groups "through the negotiated construction of a political and ideological consensus which incorporates both dominant and dominated groups" (Strinati 1995, 165). Consensual control thus occurs when individuals voluntarily assimilate the worldview of the dominant group and the extraction of consent legitimates the position and actions of the powerful (which can be supplemented by coercive control if necessary).

One of the hegemonic functions of individualism is to mask structural realities and the organisation of society that consigns some to a subordinate status. Neo-liberalism's language of freedom facilitates the belief in possibility and fairness and masks disadvantage. Thus, power and exploitation take place less through imposed restraint than through participation and results in a kind of subjugation by proxy. Crucially, this subordination is now veiled. A hierarchy that was once explicit and visible has been obscured and subject to the revisionary discourses of neo-liberalism. The democratically offered meritocracy and valorisation of self-determination and personal responsibility have closed down the space in which a sense of unfairness or encumbrance might be articulated. Indeed, the punitive nature of neo-liberalism, where any difficulty signifies personal deficiency, discourages the recognition, let alone an articulation, of disadvantage or lack of power. Denise Thompson (2001) also considers that the systematic nature of domination is most effectively concealed through the representation of the interests of dominant classes as the interests of all and that the

individualisation of the relations of domination provides a particularly cogent means of extracting consent:

> Where better to hide the dominating nature of relations of ruling than in the depths of the individual psyche? If domination is desired, it cannot be challenged and opposed. If it constitutes the very roots of personal identity, it cannot be seen as systematic (Thompson 2001, 43).

Young women have invested heavily in the concept of meritocracy and this encourages a playing down of the relative power and privilege between men and women and amongst women. The majority of participants in this research did not want their lives to be interpreted as disadvantageously influenced or determined by sex, class or race. The findings of this research demonstrate the ways in which perceptions or articulations of disadvantage were managed. Affirmations of their own experiences and beliefs in equality and the disavowal of men as advantaged were drawn on in order to close down the perception of an unfair gender gap in particular. These convictions are facilitated by the celebratory girlpower discourse which emphasises a transformed and empowered femininity and also militates against the perception or expression of continuing subordination or unfairness.

The hegemony of neo-liberalism is able to operate where the absence of explicit exclusion is considered sufficient for the enactment of personal responsibility and choice in a meritocratic and fair society. So while externally imposed constraints to individual freedom may be perceived as unfair, and any situations and practices that deny self-ascription and self-definition are opposed, the importance of systemic disadvantage is increasingly disregarded. Therefore, much subordination now occurs within the context of an ostensible commitment to equality and the pretence that society fosters extensive social mobility.

Choosing choice

Choice performs a crucial role within the hegemonic operation of neo-liberalism. This research found that it is the notion of choice that underpins young women's understanding of success and exploitation or subordination; it is used to understand both positive and negative circumstances. Choice is ascribed to those operating under considerable structural constraint and it is utilised by them too, so its role in concealing the operation of power can not be understated.

Choice is a difficult concept to criticise because the absence of choice is so unattractive. However, the contemporary over-use of choice as an explanatory concept is problematic in several respects. It conjures up strong notions of personal power but is often invoked to account for situations that are characterised by constraint and difficulty. It is often used in ways which are inattentive of the nature of the context in which choice is encountered or to the limited nature of available options. There are many examples where the participants in this research did not choose the conditions in which they are making decisions. This thesis has also reported the ways in which choices are constrained. Following the epistemological fallacy described by Furlong and Cartmel (1997), social constraint is underacknowledged and underestimated. For many of the young women in this research, the responses of and responsibilities to others are highly salient to their decision-making and influence what is considered to be freely available. Therefore, in situations of socially structured constraint, choice is a highly relative and often unsuitable term. Indeed, choice has also been identified by feminists as providing an updated means of victim-blaming. For example, Sheila Jeffreys (1997) identifies increasing reference to choice to explain women's involvement in prostitution. This research has found that when women are considered to have free access to a range of choices, their experience of violence in a relationship or their provision of the majority of childcare and domestic work are understood as the enactment of choice or their failure to take up equally available but better options.

This research has also demonstrated how some expressions of individual choice are less acceptable than others. Those young women who express a preference for not having children or having just one child report criticism of this choice, as do those heterosexual young women who are not currently aspiring to an intimate relationship. The choice of feminist identity is not freely available but is mediated by intractable stigma that is still grounded in misogyny and associated with transgressing the norms of a traditional, subordinated femininity. Certain choices are imposed on young women as more desirable than others and particularly as more necessary to be a 'real' woman.

This research found that the dissonance between what has been promised and what is experienced is managed by reference to choice and consent and through strategies which discount disadvantage and emphasise volition. Thus, the rhetoric of choice and meritocracy protects those who adopt it from a sense of vulnerability and injustice. Conversely, it also

prevents those with relative privilege from recognising and acknowledging unfairness. The adjustment to or acceptance of disappointment relies on the ability to reconstruct largely structured outcomes as choice which facilitates a sense of volition. In this way, the requirement for flexibility in late modernity can be mobilised to legitimate the reproduction of disadvantage. Therefore the reflexive modernisation and individualisation proposed by Giddens and Beck do not necessarily facilitate the fulfilment of disembedded aspirations. Rather, what the imperative for reinvention seems to produce is the re-working of aspirations in line with what is realistic and must be endured.

The effectiveness of an explanatory framework of choice rests on its attribution of agency to women and its positioning of women as strong and capable. I do not mean to argue that a structural feminist analysis insists that women are incapable of making decisions and taking action in their own self-interest. I also recognise that the expansion of choice and the attribution of agency to women have value when compared with past exclusions and silencing. My concern is with the way in which the concept of choice functions to legitimise new injustices and disadvantage and shores up individualism at the expense of the recognition of wider social processes, what McRobbie terms women's "re-regulation" through choice (2004b, 262). It is vital that the ways in which women's choices are variously framed, coerced, burdened, impaired and limited continue to be acknowledged and challenged. The difficulty of addressing matters of inequality with those who work so hard to disavow it is clear. However, while I have identified choice as a key site for concern, I also consider that it offers a potentially effective point of entry to unsettling complacent neo-liberal discourse. Although the participants in this research overwhelmingly identified their difficulties with choice as manifestations of personal deficits, their articulation of it as problematic suggests that this is an aspect of individualism which offers scope for debate and critique.

Feminism and the ethics of interdependence

This research has asserted the importance of considering the implications of current epistemological and ideological preferences for feminism. Neo-liberal ideology re-inscribes an essentially masculine subject, whose nature is conveniently obscured by its own gender-neutral rhetoric. A feminist sensibility under neo-liberalism centres on the notion of female aggrandisement and the collective nature of women's liberation is undermined by the direction to individual goals. Issues that were the mainstay of feminist analysis have been

largely acquitted of political significance. This has occurred through the reclamation of issues as diverse as domestic violence, housework, employment and primary responsibility for nurturing as profoundly individualised and self-determined rather than reflecting external influences or constraints. The personal again becomes apolitical as the emancipatory potential of feminism is appropriated and commodified through its permeation by atomistic, competitive ideology. The need for a structurally-informed feminism has been undermined by an exaggeration of the degree to which agency has been set free from traditional bonds and the extent to which women are conceived to have been cut loose from previous ways of life. Thus, feminism is rendered redundant in the eyes of many young women.

Many feminists, including myself, have felt quite paralysed about how the ongoing subordination of women can be re-politicised. The findings of this research strongly suggest that a contemporarily politicised and activist feminism needs to be grounded in the material realities and cultural productions of the twenty first century and must attend to the ways in which male domination manifests itself under current conditions. Injustice now takes a more complex form where the imposition of visible constraint by external forces has increasingly moved to new forms of repression and silencing which are reinforced by notions of meritocracy and choice. Structural constraints no longer announce themselves, but increasingly work through the belief systems engendered by reflexive modernity and neo-liberalism. The conditions that subordinate young women in particular, now occur in a modern context of ostensible support for equality and a celebration of their apparent freeing from previous constraints. The democratically offered possibility of achieving an ambitious self-actualisation, managed through the concept of choice and individual responsibility, closes down the room for a radical politics because the beliefs which are challenged are founded on the understanding that the need for such a politics is redundant. Therefore, I believe it is wise to expend political effort at undermining the increasingly cherished and seemingly inviolable ideals of choice and meritocracy in particular.

There are strong ethical grounds on which to challenge the elevation of individualism at the expense of collectivity and relationality. Carol Gilligan (1982) and Alison Jagger (1992) have described how conventional approaches to ethics overvalue the culturally masculine traits of independence, autonomy and reasoning. These ideals emphasise universality and impartiality while, in contrast, feminist approaches to ethics favour relationships and particularity. Any reassertion of the importance of relational values must, of course, be done with caution. The

association of caring with femininity has often been transformed into the notions of subservience and self-sacrifice which have been used to control women. Wendy Parkins (1999) suggests that feminist ethics may provide a useful way of reasserting notions of interdependence and interconnections between people in order to counter the denial of sociality that is inherent in neo-liberal thought. The notion of relationality is lost amidst the individualistic allure of neo-liberalism where individuals are conceived as self-contained entities, independent of society. Where individual choice is elevated as the only and ultimate condition of freedom and is exalted above collective well-being, the concept of relationality is obscured. Under such conditions, exploitation slides from being the result of a relationship of domination to a depoliticised, decontextualised personal attribute. Such views provide an important corrective to the diminution of compassion, which Martha Nussbaum (2001) identifies as a vital component of such ethical thought.

A feminist ethics of interdependence recognises that the enjoyment of one person's freedom may be dependent on the subordination and disadvantage of others. This requires a refocusing of the disproportionate attention which is given to attributing agency to the least advantaged, to remembering to examine the agency of the privileged. Whilst many feminist theorists and commentators have been eager to point to progress and change for women, the continuing advantages enjoyed by many men and the continuing disadvantage of many women are obscured. Poor and racially disadvantaged women are carrying the heavier burden of the harm of male domination at a time when opportunity for all is proclaimed.

Future Research

It is interesting (indeed, worrying) to speculate about the trajectories that the lives of these young women may take. Future research could usefully chart the relationship between the current hopes and future outcomes for these young women and others from their cohort. Although the participants supported its ideological basis, contemporary social policy in Australia is not congruent with their stated aspirations in terms of mothering and employment. A mismatch also seems to exist between their attitudes and expectations about relationships and those of the young men that some of them have relationships with. If, as seems likely, many of their expectations are not met, there may be significant implications for the mental health and well-being of this generation of young women.

If, as I suggest, young women's lives do not progress in the ways that they presently hope for, how will this be interpreted? Future research might examine how disappointment and disadvantage is managed and whether this continues to rely on individualism. In a more optimistic vein, I have hope that the falsity of the over-used concept of choice will be revealed and provide the impulse for a newly invigorated feminism and challenge to neo-liberalism. Additional research into understandings and experiences of choice may make an important contribution to knowledge about the operation, effects and countering of neo-liberal hegemony.

This research has signalled some of the implications of individualism and resentful politics for the just treatment of marginalised and subordinated groups. The empathic foundations of social welfare work are undermined by the operation of neo-liberal discourses at the same time as it increases material polarisation. This is an area that could be productively explored by social welfare practitioners and academics.

Chapter summary and thesis conclusion

A central concern of this thesis has been to elucidate the ways in which processes that are apparently liberating for young women actually contribute to the reinscription of asymmetrical power relations. Reflexive modernisation and individualisation bring new demands for flexibility, fluidity and mobility, which are mediated by a structured social hierarchy in which the subordination of women still holds strong. This research has demonstrated that, although individualisation has certainly brought unprecedented forms of personal and social experimentation for young women, which they are very cognisant of and which many enjoy, they do not encounter this within an uncomplicated freedom. Their enactment of flexibility and mobility is bounded by traditional responsibilities for the care of others and constraints around the enactment of self-interested behaviour. The hegemonic nature of neo-liberalism is important to the reconstitution of inequality because young women's awareness of the continuation of such structured disadvantage is compromised by their investment in personal responsibility, choice and a belief in meritocracy. As such, choice has been identified as a potentially productive site for unsettling over-stated claims about the apparent release of agency from previously restraining structure.

The conclusions outlined in this chapter have relevance for and the potential to inform contemporary feminist theory and activism and social policy and welfare practice. The

conditions that now subordinate women occur in a context of superficial commitment to equality and are shored up by discourses in which the social is constituted by and through the individual. Moreover, rather than being transformative of gender, processes of individualisation are involved in the re-embedding of disadvantage for women. The need to develop knowledge about these processes is urgent and significant because the masking of inequity is taking place at a time when inequality and stratification is deepening.

Bibliography

Aapola, S., Gonick, M., & Harris, A. (2005). *Young Femininity: Girlhood, Power and Social Change*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Abercrombie, N., Hill, S., & Turner, B. S. (1986). *Sovereign Individuals of Capitalism*. London: Allen and Unwin.

Access Economics. (2004). *The Cost of Domestic Violence to the Australian Economy*. Canberra: Office for the Status of Women.

Adkins, L. (2001). Cultural feminization: "Money, sex and power" for women. *Signs, 26*(3), 669-695.

Adkins, L. (2002). *Revisions: Gender and Sexuality in Late Modernity*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Ahmad, F. (2001). Modern traditions? British Muslim Women and Academic Achievement. *Gender and Education, 13*(2), 137-152.

Albrechtson, J. (2002, 3rd July). No commitment to breed. *The Australian,* p. 11.

Albrechtson, J. (2003, 3rd December). Feminists don't know what women want. *The Australian,* p. 15.

Alexander, R. D. (1979). The search for a general theory of behaviour. *Behavior Science, 20*, 77-100.

Alloway, N., & Gilbert, P. (2004). Shifting discourses about gender in higher education enrolments: Retrieving marginalised voices. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 17*(1), 103-118.

Andruske, C. L. (2000). *Policy Implications for Exploring Women's Everyday Spaces in Transitions from Welfare*. New Orleans: American Educational Research Association.

Ang, I. (1995). I'm a feminist but…: 'Other' women and postnational feminism. In B. Caine & R. Pringle (Eds.), *Transitions: New Australian Feminisms* (pp. 57-73). St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Archer, L. (2002). "It's easier that you're a girl and that you're Asian": Interactions of 'race' and gender between researchers and participants. *Feminist Review, 72*, 108-132.

Armstead, C. (1995). Writing contradictions: Feminist research and feminist writing. *Women's Studies International Forum, 18*(5/6), 627-636.

Arnold, L. B. (2000). "What is a feminist?": Students' descriptions. *Women and Language, 23*(2), 8-18.

Arnot, M., David, M., & Weiner, G. (1999). *Closing the Gender Gap: Post-War Education and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Attar, D. (1992). The demand that time forgot. *Trouble and Strife, 23*, 24-29.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (Various years). *Births, Australia* (Cat. No. 3301.0 2001). Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (1996). *Women's Safety Australia*. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics and Office for the Status of Women.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (1997). *Mental Health and Wellbeing: Profile of Adults* (Cat. No. 4326.0). Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). (2000). *Caring in the Community* (Cat. No. 4436.0). Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2001). *2001 Census Basic Community Profile and Snapshot* (No. Cat. No. 2002.0). Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics.

Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU). (2004). *ACTU Work and Family Test Case Evidence*. Retrieved 30th May, 2004, from http://www.actu.asn.au/public/campaigns/workandfamily/work_family_evidence.html.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). (2004). *Demand for SAAP Assistance by Homeless People 2002-3 Australia* (No. HOU 126). Canberra: AIHW.

Bail, K. (Ed.). (1996). *DIY Feminism*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Bailey, C. (2002). Unpacking the mother/daughter baggage: Reassessing second- and third-wave feminism. *Women's Studies Quarterly, 30*(3/4), 138-154.

Baker, J. (2002). *'There's Always That Doubt in Your Mind': Young Women's Views on Dating Violence, Sexuality and Feminism.* Unpublished Masters, James Cook University, Townsville, Queensland.

Barash, S. S. (2004). *The New Wife: The Evolving Role of the American Wife*. Lenexa, KS: Nonetheless Press.

Barns, A. F. (2003, 12-14 February). *Negotiating futures: Young women's stories of space and the place of work and family.* Paper presented at the 8th Australian Institute of Family Studies Conference, Melbourne.

Barrett, M. (1992). Words and things: Materialism and method in contemporary feminist analysis. In M. Barrett & A. Phillips (Eds.), *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (pp. 201-219). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Barrett, M. (2000). Post-feminism. In G. Browning, A. Halcli & F. Webster (Eds.), *Understanding Contemporary Society. Theories of the Present* (pp. 46-56). London: Sage.

Baruma, I. (1994). *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan*. New York: Farrar Straus Giroux.

Bates, I. (1993). A job which is 'right for me'? Social class, gender and individualization. In I. Bates & G. Riseborough (Eds.), *Youth and Inequality* (pp. 14-31). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Baudrillard, J. (1988). *Selected Writings*. Cambridge: Polity.

Bauman, Z. (1998). *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Bauman, Z. (2000). *Liquid Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.

Baumgardner, J., & Richards, A. (2001). *Manifesta: Young Women, Feminism, and the Future*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

Bazeley, P., & Richards, L. (2000). *The NVivo Qualitative Project Book*. London: Sage.

Beck, U. (1992). *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*. London: Sage.

Beck, U. (1994). The reinvention of politics: Towards a theory of reflexive modernization. In U. Beck, A. Giddens & S. Lash (Eds.), *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (pp. 1-55). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Beck, U. (2002). From 'living for others' to 'a life of one's own': Individualization and women. In U. Beck & E. Beck-Gernsheim (Eds.), *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences* (pp. 54-84). London: Sage.

Beck, U., & Beck-Gernsheim, E. (1995). *The Normal Chaos of Love*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bellafante, G. (1998, June 29). Feminism: It's all about me! *Time Magazine,* 52-60.

Benhabib, S. (1999). Sexual difference and collective identities: The new global constellation. *Signs, 24*(2), 335-361.

Bewley, S., Davies, M., & Braude, P. (2005). Which career first? *British Medical Journal, 331*, 588-589.

Bhavani, K.-K. (2004). Tracing the contours: Feminist research and feminist objectivity. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & M. L. Yaiser (Eds.), *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research* (pp. 65-77). New York: Oxford University Press.

Bittman, M., & Pixley, J. (1997). *The Double Life of the Family*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Borland, J., Gregory, B., & Sheehan, P. (Eds.). (2001). *Work Rich, Work Poor. Inequality and Economic Change in Australia*. Melbourne: Centre for Economic Studies.

Boston Consulting Group. (2000). *Pathways to Work. Reducing Long-term Unemployment*. Melbourne: Business Council of Australia.

Bourdieu, P. (1997). *The State Nobility*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). The myth of 'globalization' and the European welfare state. In P. Bourdieu (Ed.), *Acts of Resistance: Against the Tyranny of the Market* (pp. 29-44). New York: The New Press.

Bowen, J. (1998). *Feminists Fatale*. Sydney: Harper Collins.

Bradley, H. (1996). *Fractured Identities: Changing Patterns of Inequality*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Brennan, D. (1999). Child care: Choice or charade? In L. Hancock (Ed.), *Women, Public Policy and the State* (pp. 85-98). South Yarra, Victoria: Macmillan Education.

Brenner, J. (2002). *Feminism in the new gender order: Restructured capital, reconstructed identities*. Retrieved 11/03/2003, 2003, from http://solidarity.igc/atc/97Brenner.html.

Brodribb, S. (1992). *Nothing Mat(t)ers: A Feminist Critique of Postmodernism*. North Melbourne: Spinifex Press.

Brown, L. M. (1999). *Raising Their Voices: The Politics of Girls' Anger*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Brown, W. (1997). The impossibility of women's studies. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, 9*(3), 79-101.

Brown, W., Ball, K. and Powers, J. (1998). Is life a party for young women? *The ACHPER Healthy Lifestyles Journal, 45*(3), 21-26.

Brynner, J., Chisholm, L., & Furlong, A. (Eds.). (1997). *Youth, Citizenship and Change in a European Context*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Brynner, J., Elias, P., McKnight, A., Pan, H., & Pierre, G. (2002). *Young People's Changing Routes to Adulthood*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation/York Publishing Services.

Bryson, L. (1992). *Welfare and the State: Who Benefits?* London: Macmillan.

Bryson, L. (2001). Motherhood and gender relations: Where to in the twenty-first century. *Just Policy, 24*, 12-23.

Bryson, L., & Warner-Smith, P. (1998). Employment and Women's Health. *Just Policy, 14*, 3-14.

Budgeon, S. (2001). Emergent Feminist (?) Identities: Young women and the practice of micropolitics. *The European Journal of Women's Studies, 8*(1), 7-28.

Bulbeck, C. (1997). *Living Feminism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bullen, E., & Kenway, J. (2004). Subcultural capital and the female 'underclass'? A feminist response to an underclass discourse. *Journal of Youth Studies, 7*(2), 141-153.

Bullen, E., Kenway, J., & Hey, V. (2000). New Labour, social exclusion and educational risk management: The case of 'gymslip mums'. *British Educational Research Journal, 26*(4), 441-456.

Burgess, J., & Strachan, G. (2005). Integrating work and family responsibilities: Policies for lifting women's labour activity rates. *Just Policy, 35*, 5-12.

Burn, S. M., Aboud, R., & Moyles, C. (2000). The relationship between gender, social identity and support for feminism. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research, June*, 1081-1089.

Butler, J. (1997). *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Callahan, M., Rutman, D., Strega, S., & Dominelli, L. (2005). Looking promising: Contradictions and challenges for young mothers in care. In D. L. Gustafson (Ed.), *Unbecoming Mothers: The Social Production of Maternal Absence* (pp. 185-208). Binghampton, NY: Haworth Press.

Campbell, A. (1993). *Men, Women and Aggression*. New York: Basic Books.

Cannold, L. (2005). *What, No Baby? Why Women are Losing the Freedom to Mother, and How They Can Get it Back*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.

Caputi, J., & Russell, D. E. H. (1992). Femicide: sexual terrorism against women. In J. Radford & D. E. H. Russell (Eds.), *Femicide: The Politics of Woman Killing* (pp. 13-21). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Carlip, H. (1995). *Girlpower: Young Women Speak Out*. New York: Warner Books.

Carr-Gregg, M. R. C., Enderby, K. C., & Glover, S. R. (2003). Risk-taking behaviour of young women in Australia: Screening for health-risk behaviours. *Medical Journal of Australia, 178*, 601-604.

Chesney-Lind, M., & Brown, L. M. (1999). Girls and violence: An overview. In D. J. Flannery & C. R. Huff (Eds.), *Youth violence: Prevention, Intervention, and Social Policy*. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press.

Chodorow, N. (1996). Seventies questions for thirties women: Some nineties reflections. In S. Wilkinson (Ed.), *Feminist Social Psychologies: International Perspectives* (pp. 21-50). Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Chomsky, N. (1998). *Profit Over People: Neoliberalism and Global Order*. Berkeley, CA: Publishers Group West.

Cieslik, M., & Pollock, G. (Eds.). (2002). *Young People in Risk Society: The Restructuring of Youth Identities and Transitions in Late Modernity*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Comaroff, J., & Comaroff, J. L. (2000). Millennial capitalism: First thoughts on a second coming. *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism. Public Culture, 12*(2), 291-343.

Cook, K. S., & Levi, M. (Eds.). (1990). *The Limits of Rationality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Coronil, F. (2000). Towards a critique of globalcentrism: Speculations on capitalism's nature. *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism. Public Culture, 12*(2), 351-374.

Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations. (2003). *The social and economic impact of student debt*. Retrieved 4th May, 2005, from http://www.capa.edu.au/briefing/impact_of_student_debt.doc.

Côté, J. A. (2002). The role of identity capital in the transition to adulthood: The individualization thesis examined. *Journal of Youth Studies, 5*(2), 117-134.

Cotis, J.-P. (2003). Population ageing: Facing the challenge. *OECD Observer, 239*, 19-20.

Cotterill, P. (1992). Interviewing women: Issues of friendship, vulnerability, and power. *Women's Studies International Forum, 155*(5/6), 593-606.

Cox, D., Stabb, S., & Bruckner, K. (1999). *Women's Anger: Clinical and Developmental Perspectives*. New York: Brunner/Mazel.

Craig, L. (2005). *How do they do it? A time-diary analysis of how working mothers find time for the kids*: Social Policy Research Centre Discussion Paper No. 136.

Crimeen, K., & Wilson, L. (1997). Economic rationalism or social justice: A challenge for social workers. *Australian Social Work, 50*(4), 47-52.

Criminal Code Act. (1899). Queensland, Australia.

Crinall, K. (1995). The search for a feminism that could accommodate homeless young women. *Youth Studies Australia* (Spring), 42-47.

Crittenden, D. (1999). *What Our Mothers Didn't Tell Us: Why Happiness Eludes the Modern Woman*. New York: Simon and Schuster.

Crompton, R. (1996). The fragmentation of class analysis. *The British Journal of Sociology, 47*(1), 56-67.

Crompton, R. (1997). *Women and Work in Modern Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Daly, M. (1984). *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy*. London: The Women's Press.

Daniel, B., & Wassell, S. (2002). *The Early Years: Assessing and Promoting Resilience in Vulnerable Children I*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

Davey, F. H. (1998). Young women's expected and preferred patterns of employment and child care. *Sex Roles, 38*(1/2), 95-102.

Davies, B. (1991). The concept of agency: A feminist poststructuralist analysis. *Social Analysis, 300*, 42-53.

Davies, B. (2005). The (im)possibility of intellectual work in neoliberal regimes. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education, 26*(1), 1-14.

D'Cruz, H., & Jones, M. (2004). *Social Work Research: Ethical and Political Contexts*. London: Sage.

Delphy, C., & Leonard, D. (1992). *Familiar Exploitation: A New Analysis of Marriage in Contemporary Western Societies.* Cambridge: Polity Press.

Dempsey, K. C. (2000). Men and women's power relationships and the persisting inequitable division of housework. *Journal of Family Studies, 6*, 7-24.

Denfeld, R. (1995). *The New Victorians. A Young Woman's Challenge to the Old Feminist Order*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Denzin, N. (1989). *Interpretive Interactionism*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

DeVault, M. (1996). Talking back to sociology: Distinctive contributions of feminist methodology. *American Review of Sociology, 22*, 29-50.

Deveson, A. (2003). *Resilience*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Dibben, N. (1999). Representations of femininity in popular music. *Popular Music, 18*(3), 331-355.

Disability Services Queensland. (2000). *Queensland Strategic Framework for Disability 2000-2005*. Brisbane: Disability Services Queensland.

Dobash, R. E., & Dobash, R. P. (1979). *Violence Against Wives: A Case Against the Patriarchy*. New York: The Free Press.

Domestic and Family Violence Protection Act. (1989). Queensland, Australia.

Drago, R., Black, D., & Wooden, M. (2004). Gender and work hours transitions in Australia: Drop ceilings and trap-door floors. *Melbourne Institute Working Paper, 11/04*.

Driscoll, C. (2002). *Girls: Feminine Adolescence in Popular Culture and Cultural Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dryden, C. (1999). *Being Married, Doing Gender*. London and New York: Routledge.

du Bois Raymond, M. (1998). 'I don't want to commit myself yet': Young people's life concepts. *Journal of Youth Studies, 1*(1), 63-79.

Dwyer, P., & Wyn, J. (2001). *Youth, Education and Risk: Facing the Future*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Eckersley, R. (1988). *Casualties of Change: The Predicament of Youth in Australia*. Carlton South: Australia's Commission for the Future.

Eckersley, R. (1992). *Youth and the Challenge to Change*. Carlton South: Australia's Commission for the Future.

Edwards, L. (2002). *How to Argue With an Economist: Reopening Political Debate in Australia*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ehrenreich, B. (2001). *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Ehrenreich, B. (2003). Maid to Order. In B. Ehrenreich & A. R. Hochschild (Eds.), *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (pp. 85-103). London: Granta Books.

Ehrenreich, B., & Hochschild, A. R. (2003). Introduction. In B. Ehrenreich & A. R. Hochschild (Eds.), *Global Woman: Nannies, Maids and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (pp. 1-13). London: Granta Books.

Else-Mitchell, R., & Flutter, N. (Eds.). (1998). *Talking Up: Young Women's Take on Feminism*. Melbourne: Spinifex.

England, P. (1992). *Comparable Worth: Theories and Evidence*. New York: Aldine de Gryter.

England, P., & Kilbourne, B. (1990). Markets, marriage and other mates. The problem of power. In R. Friedland & S. Robertson (Eds.), *Beyond the Marketplace: Society and Economy* (pp. 163-188). New York: Aldine.

Epstein, J. S. (1998). Introduction: Generation X, youth culture, and identity. In J. S. Epstein (Ed.), *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern World* (pp. 1-23). Oxford: Blackwell.

Evans, K., Rudd, P., Behrens, M., Kaluza, J., & Wooley, C. (2001). Reconstructing fate as choice? Initial findings from the comparative study 'Taking control?': Personal agency and social structures in young adult transitions in England and the new Germany. *Young, 9*, 2-29.

Faludi, S. (1992). *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*. London: Vintage.

Featherstone, B. (1997). Crisis in the western family. In W. Holloway & B. Featherstone (Eds.), *Mothering and Ambivalence* (pp. 1-16). London and New York: Routledge.

Finch, J. (1984). 'It's great to have someone to talk to': The ethics and politics of interviewing women. In C. Bell & H. Roberts (Eds.), *Social Researching: Politics, Problems, Practice* (pp. 70-87). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Findlen, B. (Ed.). (2001). *Listen Up: Voices from the Next Feminist Generation* (second ed.). New York: Seal Press.

Firestone, S. (1970). *The Dialectic of Sex: The Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: William Morrow.

Fitzroy, L. (1999). Just outcomes for women? State responses to violence against women. In L. Hancock (Ed.), *Women, Public Policy and the State* (pp. 163-177). South Yarra, Vic.: Macmillan Education.

Flood, M. (2004). Backlash: Angry men's movements. In S. E. Rossi (Ed.), *The Battle and Backlash Rage on: Why Feminism Cannot be Obsolete* (pp. 261-278). Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris Press.

Folbre, N. (2001). *The Invisible Heart: Economics and Family Values*. New York: The New Press.

Folbre, N., & Larson, T. (1994). *Who Pays for the Kids? Gender and the Structures of Constraint*. London: Routledge.

Fook, J., Ryan, M., & Hawkins, L. (2000). *Professional Expertise: Practice, Theory, and Education for Working in Uncertainty*. London: Whiting and Birch.

Foucault, M. (1988). Technologies of the self. In L. Martin, H. Gutman & P. Hutton (Eds.), *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Foucault* (pp. 16-49). Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press.

Fraser, N. (1997). *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the 'Postsocialist' Condition*. New York: Routledge.

Fraser, N., & Gordon, L. (1994). A genealogy of 'dependency': A keyword of the welfare state. In N. Fraser & P. James (Eds.), *Critical Politics: From the Personal to the Global* (pp. 77-109). Melbourne: Arena Publications.

Friedan, B. (1963). *The Feminine Mystique*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Friedman, M., & Friedman, R. (1980). *Free to Choose: A Personal Statement*. London: Secker and Warburg.

Furedi, F. (1997). *Culture of Fear: Risk-Taking and the Morality of Low Expectations*. London: Cassell.

Furedi, F. (2003). *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Uncertainty in an Uncertain Age*.

Furlong, A., & Cartmel, F. (1997). *Young People and Social Change: Individualization and Risk in Late Modernity*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Game, A., & Pringle, R. (1984). *Gender at Work*. London: Pluto.

Gardyn, R. (2001). Granddaughters of feminism. *American Demographics, April*, 42-47.

Garner, H. (1995). *The First Stone: Some Questions about Sex and Power*. Sydney: Picador.

Garrison, E. K. (2000). U.S. feminism - Grrrl style! Youth (sub)cultures and the technologies of the third wave. *Feminist Studies, 26*(1), 141-170.

George, S. (1999, March 24-26). *A Short History of Neoliberalism: Twenty Years of Elite Economics and Emerging Opportunities for Structural Change.* Paper presented at the Conference on Economic Sovereignty in a Globalising World, Bangkok.

George, V., & Wilding, P. (1994). *Welfare and Ideology*. Hemel Hempstead, Herts: Harvester Wheatsheaf.

Giddens, A. (1979). *Central Problems in Social Theory*. London: Macmillan.

Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and Self Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Giddens, A. (1992). *The Transformation of Intimacy*. Cambridge: Polity.

Giddens, A. (1994). Living in a post-traditional society. In U. Beck, A. Giddens & S. Lash (Eds.), *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order* (pp. 56-109). Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.

Giddens, A. (1998). *The Third Way*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Gilbert, R., & Gilbert, P. (1998). *Masculinity Goes to School*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Gilbert, P., & Taylor, S. (Eds.). (1991). *Fashioning the Feminine*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Gillis, J. (1996). *A World of Their Own Making: A History of Myth and Ritual in Family Life*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Giroux, H. A. (1998). Teenage sexuality, body politics, and the pedagogy of display. In J. S. Epstein (Ed.), *Youth Culture: Identity in a Postmodern World* (pp. 24-55). Oxford: Blackwell.

Giroux, H. A. (2000). *Stealing Innocence: Youth, Corporate Power, and the Politics of Culture*. New York: Palgrave.

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming Qualitative Researchers*. New York: Longman.

Goldberg, M. (2001). *Feminism for sale*. Retrieved 3rd April, 2003, from http://www.alternet.org/story/10306/

Gonick, M. (2004). The 'mean girl' crisis: Problematizing representations of girls' friendships. *Feminism and Psychology, 14*(3), 395-400.

Gough, B. (1998). Men and the discursive reproduction of sexism: Repertoires of difference and equality. *Feminism and Psychology, 8*(1), 25-49.

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell, Trans.). London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Gray, E. (2002). What do we know about men's fertility levels in Australia? *People and Places, 10*(4), 9.

Green, K., & Taorino, T. (Eds.). (1997). *A Girl's Guide to Taking Over the World: Writings from the Girl Zine Revolution*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin.

Greer, G. (1992). The backlash myth: A feminist delusion. *The New Republic, 207*(15), 20-23.

Greer, G. (1999). *The Whole Woman*. London: Doubleday.

Griffin, C. (1985). *Typical Girls*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Griffin, C. (1989). 'I'm not a Women's Libber, but…': Feminism, Consciousness and Identity. In S. Skevington & D. Baker (Eds.), *The Social Identity of Women*. London: Sage.

Griffin, C. (2000). Discourses of crisis and loss: Analysing the 'boys' underachievement' debate. *Journal of Youth Studies, 3*(2), 167-188.

Griffin, C. (2004). Good girls, bad girls: Anglocentrism and diversity in the constitution of contemporary girlhood. In A. Harris (Ed.), *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity* (pp. 29-43). New York and London: Routledge.

Hakim, C. (2000). *Work-Lifestyle Choices in the 21st Century: Preference Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hamilton, C. (2003). *Growth Fetish*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Hamilton, C. (2005). *Affluenza: When Too Much is Never Enough*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Hammer, R. (2002). *Antifeminism and Family Terrorism: A Critical Feminist Perspective*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.

Hancock, L. (2005). Living precariously: The struggle for social and economic citizenship. *Just Policy, 37*, 5-7.

Harding, S. (1986). *The Science Question in Feminism*. Milton Keynes: The Open University.

Harding, S. (1987). Introduction: Is there a feminist method? In S. Harding (Ed.), *Feminism and Methodology: Social Science Issues* (pp. 1-14). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Harding, S. (1991). *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Harris, A. (2001). Revisiting bedroom culture: New spaces for young women's politics. *Hecate, 27*(1), 128-138.

Harris, A. (2004). *Future Girl: Young Women in the Twenty-First Century*. New York and London: Routledge.

Haussegger, V. (2002, 23 July). The sins of our feminist mothers. *The Age,* p. 11.

Haussegger, V. (2005). *Wonder Woman: The Myth of 'Having it All'*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Hawthorne, S. (2002). *Wild Politics: Feminism, Globalisation, Bio/Diversity*. Melbourne: Spinifex.

Hayek, F. (1960). *The Constitution of Liberty*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hayek, F. (1967). *Studies in Philosophy, Politics and Economics*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hayek, F. A. (1976). *Individualism and Economic Order* (reprint from 1949 ed.). London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Hayek, F. A. (1991). *Economic Freedom*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Hays, S. (1996). *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Henderson-King, D., & Stewart, A. J. (1994). Women or feminists? Assessing women's group consciousness. *Sex Roles, 31*(9-10).

Henderson-King, D., & Stewart, A. J. (1997). Feminist consciousness: Perspectives on women's experience. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 23*(4), 415-427.

Henderson-King, D., & Stewart, A. J. (1999). Educational experiences and shifts in group consciousness: Studying women. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 25*(13), 390.

Hertz, N. (2003). *The Silent Takeover: Global Capitalism and the Death of Democracy*. New York: HarperBusiness.

Hewitson, G. (1994). Neo-classical economics: A feminist perspective. In N. Grieve & A. Burns (Eds.), *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought* (pp. 142-150). Melbourne: Open University Press.

Hewitson, G. (1999). *Feminist Economics: Interrogating the Masculinity of Rational Economic Man*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Hewlett, S. A. (2003). *Baby Hunger: The New Battle for Motherhood*. London: Atlantic Books.

Hey, V. (1997). *The Company She Keeps: An Ethnography of Girls' Friendship*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Heywood, L., & Drake, J. (Eds.). (1997). *Third Wave Agenda: Being Feminist: Doing Feminism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Hill Collins, P. (1991). Learning from the outsider within: The sociological significance of black feminist thought. In M. M. Fonow & J. A. Cook (Eds.), *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research* (pp. 35-59). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Hill Collins, P. (2000). *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2nd ed.). New York and London: Routledge.

Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.

Hochschild, A. R. (1990). *The Second Shift*. New York: Avon Books.

Hochschild, A. R. (2003). *The Commercialization of Intimate Life: Notes From Home and Work*. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

hooks, b. (1984). *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. Boston: South End Press.

Hopkins, S. (2002). *Girl Heroes: The New Force in Popular Culture*. Annandale, NSW: Pluto Press.

Howard, A., & Tarrant, S. R. A. (Eds.). (2000). *Antifeminism in America: A Reader*. New York: Garland.

Howard, M., & Wilkinson, H. (1997). *Tomorrow's Women*. London: Demos.

Huggins, J. (1994). A contemporary view of Aboriginal women's relationship to the white women's movement. In A. Burns & N. Grieve (Eds.), *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought* (pp. 70-79). Melbourne: Open University Press.

Hugman, R. (2005). *New Approaches in Ethics for the Caring Professions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hugo, G. (2000). Declining fertility and policy intervention in Europe: Some lessons for Australia? *Journal of Population Research, 17*(2), 175-198.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). (2002). *A Time to Value: Proposal for a National Paid Maternity Leave Scheme*. Sydney: HREOC.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC). (2005). *Striking the Balance: Women, Men, Work and Family*. Sydney: HREOC.

Hyman, P. (1994). *Women and Economics: A New Zealand Feminist Perspective*. Wellington: Bridget Williams Books.

Inness, S. (Ed.). (1998). *Millennium Girls: Today's Girls Around the World*. Lanham, Md. and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield.

Inness, S. A. (2000). *Running for their Lives: Girls, Cultural Identity, and Stories of Survival*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.

Inness, S. A. (Ed.). (2004). *Action Chicks: New Images of Tough Women in Popular Culture*. New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Itzen, C. (2000). Gendering domestic violence: The influence of feminism on policy and practice. In J. Hanmer & C. Itzen (Eds.), *Home Truths About Domestic Violence: Feminist Influences on Policy and Practice* (pp. 356-380). London: Routledge.

Jaggar, A. (1983). *Feminist Politics and Human Nature*. Savage, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Jaggar, A. (1992). Feminist ethics. In L. Becker & C. Becker (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Ethics* (pp. 361-370). New York: Garland Press.

Jamieson, L. (1999). Intimacy transformed? A critical look at the 'pure relationship'. *Sociology, 33*(3), 477-494.

Jamrozik, A. (2005). *Social Policy in the Post-Welfare State: Australian Society in the 21st Century* (2nd ed.). French's Forest, NSW: Pearson Education.

Jeffreys, S. (1997). *The Idea of Prostitution*. Melbourne: Spinifex.

Jeffreys, S. (2005). *Beauty and Misogyny. Harmful Cultural Practices in the West*. London and New York: Brunner/Routledge.

Jensen, M. (2000). Riding the third wave. *The Nation, 271*(19), 24-32.

Joekes, S., & Weston, A. (1994). *Women and the New Trade Agenda*. New York: UNIFEM.

Joekes, S. (1995). *Trade-Related Employment for Women in Industry and Services in Developing Countries*. Geneva: UNRISD.

Jong, E. (1999). *What Do Women Want?* London: Bloomsbury.

Johnson, L. (1993). *The Modern Girl: Girlhood and Growing Up*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Johnston, K. L., & White, K. M. (2004). Binge-drinking in female university students. *Youth Studies Australia, 23*(2), 22-30.

Jowett, M. (2004). "I don't see feminists as you see feminists": Young women negotiating feminism in contemporary Britain. In A. Harris (Ed.), *All About the Girl: Culture, Power, and Identity* (pp. 91-100). New York and London: Routledge.

Kamen, P. (2000). *Her Way: Young Women Remake the Sexual Revolution*. New York: Broadway Books.

Kaplan, G. (1996). *The Meagre Harvest: The Australian Women's Movement 1950s-1990s*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Katz, A. (1997). *The 'Can Do' Girls: A Barometer of Change*: The Body Shop and University of Oxford.

Kelly, P. (1999). Wild and tame zones: Regulating the transitions of youth at risk. *Journal of Youth Studies, 2*(2), 193-211.

Kelly, L. (1988). *Surviving Sexual Violence*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Kelly, J., & Radford, J. (1996). 'Nothing really happened': The invalidation of women's experiences of sexual violence. In M. Hester, L. Kelly & J. Radford (Eds.), *Women, Violence and Male Power* (pp. 19-33). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Kelly, L., Burton, S., & Regan, L. (1994). Researching women's lives or studying women's oppression? Reflections on what constitutes feminist research. In M. Maynard & J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching Women's Lives from a Feminist Perspective* (pp. 27-48). London: Taylor and Francis.

Kelly, L., Burton, L., & Regan, L. (1996). Beyond victim or survivor: Sexual violence, identity and feminist theory and practice. In L. Adkins & V. Merchant (Eds.), *Sexualising the Social: Power and the Organisation of Sexuality* (pp. 77-101). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

Kenway, J. (1990). Privileged girls, private schools and the culture of 'success'. In Kenway & Willis (Eds.), *Hearts and Minds: Self-Esteem and the Schooling of Girls*. London: Falmer.

Kenway, J., & Kraack, A. (2003). *Local/Global Power Geometries: the Politics of resentment and Mobility*. Paper presented at the Gender and Education Conference, keynote address, Sheffield, UK.

Kenway, J., & Langmead, D. (1999). Is there a future for feminism in the contemporary university? In L. Hancock (Ed.), *Women, Public Policy and the State* (pp. 192-204). South Yarra, Vic.: Macmillan Education.

Kenway, J., & Willis, S. (Eds.). (1990). *Hearts and Minds: Self-Esteem and the Schooling of Girls*. London: Falmer.

Kidder, L. H., & Judd, C. M. (1986). *Research Methods in Social Relations*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Kimmel, M. (1994). Consuming manhood: The feminization of American culture and the recreation of the male body, 1832-1920. In L. Goldstein (Ed.), *The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures* (pp. 12-41). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Kimmel, M. (2001). Global masculinities: Restoration and resistance. In B. Pease & K. Pringle (Eds.), *A Man's World: Changing Men's Practices in a Globalized World* (pp. 21-37). London and New York: Zed Books.

Kinard, E. M. (1998). Methodological issues in assessing resilience in maltreated children. *Child Abuse and Neglect, 22*(7), 669-680.

King, A. (1999). *The Cost to Australia of Early School-leaving*. Canberra: National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling.

Kitzinger, C., & Wilkinson, S. (1997). Validating women's experience: Dilemmas in feminist research. *Feminism and Psychology, 7*(4), 566-574.

Klein, N. (2000). *No logo: No Space, No Choice, No Jobs*. London: Flamingo.

Klein, R. (Ed.). (1989). *Infertility: Women Speak Out About Their Experiences of Reproductive Medicine*. London: Pandora.

Klein, R. (1994). How we do what we want to do: Thoughts about feminist methodology. In *Feminist Research Methodology. A Reader* (Vol. 1, pp. 88-104). Geelong: Deakin University.

Kroll, J., Habenicht, M., & McKenzie, R. (1989). Depression and posttraumatic stress disorder among Southeast Asian refugees. *American Journal of Psychiatry, 146*, 1592-1597.

Lamb, S. (1998). Completing school in Australia. *Australian Journal of Education, 42*(1), 5-31.

Lamb, S. (2001). *The Secret Lives of Girls. What Good Girls Really Do – Sex Play, Aggression, and Their Guilt*. New York: The Free Press.

Lamb, S., & McKenzie, P. (2001). *Patterns of Success and Failure in the Transition from School to Work in Australia. LSAY Report No. 18*. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.

Laski, H. J. (1960). *A Grammar of Politics* (4th ed.). London: Allen and Unwin.

Lees, S. (1993). *Sugar and Spice: Sexuality and Adolescent Girls*. London: Penguin.

Le Grand, J. (1997). Knights, knaves or pawns? Human behaviour and social policy. *International Social Policy, 26*(2), 149-169.

Levy, A. (2005). *Female Chauvinist Pigs: Women and the Rise of Raunch Culture*. New York: Free Press.

Levy, B. (1998). *Dating Violence: Young Women in Danger* (2nd ed.). Seattle: Seal Press.

Libesman, T., Pearce, S., & Kelly, R. (1999). Indigenous women and relations with the state. In L. Hancock (Ed.), *Women, Public Policy and the State* (pp. 144-162). South Yarra, Vic.: Macmillan Education.

Lingard, B. (1997). The problematic coalition of markets and social justice. *Education Links, 54*, 4-7.

Lingard, B., & Douglas, P. (1999). *Men Engaging Feminisms: Profeminism, Backlashes and Schooling*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Lips, H. M. (2000). College students' visions of power and possibility as moderated by gender. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 24*, 39-43.

Liss, M., O'Connor, C., Morosky, E., & Crawford, M. (2001). What makes a feminist? Predictors and correlates of feminist social identity in college women. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 25*, 124-133.

Lister, R. (2003). *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (2nd ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Lockard, J. S. (1980). Speculations on the adaptive significance of self-deception. In J. S. Lockard (Ed.), *The Evolution of Human Social Behaviour* (pp. 257-275). New York: Elsevier.

Long, J. (2001). "A certain kind of modern feminism": Memory, feminist futures and 'generational cleavage' in historical perspective. *Outskirts Online Journal, 8*.

Lottes, I. L., & Kurriloff, P. J. (1992). The effects of gender, race, religion and political orientation on the sex role attitudes of college freshmen. *Adolescence, 27*(107), 675-688.

Lucashenko, M. (1994). No other truth?: Aboriginal Women and Australian Feminism. *Social Alternatives, 12*(4), 21-24.

Lucey, H., Melody, J., & Walkerdine, V. (2003). Uneasy hybrids: Psychosocial aspects of becoming educationally successful for working-class young women. *Gender and Education, 15*(3), 285-299.

Luthar, S. S. (1991). Vulnerability and resilience: A study of high risk adolescents. *Child Development, 62*(3), 600-616.

Luthar, S. S., & Becker, B. E. (2002). Privileged but pressured? A study of affluent youth. *Child Development, 73*(5), 1593-1610.

Luthar, S., Cicchetti, D., & Becker, B. (2000). The construct of resilience: A critical evaluation and guidelines for future 'work'. *Child Development, 71*(3), 543-562.

Luthar, S., & Zigler, E. (1991). Vulnerability and competence: A review of research on resilience in childhood. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 61*(1), 6-22.

Lyotard, J.-F. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Machung, A. (1989). Talking career, thinking job: Gender differences in career and family expectations of Berkley Seniors. *Feminist Studies, 15*, 35-54.

Mackay, H. (1993). *Reinventing Australia: The Mind and Mood of Australia in the 90s*. Pymble, NSW: Angus and Robertson.

Mackay, H. (1997). *Generations: Baby Boomers, Their Parents and Their Children*. Sydney: Macmillan.

Macken, D. (2005). *Oh No, We Forgot to Have Children!* Crows Nest, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Mackinnon, A. (1997). *Love and Freedom: Professional Women and the Reshaping of Personal Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacKinnon, C. A. (1989). *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State*. Cambridge: Harvard University.

Macpherson, C. B. (1962). *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism: Hobbes to Locke*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Maddison, S. (2002). Bombing the patriarchy or just trying to get a cab: Challenges facing the next generation of feminist activists. *Outskirts Online Journal, 10*.

Manent, P. (1996). *Intellectual History of Liberalism*. Princeton, NJ: University of Princeton Press.

March, J. G. (1978). Bounded rationality, ambiguity, and the engineering of choice. *Bell Journal of Economics, 9*(587-608).

Maushart, S. (2001). *Wifework: What Marriage Really Means for Women*. Melbourne: Text Publishing.

Maushart, S. (2005). *What Women Want Next*. Melbourne: Text Publishing.

Maynard, M. (1994). Methods, practice and epistemology: The debate about feminism and research. In M. Maynard & J. Purvis (Eds.), *Researching women's lives from a feminist perspective* (pp. 10-26). London: Taylor and Francis.

McCarthy, C., & Dimitriadis, G. (2000). Governmentality and the sociology of education: Media, educational policy, and the politics of resentment. *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 21*(2), 169-186.

McClelland, A., & Macdonald, F. (1999). Young adults and labour market disadvantage? The situation of young adults not in education or full-time employment. *Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Australia's Young Adults: Reality and Risk, Stage 2*. Sydney: Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

McDonald, K. (1999). *Struggles for Subjectivity. Identity, Action and Youth Experience*. Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

McDonald, P. (1998). Contemporary fertility patterns in Australia: First data from the 1996 census. *People and Places, 66*(11), 1-12.

McDonald, P. (2000). Gender equity, social institutions and the future of fertility. *Journal of Population Research, 17*(1), 1-6.

McMahon, A. (1999). *Taking Care of Men: Sexual Politics in the Public Mind*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McQuaig, L. (1998). *The Cult of Impotence: Selling the Myth of Powerlessness in the Global Community*. Toronto: Penguin Books.

McRobbie, A. (1976). Girls and subcultures. In S. Hall & T. Jefferson (Eds.), *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-war Britain* (pp. 209-222). London: Hutchinson.

McRobbie, A. (1991a). *Feminism and Youth Culture: From `Jackie' to `Just Seventeen'*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Education.

McRobbie, A. (1991b). The politics of feminist research: Between talk, text and action. In A. McRobbie (Ed.), *Feminism and Youth Culture: From Jackie to Just Seventeen* (pp. 61-80). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

McRobbie, A. (1991c). The culture of working class girls. In A. McRobbie (Ed.), *Feminism and Youth Culture: From 'Jackie' to 'Just Seventeen'* (pp. 35-60). Basingstoke: Macmillan.

McRobbie, A. (1996). More! New sexualities in girls' and women's magazines. In J. Curran, D. Morley & V. Walkerdine (Eds.), *Cultural Studies and Communications* (pp. 172-194). London: Arnold.

McRobbie, A. (2000). Sweet smell of success? New ways of being young women. In A. McRobbie (Ed.), *Feminism and Youth Culture* (2nd ed., pp. 198-213). London: Macmillan.

McRobbie, A. (2001). Good girls, bad girls: Female success and the new meritocracy. In D. Morley & K. Robins (Eds.), *British Cultural Studies* (pp. 361-372). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

McRobbie, A. (2004a). Notes on postfeminism and popular culture: Bridget Jones and the New Gender Regime. In A. Harris (Ed.), *All About the Girl: Culture, Power and Identity* (pp. 3-14). London and New York: Routledge.

McRobbie, A. (2004b). Post-feminism and popular culture. *Feminist Media Studies, 4*(3), 255-264.

McRobbie, A. (2004c). Feminism and the socialist tradition…Undone? A response to recent work by Judith Butler. *Cultural Studies, 18*(4), 503-522.

McRobbie, A., & McCabe, T. (Eds.). (1981). *Feminism for Girls: An Adventure Story*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Mendes, P. (2003). *Australia's Welfare Wars: The Players, the Politics and the Ideologies*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

Metherell, M., & Todd, M. (2004, November 11). Door open to tougher abortion law. *Sydney Morning Herald*, p. 1.

Middleton, S., Ashworth, K., & Braithwaite, I. (1997). *Small Fortunes: Spending on Children, Childhood Poverty and Parental Sacrifice*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Mies, M. (1998). *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (2nd ed.). London and New York: Zed Books.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Milne-Holme, J., Power, A., & Dennis, B. (1996). *Pregnant Futures: Barriers to Employment and Training Amongst Pregnant and Parenting Adolescents. Women's Employment and Education and Training Advisory Group Project*. Canberra: AGPS.

Minichiello, V., Aroni, R., Timewell, E., & Alexander, L. (1995). *In-Depth Interviewing* (2nd ed.). Melbourne: Longman.

Mirkin, M. P. (1994). Female adolescence revisited: Understanding girls in their sociocultural contexts. In M. Mirkin (Ed.), *Women in Context: Toward a Feminist Reconstruction of Psychotherapy* (pp. 77-95). New York: The Guildford Press.

Mirza, H. S. (1992). *Young, Female and Black*. London: Routledge.

Mizen, P. (2004). *The Changing State of Youth*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Modleski, T. (1991). *Feminism Without Women: Culture and Criticism in a 'Postfeminist' Age*. New York: Routledge.

Moore, M. (1997). Student resistance to course content: Reactions to the gender of the messenger. *Teaching Sociology, 25*(2), 128-133.

Moreton-Robinson, A. (2000). *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*. Brisbane: University of Queensland Press.

Morgan, R. (1984). *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology*.

Morrison, Z., Bourke, M., & Kelley, C. (2005). "Stop making it such a big issue": Perceptions and experiences of gender inequality by undergraduates at a British University. *Women's Studies International Forum, 28*, 150-162.

Mulroney, J. (2003). *Australian Statistics on Domestic Violence*: Australian Domestic and Family Violence Clearinghouse Topic Paper.

Muncer, S., Campbell, A., Jervis, V., & Lewis, R. (2001). "Ladettes", social representations, and aggression. *Sex Roles, 44*(1/2), 33-44.

Munk, N. (1997). Girl Power! *Fortune, 136*, 132-137.

National Union of Students (NUS). (2003). *The Higher Education Reform Package - Bad for All, Worse for Women*. Retrieved 20 May, 2005, from http://www.unistudent.com.au/research/files/womens%20paper1.pdf.

Neale, B., & Smart, C. (1997). Experiments with parenthood. *Sociology, 31*(2), 201-219.

Nelson, J. (1992). Gender, metaphor and the definition of economics. *Economics and Philosophy, 8*, 103-125.

Nelson, J., & Ferber, M. (Eds.). (1993). *Beyond Economic Man: Feminist Theory and Economics*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Nevile, J. W. (1997). *Economic Rationalism: Social Philosophy Masquerading as Economic Science*. Canberra: The Australia Institute.

Nussbaum, M. (2001). *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Oakes-Ash, R. (2003). *Anything She Can Do I Can Do Better - The Truth About Female Competition*. Milson's Point, NSW: Random House Australia.

Oakley, A. (1974). *The Sociology of Housework*. London: Martin Robertson.

Oakley, A. (1979). *Becoming a Mother*. Oxford: Martin Robertson.

Oakley, A. (1984). *Taking it Like a Woman: A Personal History*. New York: Random House.

Oakley, A. (1992). Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms. In H. Roberts (Ed.), *Doing Feminist Research* (pp. 30-61). New York: Routledge.

Oakley, A. (1993). The cries and smiles of babies. In A. Oakley (Ed.), *Essays on Women, Medicine and Health.* (pp. 81-94). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Oakley, A. (1998). Gender, methodology and people's ways of knowing: Some problems with feminism and the paradigm debate in social science. *Sociology, 32*(4), 707-731.

Olsberg, D. (2005). Women, superannuation and retirement: Grim prospects despite policy changes. *Just Policy, 35*, 31-38.

Orenstein, P. (1995). *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self-Esteem, and the Confidence Gap* (2nd ed.). New York: Doubleday Books.

Orenstein, P. (2000). *Flux: Women on Sex, Work, Kids, Love, and Life in a Half-Changed World*. New York: Anchor Books.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). (2002). *Employment Outlook*. Paris: OECD.

Orr, C. M. (1997). Charting the currents of the third wave. *Hypatia, 12*(3), 29-45.

Osler, A., Street, C., Lall, M., & Vincent, K. (2002). *Not a Problem? Girls and School Exclusion*. York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

Padgett, D. (1998). *Qualitative Research Methods in Social Work Research: Challenges and Rewards.* Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (Ed.). (1998). *Girls' Talk: Young Women Speak Their Hearts and Minds*. Sydney: Finch Publishing.

Parker, R. (1997). The production and purposes of maternal ambivalence. In W. Holloway & B. Featherstone (Eds.), *Mothering and Ambivalence* (pp. 17-36). London and New York: Routledge.

Parkins, W. (1999). Bad girls, bad reputations: Feminist ethics and postfeminism. *Australian Feminist Studies, 14*(30), 377-385.

Partnerships Against Domestic Violence (PADV). (2001). *Young People and Domestic Violence*. Canberra: Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department.

Pascall, G. (1997). *Social Policy: A New Feminist Analysis*. London: Routledge.

Pateman, C. (1981). The concept of equity. In P. N. Troy (Ed.), *A Just Society? Essays on Equity in Australia* (pp. 21-36). Sydney: Allen and Unwin.

Pateman, C. (1988). *The Sexual Contract*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Pearson, N. (2000). *Our Right to Take Responsibility*. Cairns: Noel Pearson and Associates.

Peetz, D. (2005). *Lies, AWAs and Statistics. Workers Online*. Retrieved 14th September 2005, from http://www.workers.labor.net.au/features/200506/b_tradeunion_awas.html

Phillips, L. M. (2000). *Flirting with Danger: Young Women's Reflections on Sexuality and Domination*. New York: New York University Press.

Phillips, R. (2004). From waves of action to the 'dead calm': Policy responses to violence against women in the new millennium. *Women in Welfare Education, 7*, 17-32.

Phoenix, A. (1991). *Young Mothers?* Oxford: Polity Press.

Pipher, M. (1994). *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*. New York: Ballantine Books.

Pocock, B. (2003). *The Work/Life Collision: What Work is Doing to Australians and What to Do About it*. Sydney: The Federation Press.

Pocock, B. (2004). *Work and Family Futures: How Young Australians Plan to Work and Care*: The Australia Institute. Discussion Paper No. 69.

Pocock, B., Prosser, R., & Bridge, K. (2004). *'Only a casual...': How casual work affects employees, households and communities in Australia*: Labour Studies, School of Social Sciences, University of Adelaide.

Poole, M. E., & Langan-Fox, J. (1997). *Australian Women and Careers: Psychological and Contextual Influences Over the Life Course*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pratt, A. (2001). Neo-liberalism and social policy. In A. Pratt & M. Lavalette (Eds.), *Social Policy: A Conceptual and Theoretical Introduction* (2nd ed., pp. 32-51). London: Sage.

Pratt, A., Biggs, A., & Buckmaster, L. (2005). *How Many Abortions are There in Australia? A Discussion of Abortion Statistics, Their Limitations, and Options for Improved Statistical Collection*. Canberra: Parliamentary Library.

Price, M. (2004, 12th May). F-word used in erection year. *The Australian,* p. 1.

Probert, B., & Macdonald, F. (1997). *Young Women: Poles of Experience in Work and Parenting*. Melbourne: Brotherhood of St Lawrence.

Probert, B. (2002). 'Grateful Slaves' or 'Self-made Women': A matter of choice or policy? *Australian Feminist Studies, 17*(37), 7-17.

Productivity Commission. (2004). *First Home Ownership* (No. 28). Melbourne.

Proweller, A. (1998). *Constructing Female Identities: Meaning Making in an Upper Middle Class Youth Culture*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Purcell, L. (2002). *Black Chicks Talking*. Sydney: Hodder.

Pusey, M. (2003). *The Experience of Middle Australia: The Dark Side of Economic Reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Quart, A. (2003). *Branded: The Buying and Selling of Teenagers*. Cambridge, MA: Perseus.

Quiggin, J. (1996). *Great Expectations: Microeconomic Reform and Australia*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Ramazanoğlu, C. (1992). On feminist methodology: Male reason versus female empowerment. *Sociology, 26*(2), 207-212.

Ramazanoğlu, C., & Holland, J. (2002). *Feminist Methodology: Challenges and Choices*. London: Sage.

Rattansi, A., & Phoenix, A. (1997). Rethinking youth identities: Modern and postmodern frameworks. In J. Brynner, L. Chisholm & A. Furlong (Eds.), *Youth, Citizenship and Social Change in a European Context* (pp. 121-150). Aldershot: Ashgate.

Raymond, J. (1986). *A Passion for Friends: Toward a Philosophy of Female Affection*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Raymond, J. (1993). *Women as Wombs: Reproductive Technologies and the Battle over Women's Freedom*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.

Reay, D. (2004). Rethinking social class. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & M. L. Yaiser (Eds.), *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research* (pp. 140-154). New York: Oxford University Press.

Reay, D., Davies, J., David, M., & Ball, S. J. (2001). Choices of degrees or degrees of choice? Class, 'race' and the higher education choice process. *Sociology, 35*(4), 855-877.

Reinharz, S. (1992). *Feminist Methods in Social Research*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Rich, A. (1977). *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. London: Vintage.

Richards, L. (1999). *Using NVivo in Qualitative Research*. London: Sage.

Riessman, C. K. (1993). *Narrative Analysis*. Newbury Park, California: Sage.

Rigsby, L. (1994). The Americanization of resilience: Deconstructing research practice. In M. Wang & E. Gordon (Eds.), *Educational Resilience in Inner-city America: Challenges and Projects* (pp. 85-92). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Riley-Smith, B. (1992). *The Women's View: Market Research Study on Women's Perceptions of Themselves and Government Programs and Policies*. Canberra: OSW, Dept of Premier and the Cabinet.

Rimke, H. M. (2000). Governing citizens through self-help literature. *Cultural Studies, 14*(1), 61-78.

Ringrose, J. (2004). *Post-feminism, girl power and the middle-class mean girl: Examining the discursive construction and social regulation of a new feminine pathology*. Retrieved 9 September, 2004, from http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/newFemininities/secondseminar.htm#Jessica%20Ringrose.

Ritzer, G. (1996). *The McDonaldization of Society: An Investigation into the Changing Character of Contemporary Social Life*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Robertson, B. (2000). *The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence Report*: Queensland Government (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development).

Roiphe, K. (1994). *The Morning After: Sex, Fear and Feminism*. Boston: Little, Brown and Co.

Roker, D. (1993). Gaining the Edge. Girls at Private School. In I. Bates & G. Riseborough (Eds.), *Youth and Inequality* (pp. 122-138). Buckingham: Open University Press.

Romito, P. (1997). Damned if you do and damned if you don't': Psychological and social constraints on motherhood in contemporary Europe. In A. Oakley & J. Mitchell (Eds.), *Who's Afraid of Feminism? Seeing Through the Backlash* (pp. 162-186). London: Penguin Books.

Rose, N. (1990). *Governing the Soul: the Shaping of the Private Self*. London: Routledge.

Rose, N. (1996). *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rowland, R. (1989). Women who do and women who don't join the women's movement. In R. D. Klein & D. L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Radical Voices: A Decade of Feminist Resistance from Women's Studies International Forum* (pp. 42-52). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Rowland, R. (1992). *Living Laboratories: Women and Reproductive Technologies*. Sydney: Sun Australia.

Rowlands, S., & Henderson, M. (1996). Damned bores and slick sisters: The selling of blockbuster feminism in Australia. *Australian Feminist Studies, 11*(23), 9-16.

Rubery, J. (1988). *Women and Recession*. London: Routledge.

Ruth, S. (1989). A feminist analysis of the New Right. In R. D. Klein & D. L. Steinberg (Eds.), *Radical Voices: A Decade of Feminist Resistance from Women's Studies International Forum* (pp. 93-105). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Salazar, L. F., & Cook, S. L. (2002). Violence against women: Is psychology part of the problem or part of the solution? A content analysis of psychological research from

1990 through 1999. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 12*(6), 410-421.

Saleebey, D. (Ed.). (1992). *The Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice*. New York: Longman.

Saleebey, D. (1996). The strengths perspective in social work practice: Extensions and cautions. *Social Work, 41*(3), 296-305.

Savage, M. (1992). Women's expertise, men's authority: Gendered organisation and the contemporary middle classes. In M. Savage & A. Witz (Eds.), *Gender and Bureaucracy*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Sawer, M. (1999). EMILY's List and angry white men: Gender wars in the nineties. *Journal of Australian Studies, 62*, 1-9.

Sawer, M. (2003a). *The Ethical State? Social Liberalism in Australia*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.

Sawer, M. (2003b). The life and times of women's policy machinery in Australia. In S. R. Rai (Ed.), *Mainstreaming Gender, Democratising the State? Institutional Mechanisms for the Advancement of Women* (pp. 243-263). Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Sawer, M. (2003c). Us and them: Anti-Elitism at the turn of the millennium. *Dialogue, 22*(1), 10-17.

Schwartz, B. (2004). *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*. New York: HarperCollins.

Scott, J. (2000). Rational choice theory. In G. Browning, A. Halcli & F. Webster (Eds.), *Understanding Contemporary Society: Theories of the Present* (pp. 126-138). London: Sage.

Scott, J. W. (1997). Women's studies on the edge: Introduction. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies, 9*(3), 1-5.

Scutt, J. (Ed.). (1985). *Growing Up Feminist: The New Generation of Australian Women*. North Ryde, NSW: Angus and Robertson.

Segal, L. (1990). *Slow Motion: Changing Masculinities, Changing Men*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press.

Sennett, R. (1998). *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York and London: W. W. Norton and Company.

Shanahan, A. (2005, 15-16 October). Finding fertile ground. *The Weekend Australian,* p. 29.

Sharp, R. (1995). The power of a feminist economics. *Refractory Girl, 49*, 26-33.

Sharpe, S. (1976). *'Just Like a Girl': How Girls Learn to be Women*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Sharpe, S. (1994). *'Just Like a Girl': How Girls Learn to be Women* (2nd ed.). London: Penguin.

Shiva, V. (1993). *Monocultures of the Mind: Perspectives on Biodiversity and Biotechnology*. Penang: Third World Network.

Shiva, V. (2000). *Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Silva, E. (1996). Introduction. In E. Silva (Ed.), *Good Enough Mothering? Feminist Perspectives on Lone Motherhood* (pp. 1-9). Routledge: London.

Simmons, R. (2002). *Odd Girl Out: The Hidden Culture of Aggression in Girls*. New York: Harcourt.

Skeggs, B. (1995). Women's studies in Britain in the 1990s: Entitlement cultures and institutional constraints. *Women's Studies International Forum, 18*(4), 475-484.

Skeggs, B. (1997). *Formations of Class and Gender: Becoming Respectable*. London: Sage.

Smith, D. E. (1974). Women's perspective as a radical critique of sociology. *Sociological Inquiry, 44*(1), 7-13.

Smith, D. E. (1987). *The Everyday World as Problematic: A Feminist Sociology*. Boston: Northeastern University Press.

Smith, M., & Ewer, P. (2001). *Changes to Childcare Funding and Women's Labour Force Participation in Western Sydney*. Blacktown, NSW: Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Local Councils Ltd.

Sommers, C. H. (1994). *Who Stole Feminism? How Women Have Betrayed Women*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

South Australia Unions. (2005). *Dirt Cheap and Disposable*. Adelaide: SA Unions.

Spierings, J. (2002). *'Make Your Own Way There': An Agenda for Young People in the Modern Labour Market*. Sydney: Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

Spivak, G. C. (1994). Can the subaltern speak? In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader* (pp. 66-111). New York: Columbia University Press.

Sprague, J., & Kobrynowicz, D. (2004). A feminist epistemology. In S. N. Hesse-Biber & M. L. Yaiser (Eds.), *Feminist Perspectives on Social Research* (pp. 78-98). New York: Oxford University Press.

Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1983). 'Back into the personal' or: Our attempt to construct 'feminist research'. In G. Bowles & R. D. Klein (Eds.), *Theories of Women's Studies* (pp. 192-209). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Stanley, L., & Wise, S. (1993). *Breaking Out Again: Feminist Ontology and Epistemology*. London: Routledge.

Steenbergen, C. (2001). Feminism and young women: Alive and well and still kicking. *Canadian Women's Studies Journal, Special Issue: Young Women: Feminists, Activists, Grrrls, 20/21*(4/1), 6-14.

Strauss, A. L., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Second ed.). Thousand Oaks, California: Sage.

Strickland, R. (Ed.). (2002). *Growing up Postmodern: Neoliberalism and the War on the Young*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.

Strinati, D. (1995). *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.

Stuart, A. (1990). Feminism: Dead or alive? In J. Rutherford (Ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (pp. 28-42). London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Sullivan, O. (2000). The division of domestic labour: Twenty years of change? *Sociology, 34*, 437-456.

Summers, A. (1994). Letter to the next generation. In *Damned Whores and God's Police* (pp. 505-528). Ringwood, Victoria: Penguin Books.

Summers, A. (2003). *The End of Equality: Work, Babies and Women's Choices in 21st Century Australia*. Milson's Point, NSW: Random House.

Summers, A. (2004). *The Politics of Dissent in an Age of Endangered Democracy*. Retrieved 13th September 2005, from http://www.wa.ipaa.org.au/ipaa/docs/REIDORATION.pdf.

Surbey, M. (2005). Self-deception: Helping and hindering personal and public decision making. In C. B. Crawford & C. A. Salmon (Eds.), *Evolutionary Psychology, Public Policy, and Personal Decisions* (pp. 117-144). Hillside, NJ: Erlbaum.

Taft, A., Watson, L., & Lee, C. (2004). Violence against young Australian women and association with reproductive events: A cross-sectional analysis of a national population sample. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health, 28*(4), 324-329.

Taskforce on Care Costs. (2005). *Creating Choice: Employment and the Cost of Care Policy*. Sydney: NSW EEO Practitioners Association.

Tavris, C. (1989). *Anger: The Misunderstood Emotion* (Revised ed.). New York: Touchstone.

Taylor-Gooby, P. (2001). Risk, contingency and the Third Way: Evidence from the BHPS (British Household Panel Survey) and Qualitative Studies. *Social Policy and Administration, 35*(3), 195-211.

Taylor, J. M., Gilligan, C., & Sullivan, A. M. (1995). *Between Voice and Silence: Women and Girls, Race and Relationship*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

Teese, R. (2000). *Academic Success and Social Power: Examinations and Inequality*. Carlton South: Melbourne University Press.

Thompson, D. (2001). *Radical Feminism Today*. London: Sage.

Thorpe, R., & Irwin, J. (1996). Women, violence and social change. In R. Thorpe & J. Irwin (Eds.), *Women and Violence: Working for Change* (pp. 1-15). Sydney: Hale and Iremonger.

Titterton, M. (1992). Managing threats to welfare: The search for a new paradigm of welfare. *Journal of Social Policy, 21*(1), 1-23.

Titus, J. (2000). Engaging student resistance to feminism: "How is this stuff going to make us better teachers". *Gender and Education, 12*(1), 21-37.

Tizard, B., & Phoenix, A. (2002). *Black, White or Mixed Race? Race and Racism in the Lives of Young People of Mixed Parentage*. London and New York: Routledge.

Trioli, V. (1996). *Generation F: Sex, Power and the Young Feminist*. Port Melbourne: Minerva.

Tritter, J. Q., & Archer, M. S. (Eds.). (2000). *Rational Choice Theory: Resisting Colonization*. London and New York: Routledge.

Uttley, S. (2000). Lone mothers and policy discourse in New Zealand. *Journal of Social Policy, 29*(3), 441-458.

Van Gramberg, B. (1999). Women, industrial relations and public policy. In L. Hancock (Ed.), *Women, Public Policy and the State* (pp. 99-113). South Yarra, Vic.: Macmillan Education.

VicHealth. (2004). *The Health Costs of Violence: Measuring the Burden of Disease Caused by intimate Partner Violence*. Carlton South, Victoria: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation.

Wacquant, L. (2001). The penalisation of poverty and the rise of neo-liberalism. *Journal on Criminal Policy and Research, 9*, 401-412.

Wade, M. (2005, 31st October). Child care crying out for a proper accounting. *Sydney Morning Herald*.

Wajcman, J. (1999). *Managing Like a Man: Women and Men in Corporate Management*. St. Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Walby, S. (1986). *Patriarchy at Work: Patriarchal and Capitalist Relations in Employment*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Walby, S. (1992). Post-post-modernism? Theorizing social complexity. In M. Barrett & A. Phillips (Eds.), *Destabilizing Theory: Contemporary Feminist Debates* (pp. 31-52). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Walby, S. (1997). *Gender Transformations*. London and New York: Routledge.

Walker, R. (Ed.). (1995). *To Be Real: Telling the Truth and Changing the Face of Feminism*. New York: Anchor.

Walkerdine, V. (1990). *Schoolgirl Fictions*. London: Verso.

Walkerdine, V. (2003). Reclassifying upward mobility: Femininity and the neo-liberal subject. *Gender and Education, 15*(3), 237-248.

Walkerdine, V., Lucey, H., & Melody, J. (2001). *Growing Up Girl: Psychosocial Explorations of Gender and Class*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.

Walsh, D. (1998). Structure/agency. In C. Jenks (Ed.), *Core Sociological Dichotomies* (pp. 8-33). London: Sage.

Walsh, D., & Weeks, W. (2004). *What a Smile Can Hide: The Extent, Level and Nature of Violence During Pregnancy. Occasional Paper*. Melbourne: Women's Social Support Service/The Royal Women's Hospital.

Walter, M. (2005). Exploring mothers' relationship to the labour market. *Just Policy, 35*, 13-21.

Walter, N. (Ed.). (2000). *On The Move: Feminism For a New Generation*. London: Virago.

Ward, L. (2005). *Young Women No Longer Want It All*. Retrieved 10th March, 2005, from http://www.guardian.co.uk/print/0,3858, 5144566-110592.html

Waring, M. (1988). *If Women Counted: A New Feminist Economics*. New York: Harper and Row.

Webber, M. (2005). "Don't be so feminist": Exploring student resistance to feminist approaches in a Canadian university. *Women's Studies International Forum, 28*, 181-194.

Weber, L. C., Higginbotham, E., & Leung, M. L. A. (1991). Race and class bias in qualitative research on women. In M. M. Fonow & J. A. Cook (Eds.), *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

Weeks, W. (2004). *Let Them Eat Cake: Income Support and Paid Maternity Leave for Women*. Melbourne: Women's Social Support Service/The Royal Women's Hospital.

WESNET. (2004). *Women's Refuges, Shelters, Outreach and Support Services in Australia*. Canberra: Office for Women, Department of Family and Community Services.

Westergaard, J. (1995). *Who Gets What? The Hardening of Class Inequality in the Late Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Polity.

Weston, R., & Qu, L. (2001). Men's and Women's reasons for not having children. *Family Matters* (Autumn), 10-15.

Whelehan, I. (2000). *Overloaded: Popular Culture and the Future of Feminism*. London: The Women's Press.

White, R., & Wyn, J. (2004). *Youth and Society. Exploring the Social Dynamics of Youth Experience*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.

Whitehouse, G. (2005). Policy and women's workforce attachment. *Just Policy, 35*, 22-30.

Wichterich, C. (2000). *The Globalized Woman: Reports From a Future of Inequality*. North Melbourne: Spinifex.

Wicks, D., & Mishra, G. (1998). Young Australian women and their aspirations for work, education and relationships. In E. Carson, A. Jamrozik & T. Winefield (Eds.), *Unemployment, Economic Promise and Political Will* (pp. 89-100). Brisbane: Australian Academic Press.

Wilkinson, H. (1994). *No Turning Back: Generations and the Genderquake*. London: Demos.

Wilkinson, H. (2000). The Thatcher legacy: Power feminism and the birth of girl power. In N. Walter (Ed.), *On The Move: Feminism For a New Generation* (pp. 27-47). London: Virago.

Wilkinson, H., & Mulgan, G. (1995). *Freedom's Children: Work, Relationships and Politics for 18-34 Year Olds in Britain Today*. London: Demos.

Willett, C. (2002). Parenting and other human casualties in the pursuit of academic excellence. In A. M. Superson & A. E. Cudd (Eds.), *Theorizing Backlash: Philosophical Reflections on the Resistance to Feminism* (pp. 119-131). Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield.

Wiseman, R. (2002). *Queen Bees and Wannabees: Helping your Daughter Survive Cliques, Gossip, Boyfriends and Other Realities of Adolescence*. New York: Crown Publishers.

Wittig, M. (1982). The category of sex. *Feminist Issues, 2*(2), 63-68.

Wolf, N. (1994). *Fire With Fire: The New Female Power and How it Will Change the 21st Century*. London: Vintage.

Wood, M., & Teutsch, D. (2005, January 16). Experts warn female alcohol use on rise. *Sun-Herald*.

Wooden, M., & VandenHeuvel, A. (1999). The labour market for young adults. *Australia's Young Adults: The Deepening Divide*. Sydney: Dusseldorp Skills Forum.

Wulff, M. (2001). Out with the old and in with the new? Housing's role in the new social settlement. In L. Hancock, B. Howe, M. Frere & A. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Future Directions in Social Policy: New Ways of Preventing Risk* (pp. 57-65). Melbourne: Committee for Economic Development of Australia.

Wyn, J. (2000). The postmodern girl: Education, "success" and the construction of girls' identities. In J. McLeod & K. Malone (Eds.), *Researching Youth* (pp. 59-70). Hobart: Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies.

Wyn, J., & Dwyer, P. (2000). New patterns of youth in transition to education. *International Social Science Journal, 164*, 148-159.

Wyn, J., & White, R. (1997). *Rethinking Youth*. St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin.

Wynhausen, E. (2005). *Dirt Cheap: Life at the Wrong End of the Job Market*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan.

Yates, L. (1997). Gender equity and the boys debate: What sort of challenge is it? *British Journal of Sociology of Education, 18*(3), 337-347.

Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA). (2002). *If Looks Could Kill: Girls and Bullying*. London: YWCA.

Appendices

Appendix A: Participant recruitment flyer

Your chance to take part in a Townsville-based research project about girls' lives

What's it like to be a young woman today?

Are you between 18 and 25 years old? If you are, you can take part in a study about what young women's lives are like today. 50 young women from a variety of walks of life will have a chance to talk about their hopes, dreams and concerns.
Individual interviews are confidential and happen at a time and place that is convenient for you.

Each young woman receives 2 movie passes for her participation.

To be involved or to get more information, please contact Joanne Baker on 4781 4303 or email me at joanne.baker@jcu.edu.au.

Appendix B: Information page for participants

JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY

Townsville campus
Townsville QLD 4811 AUSTRALIA
Telephone: (07) 4781 4111 Web: **www.jcu.edu.au**

CRICOS Provider Code: 00117J

School of Social Work and Community Welfare
Head of School – Dr Tony McMahon
Telephone: (07) 4781 4301
Facsimile: (07) 4781 4064
E-mail: Anthony.McMahon@jcu.edu.au

Joanne Baker, PhD Student
School of Social Work and Community Welfare
James Cook University
Townsville 4811
Telephone: (07) 4781 4303
Fax: (07) 4781 4064
Email: Joanne.Baker@jcu.edu.au

INFORMATION PAGE FOR PARTICIPANTS

PhD Project Title: Entitlement and Constraint: Young Women and Neo-liberalism

Project Description:

This study will explore some aspects of the lives of young women aged 18-25 at the beginning of the 21st century. Through a focus on education, work and women's rights, it will examine the kinds of opportunities, choices or barriers that young women have experienced and what their hopes, aspirations and fears for the future are. Participants are required to be over the age of 18.

Complaints or questions:

If you have a complaint or question about your participation in this project, you may contact the researcher, Joanne Baker, or the Ethics Administrator at James Cook University.

Tina Langford, Ethics Administrator
Research Office
James Cook University
Townsville
Telephone: (07) 4781 4342
Fax: (07) 4781 5521
Email: Tina.Langford@jcu.edu.au

Support and Information:

If, following this interview, you require further information or support regarding the issues that have been discussed, you may wish to contact The Women's Centre. It offers free, confidential information, referral and counselling services to women in the Townsville/Thuringowa region. The Women's Centre is located at 52 Patrick Street in Aitkenvale, telephone 07 4775 7555.

Townsville Cairns Mackay

Appendix C: Informed consent form

Joanne Baker, PhD Student
School of Social Work and Community Welfare
James Cook University
Townsville Qld 4811.
Telephone: 07 4781 4303
Fax: 07 4781 4064
Fax: 07 4781 4064
Email: Joanne.Baker@jcu.edu.au

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

My name is Joanne Baker and I am a PhD student in the School of Social Work and Community Welfare at James Cook University in Townsville. My PhD study will explore some aspects of the lives of young women aged 18-25 at the beginning of the 21st century. Through a focus on education, work and women's rights, it will examine the kinds of opportunities, choices or barriers that young women have experienced and what their hopes, aspirations and fears for the future are.

If you agree to be a participant in this study, you will take part in an interview that will last between 1 and 2 hours. The interview will involve you being asked questions about your educational and employment experiences and your views about women's rights. Your permission will be sought to audiotape the interview. After the interview has been transcribed, the audiotape will be destroyed. You will be sent a copy of this transcript and invited to make changes or comments. All information gathered in the course of this study will be kept in a lockable filing cabinet to which only I have access and on a password-protected computer. When the research is completed, the findings will be written into a thesis and into papers that will be submitted for publication. It is also possible that I will discuss the findings in newspaper, radio or television interviews. If you take part in this project, your confidentiality is assured. Your name and any other information that could identify you will be changed.

CONSENT

The aims of the research project 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 am over eighteen years old. I understand that any information I give will be kept strictly confidential and that no names or information that could identify me will be used in the research.

Name: (printed)

Signature:

Date:

WITNESSED BY RESEARCHER OBTAINING CONSENT

Name: (printed)

Signature:

Date:

Townsville   Cairns   Mackay

Appendix D: Interview schedule

This interview schedule functions as a guide to the main themes that are to be covered in the interview. It includes prompts that might be used to facilitate more detailed discussion in particular areas.

Biographical information

Name   Children

Age   Relationship status

Racial/ethic background   Living arrangements

Educational level

The interview begins with broad questions about family and schooling background and the listed biographical information is collected.

Education and employment

Opening questions to establish the participant's current occupation/s (employment and/or study and/or parenting) or whether they are unemployed.

- How did you come to be in that course of study/job/looking for work?
- How did you decide what to study/ what kind of work to do or are looking for? (Prompts: What choices were available, were there particular things or people that influenced you?)
- What is it like to be doing that (particular course of study/employment or unemployment)?
- What are your hopes for your work life in the future?
- Do you think those things will happen for you? Is there anything that might be difficult or get in the way of those hopes coming true for you?

Relationships and children

Questions for mothers:

- How did you come to be a mother? (Prompts: circumstances of pregnancy, planned/unplanned, how decision made to become or continue with pregnancy, external influences)
- What has your experience of parenting has been like? (Prompts: positive and negative aspects, input from fathers/partners/family)

Questions for women who do not have children:

- Do you plan to have children?

- Can you tell me more about why or why not?

- How many children would you like to have? Do you have any ideas about when or how you would like that to happen?

- What are your hopes for your personal life in the future? Is there anything that might be difficult or get in the way of those hopes coming true for you?

Views about equality and the position of women today

- What do you think about women's equality with men? (Prompts: Is there equality between men and women today? Why or why not? Are there any situations that you think are unfair?)

- What do you think about equality between women? (Prompts: Is there equality between women from different backgrounds? Are there any situations that you think are unfair?

- This is a really broad question – what is it like to be a young woman today, in your opinion?

Questions about feminism

- Have you heard of feminism?

- What does feminism mean to you?

- Do you consider yourself to have feminist beliefs? What are they and why or why not?

- Are there any things that have encouraged or discouraged you from being a feminist/having feminist beliefs?

Closing questions

- Are there any other stories or ideas you can tell me that would shed more light on the kinds of things we have been discussing?

- Are there questions I haven't asked you that you think would be important for me to ask you or other young women?

- Do you have any other questions for me? Is there anything else about this research project that you would like to know, having done the interview?

- Would you be willing to pass on information about this study to other young women you know?