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Dependency, the Life Course and Social Policy

Proceedings of a One Day Seminar held at the

Social Policy Research Centre on Friday 23 September 1994

edited by
Sara Graham



THE UNIVERSITY OF
NEW SOUTH WALES

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Foreword

This report contains the proceedings of a one day seminar held at the Social Policy Research Centre on 23 September 1994. The theme of the seminar, *Dependency, the Life Course and Social Policy*, was selected in light of the increased attention focused on the issue of dependency in social policy and welfare reform in Australia.

The opening paper by Diane Gibson discusses the concept of dependency and the different ways it is applied. It presents a useful (though, as the author acknowledges, not definitive) classification scheme which is then used to examine the several literatures which have grown in the area. The other papers fall into these categories in interesting ways. Anne Edwards looks at the social construction of the category 'youth', examining the social status and other circumstances which impinge on their dependence and independence. She draws upon Census and other ABS data, enriched with findings from a survey carried out by herself and the Brotherhood of St Laurence between 1989 and 1993, to discuss the 'problem' of youth in a structurally contradictory situation.

Bruce Bradbury deals specifically with the ways in which the social security and taxation systems treat the relationships of dependency and interdependency within the family unit in a society which has changing norms about labour force participation, the concept of 'dependent spouse' and child care arrangements. He discusses how these changing norms are reflected in the social security reforms announced in the 1994 *Working Nation* White Paper.

Sol Encel discusses age dependency, the notion of the age dependency ratio and aspects of the treatment of age in the media. He argues that the idea of dependency arises from a social construction and that a more appropriate description of the situation of the aged in society is one of 'interdependence'. Cherry Russell is also concerned with the 'construction' of dependency for older people and examines some research which has taken place in the area. She draws on her own research which shows that the concept of 'control' emerges as a major factor in the way dependency is seen in the discourse of older people.

In the final overview paper, Sheila Shaver reviews the five papers and locates the concept of dependency in a context of individuation and individualism within the welfare state.

The Social Policy Research Centre is well placed to bring together a range of individuals, researchers and practitioners in order to hold seminars such as the one presented here. The Centre sees this type of seminar and the publication of its proceedings as important elements in the process of raising the profile of debate on social policy research and analysis.

I should like to express my thanks to Julia Martin for assisting in the organisation of the seminar and Diana Encel for assisting with the editing of the proceedings.

Peter Saunders
Director

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Dependency: The Career of a Concept

Diane Gibson

Aged Care Unit

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Dependency and debates surrounding it have a long and often honourable history, both in social theory and social policy. Fears that social welfare benefits might encourage dependency recurred throughout debates surrounding the emergence and subsequent revisions of the English Poor Laws (Blaug, 1963). Such themes have been explored, to varying ends, by welfare state theorists from Jeremy Bentham (1789: 292-3) and John Stuart Mill (1848, bk.5, chap. 11) through Charles Murray (1984) and Robert Goodin (1988, ch. 12). Dependency features as an ongoing issue in histories of American, British and Australian social legislation and in the rhetoric of their politicians. (For a selection of illustrative quotes from politicians and policy-makers in these countries see Goodin, 1988: 333-6, 343-9.)

Beyond those welfare-state contexts, dependency is also a central concept in social theory more generally, exemplified by Durkheim's (1952) work on social cohesion and intrinsic to the arguments of many exchange theorists. (See, e.g., the work of Blau, 1964 and Gouldner, 1960; 1975.) Dependency ratios are a standard concept in demographic and econometric work, particularly that pertaining to labour markets and social security analyses. Dependency has also emerged as a critical concept in feminist analyses, most commonly in relation to the welfare state and the family.

Dependency is a term with myriad uses and a multiplicity of meanings. This paper aims, first, to bringing some order to this profusion. In the first section I sketch out the varied uses and meanings of dependency, and in the second situate each of various senses of the term within each of the several relevant literatures in which it figures. The third section builds on and moves beyond those existing literatures into less well charted territory. There, I address a generally neglected question concerning the nature of dependency itself: what exactly is it about dependency that gives it such an unremittingly negative aura?

1 The Dimensions of Dependency

Many authors have taken dependency to be a relatively particular and unambiguous concept. Others, however, have recognised various kinds of dependencies and attempted to organise them into typologies. One of the earliest to develop an explicit classification scheme was Clark (1972). Her organising framework was essentially based on the underlying causes of dependency: it included such categories as developmental dependency, dependency of crisis, non-reciprocal role dependency, and neurotic dependency. In an influential article published a decade later, Alan

Walker (1982) pointed to the continuing lack of consistent usage surrounding the term. He outlined a fivefold taxonomy: life-cycle dependency, physical and psychological dependency, political dependency, economic and financial dependency, and structural dependency. Most recently, in two already widely cited articles Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1994a, b) have identified four 'registers of meaning' - economic, socio-legal, political and moral or psychological - associated with dependency.

Some elements of these typologies overlap, others do not. Moreover, discussions and debates around dependency raise many aspects not referred to at all in such typologies. These are descriptors and attributes such as 'natural' dependencies, 'legitimate' dependencies, dependency on the state versus dependency on the family, and so on. While the one dimensional typologies outlined above are useful for a variety of descriptive and analytic purposes they do not adequately represent the range of contexts and purposes associated with the term.

Dependency is simply not a one dimensional concept. The schema presented in this paper (see Figure 1) covers five different dimensions of dependency, but I do not wish to argue that this is the only or the definitive way of carving up the term. My intention is illustrative rather than classificatory: to establish the multi-dimensional nature of the term, and to illustrate the range of elements and attributes involved.

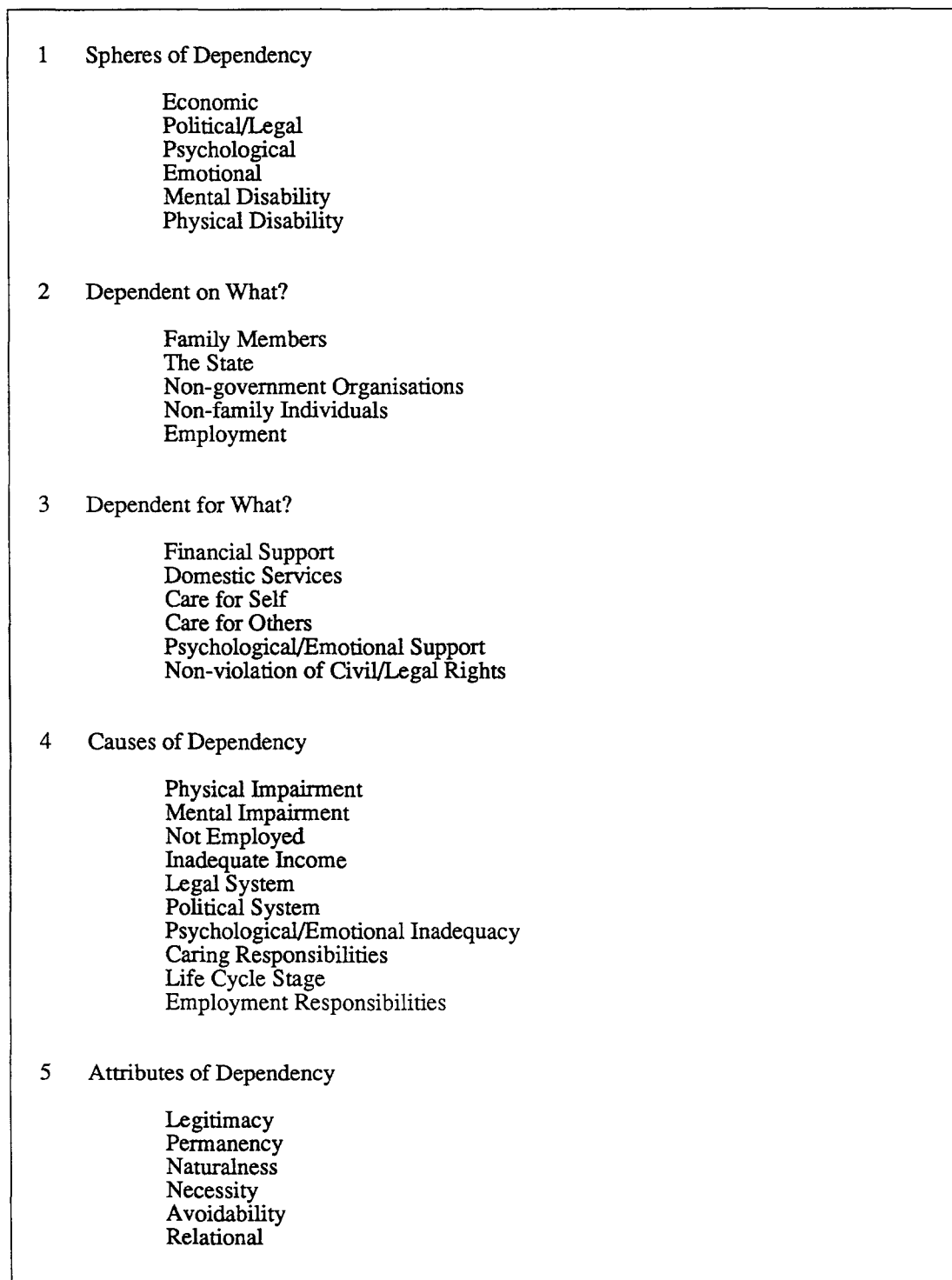
Spheres of Dependency

This first dimension is quite similar to the three typologies already mentioned. There are general areas or spheres in which dependency relations operate, and while not consistently definable as cause or content of assistance, for example, they have intuitive appeal as relatively discrete areas. They include, minimally, economic dependency, political and legal dependency, psychological dependency, emotional dependency, and dependencies arising from mental or physical disabilities.

Within the economic sphere, it is important to recognise dependencies associated with the informal economy, as well as the more commonly recognised ones associated with the formal economy. So under this heading should be included the dependency of an employed spouse on an unemployed partner to undertake domestic or caring work, as well as the dependency of an unemployed spouse on an employed partner to generate a cash income.

Political and legal dependencies involve that class of dependencies associated with the absence of legal or political citizenship, such as the right to vote or the right to own property.

Psychological dependency refers essentially to inadequate or flawed personality development, but is not limited in its application to the purely psychological. This kind of dependency has also emerged as an important dynamic in the explanation of patterns of entrenched urban poverty in the culture of dependency literature, that is

Figure 1: Five Dimensions of Dependency

the failure, exemplified by the black urban 'underclass' to develop and maintain 'normal' patterns of adult economic independence. (I refer here to the writings of Mead (1992), Moynihan (1973) and Wilson (1987), amongst others. See also the second section of this paper.)

By emotional dependence, I refer to the relationships which provide affective support, such as spousal, parent-child, or friendship relations. The final two categories, dependencies arising from mental and physical disabilities, are self-explanatory.

Dependent on What?

The second dimension concerns the source of support or assistance, put simply, dependency on who or on what. In most analyses, although not in all, dependency is at least implicitly recognised as a relational concept. The first two types here, dependency on family members or dependency on the state, are probably the more commonly recognised forms in the literature. Indeed, in much of the relevant literature, dependency is viewed almost exclusively in these terms.

Yet given the growing recognition worldwide of the important role played by the third or voluntary sector in providing human services, it seems inappropriate not to include dependency on the non-government sector. Recent work undertaken in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and elsewhere has begun to map the size, role and range of services and assistance provided in this way, an interest which had previously been almost the exclusive preserve of social historians.¹

Moreover, there are also the many kinds of support and assistance provided by non-family individuals, but not within the framework of charitable organisations. Under this category are included such a diverse range of dependencies as reliance on a friend or neighbour, for example to deliver shopping or perform errands for a disabled aged person, reliance on paid help, for example on a staff member to remove a bedpan in a nursing home, or reliance on the spontaneous charity of individuals, exemplified by those who support themselves by begging in the streets.

The last category, dependency on employment, is a less common understanding of dependency. Indeed, for some it may appear counter-intuitive, as economic independence is often held to be synonymous with having a secure and reasonably paid job. This is an issue which will recur later in the paper, but for now let it simply

1 Both the United Kingdom (Association of Researchers into Voluntary Action and Community Development - ARVAC) and the United States of America (Association for Research on Nonprofit Organisations and Voluntary Action - ARNOVA) have long established associations for research on the nonprofit sector, and recent years have seen the establishment of a similar association in Australia and New Zealand (Australian and New Zealand Third Sector Research). For international material see the John Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project (Salamon and Anheier 1992a, b) and for Australian material see Lyons (1993, 1994).

be noted that in the absence of 'independent wealth', many people will be dependent on employment, and perhaps a particular employer, for their continued economic well-being.

Dependent for What?

The third dimension involves categories of dependency classified in terms of what one is dependent for: the nature of the service being provided. Financial dependence includes the reliance of unemployed family members on the family wage-earner(s), and reliance on the state for one's income. It could also include reliance on an employer to continue one's employment, and to pay the agreed salary for that work.

Persons may be dependent on domestic services in a range of contexts. A child or an employed person may rely on a family member to undertake domestic labour responsibilities for them or on their behalf. A disabled person may rely on paid or unpaid assistance with such activities.

By care of self I refer to the range of caring work which may be required by someone who is not capable of self-care in the 'normal adult' sense. This includes the range of care activities required by a frail or disabled person, or a child.

Care of others brings into the classification the range of caring responsibilities that a person may have, but for one reason or another may be unable or unwilling to undertake. Employed persons may have to rely on others to care for their children, or their aged and disabled parent. Others may have to do so owing to geographical distance, or competing caring responsibilities, or as a consequence of their own personal disability or ill-health. This may or may not involve financial remuneration; it is the fact of relying on others to provide the care which is the defining feature.

Being dependent emotionally or for psychological support refers to the range of normal and abnormal human relationships which contribute (positively or negatively) to our emotional and psychological well-being.

Finally, we are all dependent on others not to violate our basic human and civil rights, not to abuse us physically or emotionally, not to steal or destroy our homes and possessions, and so on.

Causes Of Dependency

A fourth way of looking at dependency concerns its causes. Physical and mental impairments are two obvious causes of dependency, as is unemployment. An inadequate income may induce dependency even among the employed, however; it is therefore included as a separate category.

A legal system may cause dependency by not providing a class of individuals with basic citizenship rights, for example in the cases of coverture or slavery. Similarly, a

political system may not fully endow a class of residents with citizenship rights, such as the Turkish workers in contemporary Germany.

Psychological or emotional inadequacy, as an individual attribute, may lead to dependency on other individuals, but as already mentioned has also figured in the debates over the emergence of a culture of dependency.

References to dependency due to caring responsibilities first appeared in the feminist social policy literature, and are well illustrated by the economic dependency of married women caring for young children on a male breadwinner. The point is a more general one, however; caring responsibilities whether they be for children, aged parents, persons with a disability or in ill-health, all may render the caring individual dependent on a range of financial, domestic or other kinds of assistance.

Life-cycle stage refers typically to the dependencies of childhood and adolescence, but could also be applied to old age with movement out of the labour force. Finally, one's employment responsibilities can render one dependent on others to perform a range of functions, including for example the care of dependent family members, or domestic services.

Attributes of Dependency

The fifth and final dimension to be considered differs from the previous four in that the elements are essentially normative. They are thus less kinds of dependency than labels (often evaluative) which are frequently associated (implicitly or explicitly) with the term.

Legitimacy is perhaps the most common such attribute, referring to whether or not the particular dependency is regarded as an acceptable one. This acceptability may be from the perspective of a particular individual, or the broader society or some subset thereof.

Temporality distinguishes permanent dependencies (disabled persons, or the long-term unemployed) from those which are linked to temporary circumstances (ill-health or a short period of unemployment) or life phases (childhood).

Natural dependencies are not easily defined, often reflecting (implicit) assumptions rather than any more objectively ascertainable criteria. The term is used in association with life-cycle stages, and with regard to periods of ill-health and disability, but there is also not infrequently a connotation of dependency within the family being the defining feature.

Necessity and avoidability indicate the extent to which the dependent person or group is responsible for their situation of dependency. Necessity refers to whether or not the individual has viable alternatives or options in their current situation, whereas avoidability taps the notion of whether some previous individually determined behaviour is responsible for their current situation: hence the frequently

different meanings publicly attached to the dependency of AIDS victims if they are haemophiliacs, as compared to those who are intravenous drug users.

The relational aspect of dependency is somewhat different, in that it lacks a normative component. But while dependency is most frequently discussed as a relational concept - that is as involving a dependency on some person or thing external to the individual, in some of the dependency literature it is explicitly claimed to be a characteristic of the individual, as in the work of Margaret Baltes and Susan Silverbert (1994) which is discussed later in this paper.

Of Taxonomies and Typologies

The classification system I have just described is intended as illustrative, rather than exhaustive or definitive. The topics covered and perspectives brought to bear on the study of dependency are diverse, however, and it is useful to be reminded of the range of issues involved, and the potential to be working with quite different assumptions, when a subject such as dependency is discussed.

Moreover, there are a number of dependencies which I have excluded from this analysis, on the grounds that they are less central to the analysis of social policy and dependency. But the term is used in other, not unrelated literatures. One such example derives from dependency economics, the analysis of third world economies as dependent on more developed countries. Other examples could be drawn from the environmental literature on sustainable development. There is also the dependency of all members of any developed society on the continuing existence of the market for the supply of their basic goods and services, and hence their continuing existence. To that can be added the literature on drugs of dependence, and doubtless a number of other areas, and indeed in other historical epochs. So the schema is not by any means an exhaustive one.

Furthermore, I do not wish to argue that in the classification of dependency presented here, either the five dimensions, or the categories within those dimensions, are mutually exclusive. So, for example, economic or financial matters are included as one of the 'spheres' of dependency, as one of the 'causes' of dependency, and as one of the forms of assistance 'dependent for what' which can characterise the dependency relationship. And within the 'attributes' of dependency classification, labels such as avoidability and necessity overlap and are underpinned by notions of responsibility and blame, which themselves impinge on legitimacy.

It must also be recognised that each of the five dimensions outlined inter-relate, combine and re-combine in a variety of ways. So, a university student receiving AUSTUDY could be seen to be receiving economic support from the state due to his or her life-cycle stage - we would regard such a dependency as within the economic sphere. However, a physically disabled student receiving AUSTUDY and government financial assistance with continence aids, would add to this economic support from the government to allow self-care due to a disability, which might be regarded as within the economic sphere but also within that of physical disability.

I am not interested in where such a case really belongs, but rather simply to demonstrate that the different dimensions do interact, sometimes in a one to one way, but sometimes not; and that while sometimes the different dimensions duplicate each other, sometimes they do not.

The aim of this section was to sketch the range of ways in which dependency could be classified, and to establish that dependency is indeed a multi-dimensional concept. The purpose of the classification scheme is to help track the career of the concept, however, rather than to chop it up into mutually discrete categories, or as an end in itself. Thus, a simplified version of the classification scheme will be used to locate and contextualise the review of the major literatures undertaken in the next section.

2 The Relevant Literatures

This second part of the paper tracks the different uses of dependency across several related but diverse literatures. These are the social welfare literature, the culture of dependency literature, the developmental psychology literature, and the ageing and disability literatures, with briefer references to the sociology of the family literature, the social network literature, and the literature pertaining to dependency ratios.

The Social Welfare Literature

The central preoccupations of the social welfare literature on dependency have been firstly that social welfare should adequately protect those experiencing legitimate dependencies in a society, and secondly with whether such public assistance would mitigate against self-reliance, self-help, and family support. Such debates can be traced to the emergence of the British Poor Laws, and can also be found surrounding the emergence of social welfare legislation in the United States and Australia. Moreover, the debates continued through the intervening decades to the present day.

The argument is in essence one about financial incentives. If the government provides an adequate standard of living without requiring individuals to work, then there will be no incentive to work, and in the attempt to provide for a group of persons with 'legitimate' dependencies a cast of parasitic, publicly dependent people will have been created. The debates and the evidence around this question have been canvassed at length elsewhere, and will not be rehearsed further here. (For early examples see Malthus, 1826; Emerson, 1841; John Stuart Mill, 1848; Herbert Spencer, 1894; and Beveridge, 1942; more recently Titmuss, 1958/1976; 1968; Rein, 1970; and Goodin, 1988.)

For present purposes, I wish to make several points about the way in which dependency was interpreted within this tradition. First, dependency was generally and uncritically assumed to be synonymous with public dependency. Dependency could thus be unproblematically 'reduced' by decreasing the numbers of persons

reliant on the public sector. Second, it focused only on economic dependency in the traditional sense of reliance for financial support. Third, there was little recognition of the problems inherent in the categorisation of certain dependencies as 'legitimate' and others as 'illegitimate'. Fourth, there are notable exceptions to such generalisations, with writers such as Richard Titmuss (1958/1976) and subsequently Martin Rein (1970) pointing to the normative assumptions in such analyses, and others such as Goodin (1988, ch.12) providing more sophisticated accounts explicitly recognising, for example, that a reduction of (public) dependency so defined was in fact likely to be an increase in dependency within the family.

The late 1970s and early 1980s saw the emergence of a series of feminist analyses, largely emergent from this essentially British social welfare tradition, by such authors as David and Land (1983), Land (1978, 1985), McIntosh (1978, 1979) Rose (1981), Tulloch (1984) and Wilson (1977). The thrust of this work was that much social policy presumed a gendered division of labour, such that women's economic dependency on men was both assumed and reinforced by the existing system of social provision. While this work consistently presented a different account of dependency to that which had hitherto characterised the literature, recognising the existence of dependency within the private as well as the public sphere, and the role played by the family wage system as an underlying cause 'creating' women's dependency, there was also a notable conflict amongst feminist accounts of the way in which the welfare state 'structured' women's dependence.

The early accounts cited above emphasised the assumed dependency of women: that welfare provisions for single mothers, for example, simply assumed that a woman with children would be dependent on a man, and that only if there was no man available would the state step in and support that dependency. This was viewed as reinforcing women's dependency on men and within the family, firstly by viewing it as a natural and legitimate dependency, and secondly by providing women with only unattractive and stigmatised forms of welfare payment as an alternative.

These analyses drew on and intermeshed with earlier and contemporaneous feminist analyses of the family, which emphasised the ways in which the family was centrally responsible for the continued oppression of women (Barrett, 1980, ch 6; Barrett and McIntosh, 1982/1991; Firestone, 1979; Oakley, 1974; Segal, 1983). Individualism, isolation in the home, unequal sexual power, responsibility for domestic labour, caring responsibilities, a disadvantaged base from which to engage in the labour market - all of this and more was said to reinforce in both ideological and institutional ways women's dependency both within the family and more broadly within society.

Such analyses were also connected with the emerging construction in the 1980s of welfare as a form of social control - the very structure of the welfare state was viewed as increasing the control exerted over women, and the oppression and dependency experienced by them. Some authors suggest that the form and nature of the state's control over women is directly oppressive (see for example Bryson, 1983; Cox, 1983; Nelson, 1990). In other related accounts the role of the state in requiring,

creating and maintaining particular forms of women's dependency largely via their continued oppression within the family is viewed with equal disfavour (Abramovitz, 1988; Barrett, 1980; Gordon, 1990). In its most negative form, these analysts refer to a virtual shuffle between dependence on the state or dependence on men, with dependency on one or the other emerging as all but unavoidable (Zinn, 1984).

While sharing many of these perceptions of the patriarchal welfare state, there have also been somewhat contradictory propositions put forward by authors such as Carol Pateman (1988) that dependence on the state is frequently preferable to dependence on a man, or Frances Fox Piven's argument that the welfare state has actually lead to increased independence for women (1990). Certainly, in the debates that surrounded the introduction of the Child Support Scheme in Australia, women's preference (and the greater associated independence) for reliance on the state rather than former husbands or partners was put forward as an important issue by feminist activists.

These feminist accounts added significant sophistication to the mainstream literature as it existed in the 1970s and 1980s. They focused attention squarely on the reality of dependency within the family, and specifically on women's dependence on men. Dependency within the private sphere became a legitimate object of analysis. Moreover, the movement between spheres - from dependency on a male breadwinner to dependency on the state, was also recognised, and with it, particularly in more recent work, there came at least a tacit recognition that simply transferring dependency from one sphere to another did not necessarily change the fact of that dependency. Finally, feminist writers revealed and critically analysed the normative bases underlying various accounts of dependencies - most particularly notions of naturalness and legitimacy.

There were no major developments in this literature through the late 1980s and early 1990s, until the emergence of Fraser and Gordon's genealogy of dependency in 1994. However, Fraser and Gordon specifically situate their task as an attempt to explain and dispel current constructions of dependency as imbued in the American debates about welfare mothers. And indeed, given the emphasis on the moral/psychological register, and on dependency as an individual trait, it seems more consistent with the American culture of dependency literature than the predominantly British social welfare intellectual tradition which has been discussed here. The issues raised by Fraser and Gordon, then, are taken up in the following discussion of that literature.

The Culture of Dependency Literature

The culture of dependency literature dates from Moynihan's often cited introduction to his 1973 book on the politics of a guaranteed national income: 'the issue of welfare is the issue of dependency'. Moynihan goes on to outline the undesirable personal attributes associated with dependency, and its 'abnormal' status for adults. These ideas have been taken up, developed and modified by a range of writers, but perhaps most notably by Charles Murray (1984), Lawrence Mead (1986) William Julius Wilson (1987) and Christopher Jencks (1992).

While there is disagreement as to the causal mechanism, with the more conservative writers arguing for biology, psychology and family pathology, and the more liberal for social and economic context, there are nonetheless some generalisable points to be extracted.² First, it is in these debates that dependency emerges as a personal attribute, in addition to the older relational sense of being dependent on the state. Second, this dependency is held to be created, in varying ways and to varying extents, by social welfare. Third, the notion of blame, of targeting the victim, emerges centrally in these debates. Fourth, while some of these ideas have been taken up in Britain by writers such as Hartley Dean and Peter Taylor-Gooby, this is predominantly an American literature. As such, it combines a number of racial, sexual and social stereotypes surrounding the black urban poor, and particularly black welfare mothers, which have not gone unchallenged by American feminist writers (see Barbara Nelson, 1990 and Linda Gordon, 1992).

More recently, under the influence of Fraser and Gordon (1994a, b) as already mentioned, of Frances Fox Piven (1994) and Jacqueline Jones in her book on the history of the American underclasses from the Civil war onward (1992), this work has gathered momentum and depth, emphasising not just the gendered and racial nature of the culture of dependency argument, but also the changing meanings attached to dependency, and the ideological components of such debates. Fraser and Gordon's work provides a good example of recent developments in this literature.

Fraser and Gordon provide a detailed historically based account of the changing meanings associated with dependency in four 'registers of meaning' (economic, socio-legal, political and moral-psychological). Their argument is that dependency is an ideological term, their concern in this paper is to 'dispel the doxa surrounding current US discussions of dependency' (1994b: 310), and their intent is to dislodge the force of the stereotype of 'welfare mothers':

In current debates, the expression **welfare dependency** evokes the image of 'the welfare mother', often figured as a young, unmarried black woman (perhaps even a teenager) of uncontrolled sexuality. The power of this image is overdetermined, we contend, since it condenses multiple and often contradictory meanings of dependency. Only by disaggregating those different strands, by unpacking the tacit assumptions and evaluative connotations that underlie them, can we begin to understand, and dislodge, the force of that stereotype. (Fraser and Gordon, 1994b: 311-12)

This paper signals a key development to the dependency literature. It takes account, not only of the different spheres in which dependency operates, but also of the changing historical meanings associated with the term in those spheres. The self-

2 For a succinct indication of some of the issues and differences of position within this literature, see Fraser and Gordon (1994b: 328-9); a lengthier version may be found in Dean and Taylor-Gooby (1992, ch. 2).

conscious recognition of dependency as an ideological term, and the grounding of that recognition in a detailed historical analysis of linguistic and social-structural change, is another key advance. And of some interest is the inclusion of a specifically moral/psychological register of dependency, incorporating both the culture of dependency literature and a hitherto specifically feminist (or anti-feminist) literature:

...a burgeoning cultural-feminist, post feminist, and antifeminist self-help and pop-psychology literature [in which] women's dependency was hypostatized as a depth-psychological gender structure: 'women's hidden fear of independence' or 'the wish to be saved'...[also] ... a spate of books about 'codependency', a supposedly prototypically female syndrome of supporting or 'enabling' the dependency of someone else. (Fraser and Gordon, 1994b: 325-6)

A particular usefulness of this incorporation lies in the social problem to which Fraser and Gordon's article is directed - the construction of 'Aid to Families with Dependent Children' (AFDC) mothers in contemporary American literature. But it is as noteworthy as it is perhaps inevitable that the particular construction (AFDC mothers) with which they are preoccupied should strongly inflect their analysis of dependency.

While initially a paper which self-consciously takes account of the culturally and temporally specific nature of dependency, Fraser and Gordon then bring the power of that argument to bear in explaining one particular historically specific instance of dependency. In doing so, they fail to extend their analysis to explore other forms of dependency, or to examine why these particular social groups have been so labelled. As they themselves point out, theirs is not a causal analysis. But the task of identifying and seeking to explain generalisable attributes in this and other constructions of dependency is an important one, and one to which I return later in this paper.

The Psychological Literature

The predominantly pop-psychology literature on co-dependency and the Cinderella complex referred to by Fraser and Gordon has some connections to a more established and mainstream academic tradition, that of developmental psychology. It is this broader and more academically sound literature which is the focus of the present discussion.

From this perspective, dependence or independence is explicitly an individual trait, and the transition from dependence to independence is part of the naturally occurring, developmental process. Dependency is thus a normal trait in the early years of life, progressively shed through childhood, adolescence and the young adult stage of the life cycle until the normal, mature pattern of independent behaviour is reached. While originally a model applied to the early and middle stages of the life

cycle, interest has recently been extended to the latter years of the life cycle in this literature. Margret Baltes and Susan Silverberg (1994) provide a valuable introduction to this approach in their work on dependency throughout the life-cycle. (See also Hockey and James, 1993.)

This approach shares with the more popular psychological work on co-dependency and the Cinderella complex an assumption that while dependency is normal at the early life-cycle stages, any divergence from these normal and naturally occurring dependencies is pathological. Dependency for adults is thus a negative state. The paradigm was, of course, predominantly concerned to analyse development from infancy to adulthood, rather than the reverse process in old age.

The model has been extended, however, in the work which specifically focuses on ageing and dependency, to incorporate 'normal' increases in dependency associated with loss or decline of physical and mental functioning. Baltes and Silverberg argue that acceptance of dependency in old age can represent positive adaptation strategy, if dependence in some areas is used to protect reduced resources in order to maintain independence in 'key' areas for that individual. Certain levels of dependency can thus be seen as positive (and 'normal') at latter stages of the life-cycle.

An interesting correlate of this approach is the potential for the construction of unnecessary dependency via care-giving behaviour - what Baltes refers to as the 'dependency-support script' (Baltes, 1988; Baltes and Silverberg, 1994). The point at issue here is the psychological creation of dependency, rather than the social or structural construction referred to by earlier writers.³ Baltes is here concerned with the creation or fostering of dependency in individuals as a result of 'overcare', particularly in an institutional context. She warns that in such circumstances, the reinforcement of higher than necessary levels of dependency resulting from physical or organic causes may become unnecessarily equated with decisional dependency.

At this point, we have undoubtedly moved into an area where the psychological and the gerontological literatures can no longer be usefully separated. But before leaving the developmental psychology literature, some general points can be made. First, it uncritically posits natural and therefore positive dependencies at certain stages of the life-cycle, and departures from these normal patterns are regarded as pathological. Second, the unnecessary creation of dependency through the 'dependency support script', and certain kinds of dependency such as decisional rather than organic, are regarded as undesirable, suggesting that while certain kinds and levels of dependency are acceptable in old age they should, wherever possible, be minimised. Dependency remains, therefore, an undesirable state. Third, while this perspective starts from the premise that dependency is an individual trait, it is evident in these discussions of the possible creation of dependency through the 'dependency support script', that at least some elements of dependency are unavoidably relational in character.

3 For a discussion of the structural creation of dependency, in old age, see Walker (1980, 1982), Townsend (1981) and Gibson (1984). This point is also discussed later in this paper.

The Ageing and Disability Literatures

Not surprisingly, dependency has long been a central issue in the ageing and disability literatures. The predominant sense, however, has been with regard to physical or mental disabilities. Curiously, the debates characteristic of the social welfare literature concerning the creation of economic dependency seemed to have relatively little salience with regard to the aged and income security. This may reflect what a number of commentators have claimed as the sense of legitimacy associated with income support for the aged,⁴ or simply a lack of integration between the two literatures. However, it was not until the early 1980s that Alan Walker (1980; 1982) and Peter Townsend (1981) drew attention to the social construction of dependency in old age - by which they meant the way in which labour force participation and income security provisions structured the economic circumstances of old people in contemporary society. Their work focused on dependency almost exclusively in an economic sense, and largely with regard to public dependency. In an earlier paper, I extended these ideas concerning the creation of dependency amongst the aged, in terms of both family and state provision of care, and with regard to reasons of physical and mental, as well as economic, disadvantage (Gibson, 1985).

Probably the most common treatment of dependency in the gerontological and disability literatures has been as a virtual synonym for disability. This is in a sense a specialist usage of the term, although the extent to which it is a characteristic of the individual or of the level of care needed by the individual has remained an unresolved tension.⁵ The common measures of functional ability in old age, the so called ADL (Activities of Daily Living) and IADL (Instrumental Activities of Daily Living) scales, provide an excellent illustration of the interpenetration of the concepts. Used as standard measures of disability, individuals are scored on a set of physical items such as capacity for self care or ability to climb a flight of stairs, using a set of responses indicating whether the respondent can perform the task without difficulty, with difficulty, only with help or not at all. Level of disability is thus measured in terms of need for assistance - or dependency on the services of others. In a sense this overlap is co-terminus with the definitional problems surrounding such terms as handicap, impairment and disability in both the ageing and disability fields, and there is no reason to think that such issues will be easily, or even usefully, resolved.⁶

4 See for example Kewley (1980, ch.1: 20) for an account of the notion of 'an earned right' associated with the Australian aged pension, or in the American literature Fraser and Gordon (1994a: 14).

5 For a review of the use of the term in the gerontological literature, incorporating reference to the range of physical, mental and social attributes which influence dependency among aged persons, and a number of key measurement issues see Rickwood (1994).

6 It is at least arguable that one is unlikely to get consistent terminology in a research sense in fields where the politically correct usage continues to evolve. In part, the usage favoured by activists at any point in time is informed by an attempt to avoid negative stereotypes associated with a previous form of dominant usage, and also to draw attention to a particular aspect of their 'case'. While it is possible that current usage has reached a final evolutionary endpoint, and no further changes will occur, this seems unlikely. Note for example Morris's (1993: x) reversion to and argument in favour of the term 'the disabled', in preference to the current emphasis on 'people with disabilities'.

An area of the ageing and disability literature where dependency and related issues are discussed from a third, and somewhat different, perspective is the work on caring. This literature has been heavily influenced by feminists, among whom the main preoccupation has been a recognition of the 'burden of care', and more generally the amount of unpaid work, carried out by women caring for a range of dependent persons. (For early examples of this work see Ungerson, 1987 and Woerness, 1987; for a recent overview see Gibson and Allen 1993.) This work began to emerge at the same time that government policies were pushing for increased community care, and a move away from (expensive) institutional care. The essence of the earlier accounts was that care in the community was care by the community, care by the community was care by the family, and care by the family was care by women.

Here the notion of dependency is explored largely in the private sphere, and in terms of its negative impact on the carer. Dependency is thus essentially conceptualised as external to the carer, but experienced by her - it is the other person's attribute. In their recent work, Fraser and Gordon (1994a, b), following Sapiro (1990), argue that it is the care which women provide for dependent people which renders them vulnerable to dependency themselves. In all of this, dependency continues to be seen as inherently undesirable, but in this sense for those who carry the 'burden'.

The work on caring has also been heavily influenced by researchers from a quite separate background, psychologists operating from within a modified stress paradigm. Again, the key factor is the 'burden of care', but this time with a particular focus on the 'coping capacity' of the individual. Dependency is essentially a characteristic of the care recipient. Only very recently, and it remains to be seen whether there is any influence on the more general field, has the role of the relationship between the person being cared for and the carer been articulated as a key determinate of well-being and coping capacity.⁷

While virtually all of these debates remain germane to both the ageing as well as the disability literature, many of these illustrations are drawn from social gerontology. The final aspect of this literature to be discussed, however, while relevant to both, is drawn from the disability literature.

In recent years disabled feminist Jenny Morris (1993a, b) has launched a strong critique of much of the feminist work on caring, arguing that this work neglects the perspective of old and disable persons themselves - most of whom, she points out, are also women. More generally, this is the literature (and the associated political movement) which argues for self-determination, empowerment and more specifically the establishment of independent living arrangements for the aged and disabled. (See, for example, Brisendon, 1989 and Oliver, 1990.)

7 For prototypical examples of this work see Lawton et al. (1991) and Pearlin et al. (1990). For a critical overview of the field and the argument in favour of including dyadic aspects see Braithwaite (1994).

Morris argues that living independently is indeed possible even for severely disabled persons, and leaves the reader in no doubt that independence is not merely to do with not living in an institution. The issue which emerges strongly is one of individual control, control over what arrangements and services are required, how they are provided and by whom. In these arguments, it is control over the completion of tasks, rather than being able to do them for oneself, which defines independence. Here again, a different aspect of dependence is emerging. But this heralds a shift of focus on to the nature of the dependency relationship, and the nature of dependency itself, issues which have been recurrent but rarely central in the various literatures reviewed up to this point. The question of the nature of dependency, and what constitutes its singularly negative aspect(s), is explored further in the final section of this paper.

Dependency Ratios

The final literature to be included here is described only briefly. Dependency ratios are a simple indicator used predominantly by demographers and economists, generally in discussions pertaining to labour markets and social security provisions. They indicate the relative proportion of the population which is of working age compared to that which is not, and for the purposes of this overview I wish only to note that they assume dependency to be an economic attribute, and essentially related to non-labour market participation due to old age and/or youth. Other dependencies, including those of adult women within the family, have not generally been regarded as dependency in these ratios. These ratios are discussed in detail in Encel's (1994) paper in this volume.

Locating the Literature

In this second section of the paper, I have described the emergence and dominant usage of the term dependency across several literatures. Such a review necessarily focuses on the contexts, situations and problems whereby the term is invoked or employed. What such a review fails to focus attention on is the absences - the areas where dependency has not emerged as a relevant issue.

In the first section of this paper, I outlined five different dimensions of dependency. In so doing, I argued that those dimensions were intended to be neither mutually exclusive nor completely inclusive, but rather to represent reasonably well the range of dimensions across which the concept was relevant. What remains to be undertaken, then, is a comparison of the way in which the term has actually emerged in the literatures just reviewed, with the range of uses which could possibly have emerged. Such a task is a useful device for systematically directing our attention to the non-uses of dependency, as well as its uses. In locating these literatures in relation to the key dimensions outlined, some simplification of the five dimensional model is required if the task is to be a manageable one. To do so in a five dimensional figure would be schematically and conceptually complex, and not essential to present purposes.

The evaluative or normative dimension (attributes) can legitimately be excluded from the present task. The fact that dependency is being constructed in one way or another, as good or bad or legitimate or whatever, is not actually at issue in this stage of the analysis. Rather it is the more basic question as to whether particular kinds of interactions are discussed in terms of dependency at all which is under investigation. From the remaining four dimensions, it is possible to create a simple two dimensional model which summarises most of the issues raised in the first part of the paper.

To achieve this simplified version, I have essentially taken six reasonably discrete areas of dependency - economic (formal sphere), economic (domestic sphere), politico/legal, psychological, emotional and disability related- and crosstabulated them against the agency or individual depended upon. While a more finely grained charting could be achieving by incorporating other dimensions, such as the kind of service or assistance depended upon, the twofold version is a sufficient illustration.

The result is presented schematically in Figure 2. Across the top of the table, are the agents or organisations on which one might depend, - the family, the state, and so on. Moving down the table are the main sets or broad areas of dependency - dependency associated with the formal economic sector (essentially financial dependency), then dependency pertaining to the informal economic sector (essentially relating to domestic and caring work). And so on. Using this simple template, it is possible to locate the relevant 'dependency' literatures, noting the combinations which are typically analysed in terms of dependency, and those which are not.

To begin with the formal economic sector, it is clearly logically possible to be dependent in a financial sense on family members, the state, non-government organisations, other individuals and one's employer. Yet the majority of these relationships are not generally coded as dependency relationships in the literatures just reviewed. Financial reliance on family members and the state have clearly both been included in the analysis of dependency in the social welfare literature, although dependency within the family has been more commonly recognised in the feminist aspects of that literature. The sociology of the family literature is another arena in which economic dependency within the family has been explored. The ageing and disability literatures both engage with notions of economic reliance on the state, as does the culture of dependency literature and work on dependency ratios.

But financial reliance on the non-government sector, on individuals and on employment do not figure strongly in debates about dependency. They are not inscribed as dependency relationships. And yet such relationships could logically be so regarded. Recent years have seen a growing international acceptance of the role of the non-government sector in welfare, many people are reliant on this sector for emergency relief and charitable support. Similarly, the presence of street beggars in many European and American, as well as third world cities, suggest some reliance on individual charity. Finally, as Fraser and Gordon note, reliance on employers was

Figure 2: A Schema of Dependency Literatures

	Family Members	The State	NGOs	Individuals	Employment
Economic (Formal)	Social Welfare; Sociology of Family	Social Welfare; Ageing and Disability; Dependency Ratio; Culture of Dependency			
Economic (Domestic)	Sociology of Family				
Political/Legal					
Psychological	Psychological	Culture of Poverty		Psychological	
Emotional					
Mental and Physical Disabilities	Ageing and Disability	Ageing and Disability	Ageing and Disability	Ageing and Disability	

at one historical point regarded as a dependency relationship (1994a, b). It is in the modern world that employment has come to be synonymous with independence - but there is not reason for it to be. If we are dependent on our employers for our income - this too is a dependency relationship.

The second line of the table concerns the informal economy, or domestic services. Here, the reliance of men (usually) on the unpaid domestic services of women is the subject of scrutiny in the sociology of the family (at least by feminist commentators) but nowhere else does this figure as a dependency relationship. Yet arguably, in a so-called traditional family setting, a man in full-time employment is as reliant on his wife for her household services and the care of any dependent children as she is on his income. An argument could even be made that the husband is potentially more reliant, in that an alternative income may at least be more quickly come by than an alternative wife and children. Yet the wife is traditionally seen as dependent, while the husband is not.

Even if part-time paid work by the wife were added to this traditional scenario, so that the wife contributes domestic, caring and financial resources to the household,

dependency would remain associated with the wife rather than the husband in the literatures discussed. Reliance on a partner for domestic and caring services is simply not inscribed with the label, dependency. Similarly, where domestic services are purchased on the market, that is where one individual is reliant on the paid services of another to maintain or contribute to the maintenance of his/her domestic sphere, this is not generally held to be a dependency relationship, nor discussed in those terms in the relevant literatures. Yet, in reality, for those people who have had to find replacement domestic services at particular life stages, to help with housework or the care of children or frail aged parents, these are indeed dependency relationships of a kind.

I do not intend to elaborate in further detail each of the particular cells of this table. To some extent the figure is self explanatory, and in any case it is the blank cells which are particularly pertinent here. Focusing on the blank areas of the table reveals the areas where relationships which have the potential to be described and analysed in terms of dependency have not been so inscribed in the relevant literatures. While it is clearly possible to have dependency relationships in those areas, these have not been seen as appropriate subjects or examples of dependency.

The kinds of relationships which are discussed in the various literatures on dependency are essentially spotty - and not the full range of possible ones. While a simple explanation could be offered for any one absence (for example, economic reliance on the non-government sector may simply be an idea whose time has not quite yet come) there is also at least the possibility that a more general explanation may also serve. In search of such an explanation, it is fruitful to turn to the nature of dependency itself, and in particular to the question of what constitutes or otherwise constructs the unremittingly negative aura which characterises the term 'dependency'.

3 What's Wrong With Dependency?

The review of dependency accomplished in this paper reveals a variety of uses of the term, but also a surprising number of generalisable points.

First, dependency is by and large treated as dependent on something - in certain aspects of certain literatures it has been held to be an attribute of the individual, but even where this is explicitly the case there is a tendency for that use to break down, and the relational aspects of the term to recur. Moreover, this is an important generalisation, because it is actually the fact of being dependent on someone or something on which many of these debates turn.

Second, it is clear that some dependencies are acceptable, and some are not. In certain of the literatures reviewed, this precept is taken uncritically to be the case. In others, particularly the work which explores the historical context of dependency, what does and does not constitute acceptable dependency is seen to be normatively constructed - in certain societies at certain times.

Third, it is generally held that reducing dependency is by definition a good thing. Occasional attempts have been made to reclaim dependency as a valued quality, in keeping with moves, for example, toward more 'woman centred' models of feminist analysis (Pearce, 1990). This is not however, the dominant discourse. The more normal formulation is that of dependency, other than that which is held to be natural or unavoidable, as an undesirable state. This perspective is illustrated by Fraser and Gordon who, while recognising that some dependency should be supported, attempts to resolve this issue by setting up a distinction between 'socially necessary' and 'surplus' dependency (Fraser and Gordon, 1994b: 23-4).

This perspective might best be summarised as the maximally reducible model of dependency, and it characterises almost all of the literature canvassed in one form or the other. There may be disagreement about how to get rid of it - transfer it from public to private, or private to public, re-structure, re-inscribing and so forth - but there is certainly agreement that generally speaking it should be got rid of. Why?

Inevitably, our social world will be characterised by certain kinds and levels of dependency and interdependency. Much of it cannot be avoided, and much of it we do not wish to avoid. The question 'what is really wrong with dependency?' provides the key to push the boundaries of these debates in a more productive and positive direction.

I have argued in the past for a focus on what it is that makes dependency undesirable for those who are in a dependent state, and on what can we do about those undesirable attributes - rather than attempting to eradicate dependency itself (Gibson, 1985). Any attack on dependency, or attempt to reduce the amount of dependency to minimally necessary amount, has as a necessary corollary the further reinforcement of the negative stigma associated with being dependent.

Dependency is largely ineradicable in society as we know it - and dependency as such is surely not the problem. As Durkheim pointed out members of an increasingly sophisticated and integrated society will be increasingly dependent on each other - or interdependent if that terminology is preferred. Indeed, the distinction between dependence and interdependence is less important in this context than is often assumed. There may be some initial intuitive appeal in assuming that interdependency is the acceptable face of dependency, and that where there is some form of mutually beneficial exchange the 'problem' of dependency will not arise.

Yet interdependency is not the solution it is somehow and sometimes purported to be. Simply being interdependent does not preclude the possibility that one person is more dependent on the relationship than the other. And if interdependency is confined to those relations where the exchange is of exactly equal magnitude and importance to the two individuals or agents involved, it becomes relevant to such a small proportion of potential interdependencies as to render it virtually useless.

If being interdependent does not necessarily make the circumstances of the 'more dependent' person acceptable, the issue of what makes dependency undesirable cannot be resolved only in terms of the inequality of the exchange. The relative

importance of the exchange to the individual is the question of central importance. The underlying dimension is that of power, and can be easily operationalised in a range of contexts in terms of alternatives and discretion.

If the services which I require are available at the discretion of a service provider, and if I have no alternatives to those particular services, then I am inevitably in a powerless position with regard to those services - whether they be financial, domestic or physical care.⁸ If the services which I require are provided by my daughter, and she can choose whether or not to provide that assistance, and no other potential source of help is available to me, I remain dependent on her assistance - even if she lives in my house, uses my income and has the complete use of the family car. If I am bed-bound in a nursing home, and my personal care assistant does not choose to give me a backrub to prevent bed-sores, or gives it in an unsatisfactory or painful way - there is little I can do even though she is paid for her services.

At the individual level, then, I would argue that what is undesirable about dependency is the lack of power and control over basic elements of one's lived existence, and hence that it is the lack of power which requires addressing. Attempts to reduce the number of dependent persons always leave unresolved the fact that dependencies exist, and inevitably reinforce the negative circumstances of those who remain dependent.

This analysis of the negative aspects of dependency at the individual level is one which I, and others, have developed in earlier work. (See Gibson, 1985 and Goodin 1985; 1988, ch12.) In this paper, however, I wish to extend that analysis to a societal level.

It has been demonstrated in this paper that only certain kinds of relationships or life circumstances are separated out by society as constituting 'dependency'. This leads to the question as to what aspects of dependency are separated out as problems by a particular society, and why and when this occurs. Fraser and Gordon tracked the selective history of the usage of the term and demonstrated its changing meanings, thereby attempting to demystify the 'aura' of dependency surrounding AFDC mothers. I have attempted to direct attention to those relationships and circumstances which are not labelled 'dependency' in our society, but in logical terms could equally well be. It is the absences as well as the presences which I have been at pains to point out in my own review.

What are the particular characteristics which allow certain dependencies to be so defined in any society, and to carry the particular aura of lacking in legitimacy, acceptability, naturalness and normality that leaves dependency, as Fraser and Gordon (1994b: 4) so aptly comment 'leak[ing] a profusion of stigmatising connotations - racial, sexual misogynist, and more'? Why are some dependency

8 This point is most recently exemplified in the work of Jenny Morris, when she analyses a range of possible care situations for disabled persons, emphasising the need for maximising control of those services for the disabled person.

relations defined as 'dependent' in contemporary society, and others not? Why can there be ready recognition of the role played by many women in the 1980s and 1990s in carrying out the 'second shift' - while the dependency of men in particular, and society in general, on women continuing to so is not recognised at all? Why are certain groups in society labelled dependent?

Dependency at this societal labelling level is clearly an ideological strategy. The key issue concerning the current major victims of the label - AFDC mothers in the US - is not so much to debate the legitimacy of the term, but rather to ask why and how it has been successfully manipulated. In other societies, such labelling of 'the other' has been used to distract attention from economic ills and to justify reductions in welfare spending. Such strategies during periods of economic 'belt tightening' allow governments to shift potential blame from their own economic management to particular segments (or victims) within the society: so the 'dole bludgers' in Australia in the economic decline (and high unemployment) of the late 1970s, and the Asian migrants under similar circumstances in the early 1980s, so too the East European migrants in contemporary Germany.

Welfare mothers in the United States are neither increasing rapidly in numbers nor in terms of the proportion of the Social Security budget. In fact, the value of the benefits has been substantially reduced in real terms. Nor is the care of children a particularly low priority in public attitudes to welfare in contemporary American society (Cook and Barrett, 1992). The logic of the choice of 'welfare mothers' as the current 'icon of dependency' does not lie in any of these possible explanations. Rather, this is a group which is powerless to defend itself, and which has little alternative but to accept the circumstances in which they find themselves. Nelson (1990), Gordon (1992) and others following their accounts have pointed to the discretionary aspect of AFDC as a key issue in the difficult position in which AFDC recipients find themselves. While such factors undoubtedly affect the individual experience of being a welfare mother, and hence the experience of dependency at the individual level, it has perhaps less explanatory power to offer in terms of the successful labelling of such groups of people as dependent at the societal level. Other dependencies, such as the dependencies of men on the continued supply of services of women, are not so characterised. Were such labels to be applied, one imagines that the political backlash would be quite significant for the government in power. The voting block of young black inner city welfare mothers has undoubtedly yet to flex its political muscle!

The problem, then, is not the problem of dependency *per se*. It is the problem of how dependency within social policy is constructed, at both the individual and the societal level. At the individual level, it is the lack of alternatives coupled with discretionary control over whether the assistance is given, which renders a particular exchange an undesirable one. At the societal level, it is the labelling of particular groups of people in particular circumstances, most notably those who have neither alternatives to escape the situation or the political power to do anything about the way in which they are treated, which allows the construction and application of the particular social label - dependent.

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Youth (In)Dependence: Current Theory and Policy Issues

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1 Introduction

The social construction of the category 'youth' and its earlier variant 'adolescence' is a recent, post-world war two phenomenon. Changes in the nature, timing and length of the process of moving from childhood to adulthood in western societies have resulted in the emergence of a separate intermediate phase between the two. It is this new stage in the life course that is described as 'youth'.

Youth, which is usually located somewhere in the period between early teens and mid-twenties, is distinguished from both childhood and adulthood. Although they are socially constructed categories, youth and childhood at one end of the age spectrum and old age at the other are categories where age is the primary defining characteristic. The identification of each of these three social categories with a particular age-defined and hence biologically determined state means, therefore, that in the social representations of their characteristics and status, physical and psychological attributes are given greater weight than socio-cultural factors. On the basis of their ages which place them outside what is perceived as the average age span of adulthood, the young and the old are seen as lacking the full range of capabilities required of an adult, given the roles and responsibilities of adults in societies like our own. Age, however, for those within the normative middle age range is a far less significant social indicator and social differentiation among adults is much more dependent on social than on biological variables. Consequently, in both social and sociological conceptions of the characteristics of those located at different stages of the life course, the relative importance of biological versus socio-cultural factors varies according to the stage.

It is probably fair to say that until recently, those academics, mainly sociologists and psychologists, who were interested in the study of childhood, youth or old age, tended to accept the everyday conceptions of these terms and categories as theoretically unproblematic and focused their attention on empirical and policy-oriented questions. It was only in the 1980s that the categories 'youth' and 'old age' themselves attracted critical theoretical attention, and this was partly for intellectual and partly for social reasons.

In the first place, there were major changes in the nature and scale of youth and old age which forced some rethinking by academic writers and researchers and by professionals and policy-makers about both these phenomena, their causes and consequences, and the problems they posed for society.

Secondly and perhaps more importantly, the 1970s and 1980s were a time of critical re-evaluation of a number of the basic assumptions of western social theory. As part of this, the nature/culture dichotomy and the justification this had provided for the conventional division of labour between the biological and the social sciences began to be questioned. This led within sociology to new conceptualisations of biology and the body which avoided the earlier dualisms by firmly establishing that, whatever claims might be made for the ontological status of the biological aspects of human nature, biology as both a concept and a substantive body of knowledge about human beings does not exist outside culture (e.g. Turner, 1984; Shilling, 1993). Age thus comes to be seen less as a factor in its own right, as a measure of physiological and related psychological attributes and capacities, and more as an indicator only of a set of social characteristics not derived from biological age *per se* but linked to the occupancy of a particular social status or role that is associated with age (Finch, 1986; Riley, 1987). Consistent with this is the shift from the biologically-based notion of life-cycle to the more sociological notion of life-course, which recognises more complex interrelationships between age, biology and social conditions. The concept of life-course therefore allows for a greater emphasis on variation in human experience, even among individuals who are seen as members of a common biologically-defined category, such variation reflecting diversity of historical and social contexts (Bryman et al., 1987; Cohen, 1987).

2 Youth as a Social Status

Changes in the key institutions of education and employment in the second half of the twentieth century have been largely responsible for the creation of this new social category of youth. Youth occupies an intermediate social position between child and adult. If childhood is identified with dependency and adulthood with independence, then youth refers to that period in which in each generation the relevant cohort of individuals moves from dependency to independence. Because age alone is not the determinant, there is, however, no uniform or agreed set of limits to this period. The situation is further complicated by the fact that there are a number of culturally recognised status markers each of which represents a component of adulthood but which range over a broad age span, and the relationships between these markers and particular ages vary within and between societies. Gill Jones and Claire Wallace (1992: 103), for example, show that in Britain, depending on the activity in question, an individual may be treated as an adult in law as early as 10 or 12 (the age at which one attains criminal responsibility) or not until one has reached 25 (the age at which social security benefits are paid at the full rate).

The concept of 'transitions' has played a central role in the sociological analysis of the processes involved in moving from childhood to adulthood. Transitions is the term used to capture the notion of patterned sequences of change experienced by young people across a number of spheres, the principal transitions being: from full-time education into paid employment; from being financially supported by parents to having an adequate income of one's own; from living in the family home to setting up alone or with peers in separate accommodation; from primary reliance on relationships with family members to establishing social and sexual relationships based on choice, and extending to marriage and becoming a parent. In the past, for most young people these events occurred in a particular sequence and without much apparent difficulty, making the whole process more predictable and easier to accomplish, although there were some variations in the pathways followed by individuals with different personal and social characteristics, such as income or class, race, ethnicity, gender or geographical location (Wallace, 1987; Wilson and Wyn, 1987; Hartley, 1989). The typical pattern involved two main stages: first, entry into paid work following immediately upon leaving school (or other full-time education); and some time later, marriage, which was accompanied by moving out of the parental home and setting up a new home.

In this sequence, the school to work transition is seen as the most critical and hence it is the one that has in the past received by far the most academic and policy attention (for example, in Australia, Williams et al., 1980; Anderson and Blakers, 1983; Poole, 1983). It is this transition that has also recently become far less straightforward and routine for the majority of young people and therefore attracted considerable government and academic attention (Roll, 1988; Dwyer and Wilson, 1991; Winderlich, 1991; Poole, 1992). In the 1980s, structural changes in the labour market and in the types and levels of occupational skill demanded, related changes in education and training, both at school and post-school levels, and other government policy changes in social security and family support, quite apart from two recessions, have had profound consequences for young people generally and for the way they experience the various processes involved in becoming adult. Writers in England from the early 1980s on and more recently in Australia, when describing the situations facing young people today, use language such as 'broken', 'fractured', 'dislocated' or 'disrupted' to capture the negative effects these societal changes have had on the processes of transition (Roberts, 1984; Wallace, 1987; Polk and Tait, 1990; White, 1990). Christine Griffin (1993: 2) gives a perceptive account of the influence of changing social and economic conditions on the 'causal stories and conceptual categories through which "youth" and "adolescence" have been constructed, represented and understood' in the youth literature.

While governments, policy-makers, and social scientists have always had to concern themselves with those who because of various kinds of disadvantages - intellectual, locational, economic, cultural, familial, psychological - encounter difficulties in making the transition from dependent child maintained by others to self-supporting adult, what is distinctive about the present period is that youth as a phase of life and the circumstances surrounding it are widely perceived as problematic for all experiencing it. In the 1990s, there is wide acceptance by all political parties, by

government, by business, and by many sections of the community that the problems many young people are facing are societally-caused, complex and inter-connected, and will require structural solutions.

In this paper, I want to explore the implications of this situation at two levels: firstly, at the empirical level, by presenting aggregate statistical data on trends over the last 15 to 20 years and some recent case study material I have collected which illustrate what is happening to youth in countries like Australia; and secondly, by asking some critical theoretical questions about the value of such concepts as dependency and independence in providing a definition of adulthood and in helping us to understand the processes and problems involved in the transition to adulthood in contemporary society.

3 The Changing Circumstances of Young People in Australia

In describing the situation of youth and what the process of growing up entails, a number of dimensions of social life have been considered. These include the following: education and training; employment; income and access to economic resources; housing and place of residence; family relationships; sexual and social relationships with same and other sex friends; recreational and cultural activities; interest and participation in public politics; psychological sense of self and social identity; involvement with the police and the law. In western societies, in most if not all of these areas, significant changes have occurred over the last twenty or so years. Statistical data is available documenting Australia-wide trends affecting young people on only some of these dimensions, principally those involving education and employment. On the others, the data comes from research studies which are based on specific populations with particular characteristics located in particular places and times with limited capacity for generalisation, my own study being one such.

The total number of young people, which is usually defined as those between the ages of 15 and 25 years, has been increasing gradually in Australia: according to the Census there were 1.35m males and 1.31m females in 1991 compared with 1.13m males and 1.08m females in 1971 (Table 1).

Education and Training

The changes with the most dramatic impact are the changes in educational and workforce participation of teenagers which became progressively more noticeable during the 1980s. At the beginning of the 1980s, only slightly over one half of the population stayed at school to the end of year 11, and about one third to the end of year 12; by 1993, the proportions were over 80 per cent to the end of year 11, and about 75 per cent to the end of year 12 (Table 2). The pattern since the 1970s has been for higher proportions of females than of males to remain at school to the end of years 10, 11 and 12 and this is a long-established pattern, which has mainly been

Table 1: Total Youth Population by Age and Sex^(a)(000s)

Age	1971		1976		1981		1986		1991	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
15-19	568.0	542.2	620.9	595.6	643.7	615.3	673.1	654.0	670.3	643.9
20-24	558.2	538.8	559.1	552.5	629.4	618.4	648.5	633.1	676.5	667.3
Total	1126.2	1081.0	1180.0	1373.1	1233.7	1341.6	1287.1	1287.1	1346.8	1311.2

Notes: a) M = Male; F = Female

Source: ABS, 1993a, Cat. No. 4123, *Australia's Young People*, Table 1.2 (Census).

Table 2: Apparent School Retention Rates by Sex

	Males				Females			
	1980	1984	1988	1993	1980	1984	1988	1993
To Year 10	89.5	93.4	95.2	97.5	91.5	94.3	97.3	99.1
To Year 11	50.8	63.6	72.4	84.5	57.3	67.5	78.7	90.5
To Year 12	31.9	42.1	53.4	71.9	37.3	48.0	61.8	81.4

Source: ABS, 1984, Cat. No. 4221, *National Schools Statistics Collection, Australia*, Table 10.
ABS, 1993d, Cat. No. 4221, *Schools, Australia*, Table 17.

attributed to the role played by TAFE in providing a range of apprenticeship and other programs traditionally designed for males (Ainley et al., 1984). School retention rates generally are seen to be related to a number of factors, including socio-economic status and ethnic/cultural background as well as gender at the individual level, and at the broader societal level, employment opportunities in different areas and in different periods (see, for example, Anderson and Blakers, 1983; Merrilees, 1981; Sweet, 1987; Raffe and Willms, 1989; Whitfield and Wilson, 1989).

Young people are not only staying on longer at school but also more of them are continuing on into further and higher education. Between 1985 and 1993, the proportion of 22 year olds with post-school qualifications has increased from 37 per cent to 46 per cent (Table 3). For those in employment there has been an increase from 43 per cent to 51 per cent, but interestingly, there has been a greater percentage

Table 3: Persons Aged 22 Years by Sex and Educational Attainment

	Males						Females					
	1985		1989		1993		1985		1989		1993	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
Post-school Qualification	53.6	40.6	43.5	37.4	66.7	45.2	46.0	34.5	43.2	36.0	69.1	47.7
Degree	9.3	8.1	8.1	7.0	12.1	8.2	8.7	6.6	8.5	7.1	18.2	12.6
Trade	42.5	32.2	26.8	23.0	36.4	24.6	34.7	26.0	2.7	2.3	6.0	4.1
Certificate/diploma			8.3	7.1	17.4	11.8			31.7	26.4	44.0	30.4
Without Post-school Qualifications	78.5	59.4	72.8	62.6	81.0	54.8	87.3	65.5	76.7	64.0	75.8	52.3
Attended higher secondary level	29.1	22.0	31.1	26.7	36.9	25.0	25.0	18.7	31.4	26.2	34.9	24.1
Did not attend	49.4	37.4	41.6	35.8	44.1	29.9	62.3	46.8	45.3	37.8	40.4	27.9
Total	132.0	100.0	116.3	100.0	147.7	100.0	133.3	100.0	119.9	100.0	144.9	100.0

Source: ABS, 1993b, Cat. No. 6235, *Labour Force Status and Educational Attainment, Australia*, February, Tables 11 and 12.

jump for those in the unemployed category (from 25 per cent to 47 per cent), which probably reflects the current recession. Among those who are not in the labour force, the percentage difference is much smaller (a rise only from 20 per cent to 26 per cent) (ABS, 1993, Cat. No. 6235, Table 11). The general trends are similar for males and females, but there are differences in the kinds of post-school qualifications being obtained: half of these males have a trade qualification compared with less than one tenth of the females, while two-thirds of the females have a certificate or diploma, and a higher proportion of females than males have a degree.

Employment and Unemployment

At the same time there has been a substantial reduction in the proportion of 15-19 year olds in the work force. The employment to population ratio is the appropriate measure and this shows that the proportion of males in the labour force as compared with those in the population as a whole declined between 1982 and 1992 from 52 per cent to 40 per cent, the biggest drop occurring since 1988. The proportion of females remained fairly constant at 46-47 per cent until 1988, and then fell by 1992 to 41 per cent. Over the same period, there was a slight increase in the proportion employed in the 20-24 group (Table 4). For those young people not in the work-force in September 1992, although education was the primary reason for most of them (90 per cent of males and 67 per cent of females), for a proportion of young women (29 per cent) it was their full-time domestic labour and/or child care responsibilities (ABS, 1993a, Cat. No. 4123, Table 5.10).

The labour-force participation rates, which are based on that section of the population who are either in employment or seeking employment, and the unemployment rates reflect labour market conditions over time and the availability of employment for particular categories of the population. Labour-force participation rates were 20-30 per cent higher for 20-24 year olds than for 15-19 year olds throughout the period 1972 to 1992 and substantially higher for males than for females (around 90 per cent compared with 70-75 per cent) in the older age group (Table 5). The 1992 figures were lower than those for 1972 and 1982, except for females in the older age group. In all categories, between 1988 and 1992, the rates fell slightly.

Conversely, unemployment rates were higher throughout the period in the 15-19 year group, rising to a peak of 25 per cent in 1992. The rates were about ten per cent higher in 1982 than in 1972 and they rose again markedly between 1988 and 1992, with the smallest rise occurring in the female 20-24 age group. With this one exception, male and female rates were similar (Table 6). Young people experienced higher rates of unemployment than all other age groups throughout the period, and 15-19 year olds the highest rates of all (ABS, 1992, Cat. No. 6101, Table 4.2). Data on the age distribution of unemployment beneficiaries show that for women 16-19 year olds constituted the largest category of female unemployment beneficiaries throughout the period 1970 to 1991 (ranging between 30 and 50 per cent), while for

Table 4: Employment/Population Ratios by Age and Sex

	1982	1985	1988	1992
Males				
15-19	52.3	46.6	47.9	40.5
20-24	79.3	78.6	80.3	83.1
Females				
15-19	46.6	46.4	47.1	40.8
20-24	63.8	65.9	67.6	65.2

Source: ABS, 1992, Cat. No. 6101, *Labour Statistics, Australia*, Table 3.5.

Table 5: Labour Force Participation Rates by Age and Sex

	1972	1982	1985	1988	1992
Males					
15-19	58.5	62.4	57.7	56.4	54.0
20-24	91.7	89.3	89.7	90.1	87.6
Females					
15-19	56.2	56.1	56.0	56.0	54.2
20-24	61.7	70.0	73.6	75.8	75.6

Source: ABS, 1992, Cat. No. 6101, *Labour Statistics, Australia*, Table 2.2.
 ABS, 1985, Cat. No. 4111, *Australia's Youth Population 1984*, Table 4.2.

Table 6: Unemployment Rates by Age and Sex

	1972	1982	1985	1988	1992
Males					
15-19	5.6	16.3	19.3	15.1	25.2
20-24	2.6	11.2	12.4	10.8	18.3
Females					
15-19	5.9	17.0	17.1	15.9	24.8
20-24	3.8	8.8	10.4	10.9	13.7

Source: ABS, 1992, Cat. No. 6101, *Labour Statistics, Australia*, Table 4.2.
 ABS, 1985, Cat. No. 4111, *1985 Australia's Youth Population 1984*, Table 4.18.

men the proportions were similar (around 20 per cent) for each of the younger age groups, 16-19, 20-24 and 25-34, until around 1978; from then until 1980 they were similar and higher for the 20-24 and 25-34 groups, and since then the largest proportion (around 30 per cent) has been in the 25-34 group (Dixon, 1992, Table 17).

The high unemployment rates in 1983-84 and again in the early 1990s are associated with periods of recession which caused overall reductions in employment, but the effects were greater in the younger age groups. This period of high unemployment in the early 1980s was a major focus, particularly in Britain, of research on families and young people. A number of studies were conducted which explored the effects of unemployment on young people and developed a more complex understanding of the process of transition from dependence to adulthood (Roberts, 1984; Allen et al., 1986; Coffield et al., 1986; Brown and Ashton, 1987; Wallace, 1987; Hutson and Jenkins, 1989; see also the recent Australian study by Winefield et al., 1993).

The relatively low participation rates among the 15-19 year olds particularly are due partly to higher levels of unemployment, but also to their weaker labour market position generally, resulting in an intermittent and unstable work history. For this age group, while labour force participation rates as measured at a specific date are around 55 per cent (Table 5), a significantly higher percentage, around 70 per cent, have participated in the labour force at some time over a 12 month period and this is a higher proportion than in the 20-24 age group (about ten per cent difference) and far higher than in all other age groups (less than five per cent difference) (ABS, 1992, Cat. No. 6160, Table 2.6).

Not only has the size of the teenage labour market diminished over the last 20 or so years and particularly dramatically since the late 1980s, but there has been a fundamental change in the types of jobs available to young people. Between 1972 and 1992, of those young people in employment, the proportion in full-time jobs has declined significantly. The trend has been most marked in the 15-19 year group and for females: in 1972, around 90 per cent of both males and females in employment were in full-time jobs, by 1982 the proportions had dropped to 70-75 per cent, and by 1992, the figures were 55 per cent of males and only 34 per cent of females. For the 20-24 year olds, the reduction is much smaller, though again females are more affected: while for males the proportion in full-time jobs has fallen from 97 per cent to 85 per cent, for females the proportion has fallen from 89 per cent to 72 per cent over the period 1972 to 1992 (Table 7).

Those jobs that are available for teenagers tend to be part time, often casual and short term. Occupational comparisons over time are difficult because of changes in the classification system, but the general picture is that in the 1990s teenagers who have jobs are working in low skilled occupations, either in the retail and service sectors or in labouring, with fewer (males) in trades and fewer (females) in clerical jobs (Table 8). The decrease in manufacturing and the increase in the sales and services industries is reflected in both the male and the female employment patterns of young people (Table 9).

Table 7: Full- and Part-Time Employment by Age and Sex

	Full Time						Part Time		
	1972		1982		1992		1972	1982	1992
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	No. (000s)	No. (000s)
Males									
15-19	281.4	91.2	269.1	76.6	148.5	54.8	27.3	69.0	122.8
20-24	467.9	96.9	490.5	93.7	441.0	85.2	15.2	32.7	76.4
Females									
15-19	258.6	88.9	199.5	69.4	88.2	33.7	32.4	87.8	173.8
20-24	280.3	88.6	337.3	82.0	332.3	71.8	36.1	74.0	130.2
Source:	ABS, various years, Cat. No. 6203, <i>The Labour Force, Australia</i> . ABS, 1986, Cat. No. 6204, <i>The Labour Force, Australia, 1966-84</i> .								

	1968		1984		Occupations	1991	
Occupations	Males	Females	Males	Females		Males	Females
					Managers and administration	4.5	2.4
Professional and technical	7.7	14.8	7.2	13.9	Professional and paraprofessional	10.6	12.4
Clerical	14.0	44.5	9.5	43.7	Clerks	6.6	27.3
Sales	7.7	13.7	8.7	18.9	Sales and services	13.6	36.3
Services	3.2	11.1	7.7	13.7			
Trades, including labourers	48.3	11.8	52.5	6.9	Trades (excluding operators and labourers)	30.2	4.9
					Operators and drivers	6.9	1.7
					Labourers	20.4	8.5
Farmers etc.	11.2	1.2	8.6	1.5	Other	7.3	6.4
Total	100	100	100	100	Total	100	100

Source: ABS, 1984, Cat. No. 4111, *Australia's Youth Population*, (ABS 6204), Table 4.7.
ABS, 1993a, Cat. No. 4123, *Australia's Young People*, (Census 1991).

Table 9: Young People in Employment by Industry, Sex and Age (Percentages)

Industry	Females						Males					
	15-19			20-24			15-19			20-24		
	1971	1981	1991	1971	1981	1991	1971	1981	1991	1971	1981	1991
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting	1.2	1.4	1.0	1.3	1.5	1.2	7.8	6.4	4.3	6.6	5.5	4.3
Mining	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.5	0.4	0.4	1.3	1.3	0.7	2.2	2.1	1.5
Manufacturing	14.9	10.3	5.4	17.1	10.7	8.0	26.2	24.8	15.3	24.0	22.2	17.1
Electricity, gas and water	0.9	0.8	0.3	0.7	0.9	0.6	1.7	1.9	0.9	1.9	2.6	1.3
Construction	0.7	0.9	0.8	1.0	1.1	1.0	11.3	9.5	9.2	11.0	9.7	9.5
Wholesale and retail	30.4	35.4	47.3	20.5	17.7	21.7	22.5	24.4	36.5	16.6	17.4	22.0
Transport and storage	1.8	1.5	1.2	2.5	2.5	2.8	4.0	3.4	2.2	5.3	5.9	4.3
Communications	1.5	0.8	0.3	1.9	1.6	0.9	3.1	1.0	0.4	2.4	2.3	1.4
Finance, property and business services ^(a)	17.3	14.5	10.7	13.4	15.6	18.8	6.6	4.9	5.0	7.6	7.2	10.0
Public administration and defence	5.2	3.6	2.3	5.6	6.1	5.4	6.5	4.8	3.9	10.4	7.3	6.2
Community services	14.1	12.9	8.1	24.4	27.2	20.3	2.1	2.7	3.4	5.7	6.9	7.1
Recreation, personal and other services ^(a)	7.8	8.1	13.2	7.5	7.9	12.5	2.4	4.0	8.0	2.6	4.4	7.9
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total No. ^(b)	270864	283431	240704	307271	398342	425494	304525	341322	251976	486962	517466	467420

Notes: (a) In 1971 and 1981 this category was called Entertainment, Recreation etc.
 (b) Includes not classifiable and not stated.

Sources: ABS, 1971, *Census of Population and Housing; Bulletin 5 the Labour Force*, Table 8.
 ABS, 1981, *Census of Population and Housing; Cross-Classified Characteristics of Persons and Dwellings*, Table 37.
 ABS, 1991, *Census of Population and Housing; Basic Community Profile*, Cat. No. 2722.0, Table B21.

Marriage

The increased participation in the later years of secondary school and in various forms of post-school education and training and the related deferral of entry to full-time employment for the majority of teenagers has important consequences for other areas of young people's lives. Leaving home, establishing separate dwelling arrangements alone or with others, and getting married all become possible only with adequate economic resources, which for most young people means a full-time job paying an adult rate wage. The trend has been for marriage rates to fall, and this can be seen particularly among those under 30 and in the 1988-1993 period (Table 10).

Living Arrangements

During the 1980s, there has also been an increase in the proportion of 20-29 year olds living with their parents, though the figure is still below 50 per cent, and substantially lower for females than for males (Table 11). This reverses a pattern that was observed in the 1970s and early 1980s for young people, especially young women, increasingly to leave home and move into independent living situations prior to and unconnected with marriage (Jones, 1987; Young, 1987; Harris, 1988). Researchers have also noted a greater tendency recently for young people to have temporary periods living away from the parental home but to return sometimes more than once (Hartley, 1993).

A detailed breakdown of the family and living arrangements of young people at various ages was produced for the 1991 Census (Table 12). This shows the proportion living with parents decreasing steadily with age, from over 80 per cent at age 15-17 years, to 60-70 per cent at age 18-19, and down to 30-40 per cent at age 20-24, with the lower proportion at each age being females. By the age of 18-19, two per cent of males and seven per cent of females are living as a couple, with or without children, and by 20-24, these figures have risen to 16 per cent and 30 per cent respectively, with a further four per cent of females as sole parents. In the 20-24 age group, a similar proportion of each sex is part of a group household (12 per cent), or living alone (four to five per cent).

Income

The 1991 census also provided information on the income of young people. This shows, as would be expected, a strong association between age and income (Table 13). There is also a clear relationship between income and gender, with male incomes being consistently higher than those of females. The age distribution shows that, while in the youngest age group (15-17), two thirds have gross annual incomes below \$3,000, in the next group (18-19) there is one third in each of the two next income categories, \$3-8,000 and \$8-16,000, and in the 20-24 age group, the proportions at each of these income levels falls to around 20 per cent, and 45 to 50

Table 10: Age, Sex and Marital Status Specific Marriage Rates

	1976	1983	1986	1993
Males: 1st Marriage				
Up to 19	9.9	4.0	2.4	1.4
20-24	122.6	77.6	63.4	40.5
25-29	135.9	113.7	105.0	90.4
30-34	81.8	79.2	77.6	72.3
Females: 1st Marriage -				
Up to 19	49.0	23.4	15.2	7.4
20-24	187.5	129.8	112.0	73.7
25-29	138.8	122.2	120.2	105.9
30-34	86.5	73.7	74.0	69.8

Source: ABS, 1993c, Cat. No. 3306, *Marriages, Australia*, Table 7.

Table 11: Proportion of Young People Living with Parents by Age and Sex

	1981	1991
Males		
20-24	42.5	46.0
25-29	13.1	17.1
Females		
20-24	25.6	33.9
25-29	5.7	9.1

Source: ABS, 1994, Cat. No. 4102, *Australian Social Trends*, (Census).

per cent have incomes between \$16,000 and \$35,000. Those in the lowest income category are predominantly young men and women who are not in the labour force at all (67-69 per cent), are in part-time jobs (14-19 per cent) or are unemployed (12-14 per cent). In the next category (\$3-8,000), for males unemployment is the most common situation (40 per cent), followed by not being in the labour force (29 per cent) and having a part-time job (20 per cent); for females being unemployed describes only 28 per cent, while not being in the labour force and being in part-time work each accounts for 33 per cent (ABS, 1993a, Cat. No. 4123, Table 6.3).

For young people not in the work-force, their only sources of income are either government payments in the form of Job Search Allowance or Austudy with or without housing/rent assistance or special benefit or cash contributions from parents.

Table 12: Household/Residency Arrangements by Sex and Age, 1991

	Males						Females					
	15-17		18-19		20-24		15-17		18-19		20-24	
	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%	No. (000s)	%
With two parents	284.7	73.1	163.4	58.1	254.8	37.7	258.3	69.5	140.7	51.7	184.5	27.6
With other relatives	2.0	0.5	3.8	1.3	9.9	1.5	1.6	0.4	3.1	1.1	7.4	1.1
With sole parent	57.6	14.8	34.9	12.4	56.4	8.3	54.9	14.8	30.6	11.2	41.3	6.3
Unrelated in family household	2.3	0.6	5.8	2.1	18.2	2.7	2.7	0.7	6.0	2.2	13.5	2.0
Parent in couple	0.2	0.05	1.9	0.7	37.4	5.5	1.1	0.3	6.7	2.5	79.3	11.9
Sole parent	0.8	0.2	1.5	0.5	4.6	0.7	1.6	0.4	5.0	1.8	29.2	4.4
Couples without children	0.5	0.1	4.0	1.4	69.1	10.2	2.9	0.8	13.3	4.9	120.6	18.1
Living alone	1.5	0.4	5.4	1.9	33.0	4.9	1.4	0.4	5.5	2.0	25.9	3.9
Group household member	3.4	0.9	17.6	6.3	86.5	12.8	4.9	1.3	23.4	8.6	81.0	12.1
In non-private dwelling	17.4	4.5	17.1	6.1	34.2	5.1	12.4	3.3	12.5	5.0	21.3	3.2
Total	389.3	10.0	281.1	100.0	676.5	100.0	371.8	100.0	272.1	100.0	667.3	100.0

Source: ABS, 1993a, Cat. No. 4123, *Australian Young People*, Table 3.1 (Census).

Table 13: Gross Annual Income by Age and Sex 1991 (Percentages)

Income	Males			Females		
	15-17	18-19	20-24	15-17	18-19	20-24
Up to \$3,000	66.4	19.7	6.4	67.3	22.5	12.3
\$3,001-\$8,000	20.8	31.3	20.8	23.7	36.4	19.7
\$8,001-\$16,000	11.1	33.1	17.9	8.2	32.5	23.0
\$16,001-\$25,000	1.2	13.5	34.7	0.5	7.9	33.9
\$25,001-\$35,000	0.2	1.9	15.7	0.14	0.5	10.0
\$35,001-\$50,000	0.1	0.3	3.1	0.07	0.08	0.9
Over \$50,000	0.07	0.1	0.8	0.03	0.04	0.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Total No. (000s)(a)	283.0	253.4	628.4	270.7	244.2	608.9

Note: (a) Excluding those where income not stated.

Source: ABS, 1993a, Cat. No. 4123, *Australia's Young People*, Table 6.1 (Census).

For those under 18 years living at home, both JSA and Austudy are means tested against parental income and the amounts paid would not be sufficient to move their recipients out of the lowest income category. Though a parental means test is not applied to those in the 18-20 age group who are eligible for JSA, they are also not paid at the full adult rate. The government treats those under 21 and not in employment as primarily the financial responsibility of their parents and since the early 1980s the relative value of any direct income support payments to this age group has declined. As a recent review by the Brotherhood of St Laurence shows, only those entitled to the additional payment of Youth Homeless Allowance have improved their financial position (Thomson, 1993: 86-7).

4 The Youth Perspective: A Melbourne Study

The study was conducted jointly by myself and the Brotherhood of St Laurence between 1989 and 1993. The purpose of the study was to investigate what was actually happening to young people and their families as a result of the kinds of changes in education, employment, the youth labour market and income support provisions that have been described above. The focus was on 'average' or 'normal' young people and their parents, rather than on particular known disadvantaged or problem groups (such as low income families, early school leavers, or homeless youth). The study involved two sets of interviews with a small number of young people and some of their parents, the first interviews carried out in the second half of 1990 with follow-up interviews during 1992. Thus, although the project was initiated prior to the recession of the early 1990s, the interviews took place during a

period of rising unemployment and increasing public and government recognition of the problems this was causing for a large number of Australian families. The individuals in this study are in no sense a representative sample, but were simply students attending two government schools in Melbourne who were willing to be interviewed.

The study consists of sixty-eight 15-19 year old secondary students who were interviewed in 1990 while in years 10, 11 and 12, forty of whom were reinterviewed in 1992 after having been out of school for at least one year. In 1990, all were living with family members, all but two with one or both parents, and in general relationships were tolerable if not quite good, with no evidence of serious incompatibility. In 1992, five were no longer with their parents, but of these three were living with other family members. In the original group, there were equal numbers of males and females and a range of ethnic groups. The income range covered was from below the poverty line to somewhat above the level of average weekly earnings and the sample was representative of low to middle income groups and had a parental occupational spread that was mainly manual and lower to middle white collar, with a relatively small proportion in the higher administrative, managerial and professional categories.

The interviews produced a large volume of mainly qualitative data on a range of topics: - school, education, training, employment and unemployment, the role of government, family life, leisure, growing up, adulthood and the future. A brief summary of the main findings is presented in order to provide some insights into how the macro-social processes outlined earlier are experienced and perceived by young people themselves. The description is based on the 1990 responses but, where there are significant differences between the 1990 and 1992 data, the later responses are also given. Although there are variations in responses by gender, socio-economic status and ethnic origin, these cannot be explored here (for detailed analysis, see Edwards, 1992).

Education and Training

The most striking finding was that, despite some reservations about school, the overwhelming majority in 1990 (and even more girls than boys) intended to stay at school until the end of their final year. A very high proportion also had plans for further study, and mainly on a full-time basis, with a surprisingly large number mentioning university. There was almost universal acceptance of the necessity to get as much education as possible in order to gain access not only to career jobs but increasingly to any jobs: in other words, these students had absorbed the current message from teachers, politicians and employers. For some, however, more education was justified only on the grounds of access to jobs, not because it was interesting or enjoyable in itself. For others, there was doubt about job prospects even with further education qualifications and considerable pessimism about the future for particular individuals and for young people in general.

In fact, the follow-up interviews revealed that of the 40 individuals, only four had expressed the intention in 1990 to stay until the end of year 12 and then did not (and three of these were boys). Thirteen had said they planned to go to university and did; 11 who planned to go to university did not, but six of these, five females and one male, had taken a non-degree course instead and two others, both male, had got jobs. A further four, all males, had intended to do an apprenticeship but did not. Of the 40 young people who were reinterviewed, five had expressed no intention of doing further courses when interviewed in 1990 and nine had so far done no post-school education or training courses. However, all but seven in 1992 saw themselves as acquiring post-school qualifications of some kind at some stage.

Employment and Unemployment

In the 1990 interviews, only 20 per cent had expected to go straight into full-time jobs when they left school, the majority expected to undertake further study, mainly full time. At the follow-up stage, five had had no further education and were in jobs (which was what only two had expected) and 12 were unemployed (only two of whom said in 1990 that they expected to be), the other 23 were either apprentices (three) or in full-time education. Only ten out of the 40 had had a full-time job at some point since leaving school, 15 had or had had part-time jobs and the others had had none. Apart from the three apprentices, one in a para-professional and three in clerical jobs, the other 18 currently with jobs were all in the sales/services jobs or were semi- and unskilled workers.

The longer-term occupational destinations of the students in 1990 were associated with their post-school further and higher education expectations. Thirty-six of the 68 named administrative, managerial or professional occupations and a further 15 named para-professional jobs (75 per cent in all). At the same time they recognised that the jobs they would be likely to get on leaving school (and for many this would hopefully be part time and temporary while they were studying) were far more modest, with well over three quarters thinking in terms of semi- and unskilled manual and sales-service jobs. The educational experience since leaving school of those young people who were reinterviewed in 1992 was somewhat different from their expectations and suggests that some at least were unrealistic in their ambitions. A number had not gone on to take the courses that they planned and of those who had continued with their education there was a tendency for them to be in lower level courses than they had earlier intended. There was some evidence that these young people themselves recognised that this would affect their occupational aspirations: 23 had changed their views about the jobs they expected to end up in and for nine this involved lowering their sights.

Although 12 were unemployed at the time of the second interview, 20 of the 40 young people had experienced unemployment since leaving school, and for 13 this had lasted for over six months. Three of these were among those who had expected to go to university and another four had expected to go straight into a job. Of the other 20, seven had managed to stay in employment and 13 were in full-time

education. The impact of unemployment was reflected in the fact that most young people in 1992 anticipated that they would at some time be unemployed, a higher proportion than in 1990. While some students in 1990 included individual personal failings among the causes of unemployment, these were not mentioned in 1992, when the economy was seen as the primary factor. There were clear signs even in 1990 that the economic situation and uncertainty about jobs was a serious source of concern to young people. One of the few major differences between the students we interviewed and their parents was their perception of the problems facing young people. The two issues which parents considered most worrying were drugs/alcohol (39 per cent) and violence/ crime (31 per cent), which attracted only nine per cent and six per cent respectively of student responses. Parents were also more likely to mention declining morals and threats to the family. By contrast, students were preoccupied with the economic situation and getting a job, which were of far less concern to their parents, being mentioned by only eight per cent and 19 per cent respectively.

Financial Circumstances

In 1990, 51 of the young people (75 per cent) were living with two parents, in 42 cases this was with both natural parents; 13 were living with mother only (who in nine cases was dependent on government benefits), two with father only (in both cases on a pension or benefit) and two with grandmothers (again on pensions). In 1992, 23 were with two parents, 12 with one parent (six of these parents were wage-earning and six were receiving government support), three were with other relatives, and two were living separately. Ten of the young people were anxious to leave as soon as they were able.

In 1990, all were students and therefore financially dependent on their parents, although about one third had a job and about one fifth received Austudy. Two thirds had no more than \$30 per week of their own, and this included cash contributions from parents, and the rest had between \$30 and \$100. In 1992, only ten per cent had as little as \$30 or less, 50 per cent had between \$30 and \$100, over a quarter had \$100 to \$300, and the remainder had over \$300. Although this represents a substantial increase in income, it is not sufficient in most cases to allow these young people to leave home and live independently. Further, for half of the group the main source of income was Austudy or Job Search Allowance and less than half (18) were currently drawing a wage.

Growing Up, Adulthood and the Future

At the time of the first interview, the majority (70 per cent) of these young people were aged 15 or 16, with the others either a year younger or older. In 1992, half of those reinterviewed were now 19, with one quarter 20 and the other quarter 18. In 1990, less than one quarter considered themselves adults, but by 1992 two-thirds did and three quarters believed they were much more grown up than two years previously.

A number of questions were asked about aspects of adulthood. Individuals were asked about the ages at which individuals reached stages associated with adulthood: financial independence, leaving home, marriage. Answers showed that the majority expected to leave home well before marriage and linked the decision about when to leave primarily to financial circumstances. It had been expected that the experiences of these young people after leaving school and particularly difficulties in obtaining jobs with some security and adequate wages might have altered their perceptions of what is involved in the transition from teenager to adult. However, there was no such general pattern. Around half of the respondents gave the same answers in 1992 as they had given in 1990, and where they changed their views, it was as likely that they would advance the age at which these events might occur as postpone it.

Individuals were also asked to rank a series of attributes of adulthood. Again, perhaps surprisingly, it appeared that the experiences that these young people were undergoing in the process of growing up and the problems they were encountering had not made them change their ideas. Although 'a proper job' and 'enough money' received the largest number of mentions as the second and third highest ranked attributes from the respondents, most ranked 'being sensible' first in both 1990 and 1992. This was consistent with other views expressed which indicated that growing up is not only about gaining financial independence but also involves the psychological dimension of social and emotional maturity. Also significant was the finding that marriage and living away from parents were the lowest ranked of the five attributes. The priority assigned to material factors as the primary prerequisite for achieving adulthood is understandable in the current economic circumstances, but this may also be a reflection of a somewhat lesser cultural significance now being attached to marriage both as a key adult status marker and as the only institutional form for developing (hetero)sexual relationships.

5 Independence and Dependency

The key questions here are: What are the effects of all these changes on the process of transition from childhood through adolescence to adulthood? Is the changed nature and prolonged duration of this process of transition causing significant problems for a substantial majority of the population? To what extent is economic independence the defining characteristic of and the essential precondition for adulthood and citizenship? In a context where various categories of the population, and not only youth, are unable to achieve economic independence, what is their status in society, how can they participate as members of society and what must society provide in order that they be enabled to participate fully as citizens? What are the other forms of dependency, what relationships do they have to economic dependency, and how do these affect the status and rights of individuals?

While there is universal agreement among academics, professionals, politicians, policy-makers, the media and the community that youth is a problem in and for society, there are different interpretations of where the problem lies, whom it affects, and what to do about it.

Most analyses take a structural approach and place primary emphasis on the way the economic and labour market conditions and various areas of government policy and provision determine the position of youth in general and in particular subgroups (for the most recent major example of this approach, see Jones and Wallace, 1992). (There are exceptions, for instance, Richard Eckersley [1988, 1992] who takes a cultural perspective and argues that the western world is suffering a moral and social decline. For him, the 'youth problem' is not primarily an economic or even a government policy issue, rather it exposes a deeper moral and cultural crisis in society, as evidenced by 'the alarming escalation of social and psychological problems' such as suicide, drug use, crime and mental illness.)

The principal problem then is that young people are being placed in a structurally contradictory situation.

For just as youth supposedly became political citizens with the lowering of the voting age, so increasingly they become more and more dependent on the state for training and economic support. Indeed with the growing dominance of the Commonwealth labour market programs, the concept of youth as a dependent social category has been extended so that it now goes beyond the old age of majority at 21 to embrace those in their mid-20s. (Sherington and Irving, 1989: 18)

Some see the economic and welfare policies of some western governments in the 1980s, as they grappled with continuing budgetary problems and a series of economic crises, as having exclusionary intentions for certain groups, youth and particularly undereducated, unskilled and unemployed youth being one such group. Chapman and Cook (1988), for example, argue that Britain under Thatcher pursued deliberate policies which resulted in the marginalisation of those sections of youth who lacked access to either employment or full-time education and were dependent on government programs and income support. For others the concept of 'underclass' better captures the structural position of such groups, highlighting the implications of policies which set some sections of the population apart from the rest of society. In a recent article entitled 'the making of a youth underclass', Rob White (1994) attributes overall responsibility to governments, in particular their macro-economic, industrial, social security and welfare policies, pointing to the repressive and exclusionary aspects of these policies which are reinforced by policing practices and negative community attitudes.

Judith Bessant (1994) traces some of the political and ideological underpinnings of the re-appearance in media and other current discourses of the concept of underclass as applied to youth. As she notes, there is nothing new in politicians, academics, the media and others focusing on what are perceived as the different, deviant and often dangerous characteristics of youth and the threat these pose to public order. Nor is there anything new in governments responding with a whole range of social control measures directed specifically at managing 'the youth problem' however this is defined.

What is distinctive about the contemporary analyses of youth is the pretty well universal acknowledgment that the difficulties many young people encounter in gaining access to those roles and resources that give them adult status are not individual but social in origin and therefore require social solutions. Independence is socially defined and socially facilitated and where problems are encountered, the state and other social institutions have to provide means for overcoming them. As Kari Waerness concludes from her work on women and the welfare state:

To discuss the principles which should guide the formation of social policy in terms of independence versus dependency is therefore misleading ... the question is ... what kinds of dependencies will be created by different social policies and what consequences these will have for different social groups. (Waerness, 1989: 170)

There are various statuses and situations that in our culture mark the transition from youth to adulthood and, apart from legal and political rights of various kinds (which are statutorily fixed and strictly age-determined), the timing and the process of reaching them vary for different individuals and some statuses are never achieved by some individuals. The crucial issues, therefore, are: which statuses, if any, are essential for an individual to be considered an adult? what happens to individuals who do not achieve for whatever reason one of the statuses regarded as essential? what mechanisms are there at a societal, group and personal level for dealing with such cases?

Becoming an adult for most young people involves a sequence of steps, of which the two most important are the transitions from education to employment and from living with family in the parental home to establishing a separate household and, at the same time or later, marriage and children. Typically these transitions have been effected at different ages depending on gender, class, ethnicity, culture and other factors. And, although there may be no question that someone aged 15 at the beginning of this process is not an adult and someone aged 23 and at the end is, different groups make different assessments, only partly based on age, of individuals who have changed some, but not all, of their status positions. For example, in the case of a young woman who has left school, has lived away from home for a while, who has only had casual part-time jobs, is a single mother and is now back with her parents, how relevant is it whether she is 17 or 27? Contrast that with a young man who has been continuously in full-time tertiary education, as an undergraduate and then post-graduate for eight years, has never had a job, has been living in a flat with his girl-friend for several years, financed by wealthy parents.

The common assumption is that the essential precondition for adulthood is economic independence. Having sufficient financial or material resources to maintain oneself comes first, and only when this has been achieved, can one exercise other forms of independence, physical, psychological, social, and so on. The usual means whereby individuals acquire an income sufficient to enable them to achieve economic independence is through employment. Employment, however, is also valued in its

own right as a signifier of an individual's willingness to make a full adult contribution to the economic and social life of the society. Thus the problem for those who are not in the workforce, whether they are retrenched older workers, young people in their twenties undergoing further education and training, or married women with children supported by their husbands, is not only their lack of a regular and adequate income of their own, but their marginal status as a non-wage worker. As the levels of employment and types of workforce participation change in modern western economies, and as labour markets fail to provide the kinds of jobs needed to keep the adult population economically self-supporting, significant sections of the population will be forced to rely on the welfare state. But while only income from paid work is seen to give the recipient economic independence and income in the form of social security is seen as welfare dependency, individuals who might in all other respects be considered independent adults and full citizens find themselves denied this status.

There seem to be two main strategies advocated in the literature on youth for overcoming this problem. The most obvious is to tackle the economic issue and to put pressure on governments to recognise the legitimate claims of young people to an adequate income of their own while they are undergoing further education or training, whatever their age and parental circumstances. In this, one is recognising that regardless of maturity and other dimensions of growing up, young people who have no option but to rely heavily on parental support and to remain living in the family home will find their economic dependency on their parents is not only restrictive in itself but it also prevents them from negotiating some independence in other areas of their lives.

The second strategy involves a more complex conceptualisation of the notions of independence and dependency. In place of the usual notion of independence and dependency as a dichotomy, which offers only two possibilities, adults are independent and children and young people are dependent, both need to be seen as multi-dimensional and variable. One can then distinguish between degrees of independence and dependency and even allow for other conceptual possibilities, such as interdependency. One can also compare degrees of dependency and independence across the various dimensions of social life and trace connections between them, theoretically and empirically. This is an approach which feminists have found very useful in their work on women and the issues of public and private dependency (Waerness, 1989; Hobson, 1990; Orloff, 1993; Fraser and Gordon, 1994). A major advantage of such an approach is that it avoids the dangers of over-generalisation. This can either take the form of making categorical statements about 'youth' as a single undifferentiated entity, which has been a common defect of much of the sociological and policy analysis of youth in contemporary society; a striking example is Judith Bessant's (1993) thesis that we are witnessing a new life cycle phase for youth for which she invents the new term 'dependulthood'. Alternatively, generalisations take the form of a particular model of how independence is typically achieved, which makes assumptions about the relative importance of, and relationships between, the various aspects of young people's lives. In either case, the tendency is to theorise at a high level of abstraction and to ignore known

variations in the circumstances and experiences of different groups of young people according to such major structural variables as gender, class, ethnicity or locality.

The data we have does not support these kinds of broad generalisations. Growing up has not become a qualitatively different experience for all or even most young people. The period of financial and family dependency has reached into the twenties for some groups before and now affects not only those from mainly middle class backgrounds attending universities. There is unquestionably greater uncertainty about the availability and security of employment for many younger (and older) people and the opportunities of obtaining a job at 15-16 years of a type or in an area that would provide a long-term future have pretty well disappeared. Changes in eligibility criteria and levels of social security provision have imposed economic burdens on families and young people and put added pressures on social relationships between teenagers and their parents. At the same time, substantial proportions of young people do negotiate the transition to adulthood successfully even if it takes longer and there is more stress along the way. The reports from young people themselves indicate that there are high levels of stress and anxiety and that many teenagers do not look forward confidently and optimistically to the future. Subjective perceptions on the whole match the objective conditions. Certainly also there are sections of the youth population who can be described as marginalised, who are outside the various government programs, who are without regular or adequate sources of income, whose family relationships have broken down, who may be homeless, and so on. Whether this constitutes the emergence of a new underclass will depend on what happens to these individuals as they move through their twenties and whether these circumstances become permanently associated with location in the structures of poverty, disadvantage and inequality.

Thus, there is no one clear picture of what is happening to youth in Australia. If we are to advance our sociological understanding and develop appropriate policy responses, we need a perspective that fully acknowledges the differences, diversity and complexity, as well as change, in the positions and problems of youth in contemporary western societies.

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The Transformation of Dependency in the Australian Social Security System: Beyond the White Paper

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1 Dependency in the Australian Tax and Transfer System

The primary goal of current social security policy in Australia is the alleviation of poverty amongst people for whom neither the market nor the family are able, or expected, to provide sufficient economic support. One of the key features of the ongoing debate over the role of the state in industrial nations is whether the dependency on the state that this support entails is better or worse than dependency upon family or market. This question of **state dependency**, however, is not the subject of this present paper - though some aspects of this question are touched upon. Rather this paper considers a somewhat narrower question - how social security (and taxation) policy deals with the relationships of dependency and interdependency within the family unit.

Some aspects of this question are relatively uncontroversial: young children are assumed to be dependent upon their parents (or parent substitutes) and parents are expected to usually have their children's best interests 'at heart'. The boundary between childhood and adulthood poses many difficult questions for income support policy, and these are considered in Anne Edwards' paper in this volume. My focus is on the dependency relationships between men and women, both between husbands and wives and for the looser relationships of cohabitation and blended families.

The description of married women as 'dependants' of their husbands has a long history in Australia. Though a substantial proportion of women have always been engaged in the labour market, their exclusion from the new labour markets created by the growth of industrial capitalism provided the impetus for the statisticians of the late 1800s to define employed men as 'breadwinners' and married women and children as 'dependants' (Cass, 1985). A century later, along with the transformation to post-industrial capitalism, terms such as 'dependent spouse' now seem curiously dated and awkward. This change has, and will, necessitate major changes in the structure of social security and taxation policies.

Though dependency in this context is often described as 'economic dependence' it is important to understand that it is a social rather than an economic concept of

dependency. The economic theory of the family sees the marriage relationship as essentially one of **interdependency**. Whilst the wife in the traditional family of industrial capitalism may be dependent upon her husband for income and hence for market commodities, the husband is equally dependent upon the wife for home production and child-rearing services. That it should be the wife who is termed the dependent spouse reflects the intersection of the gender basis of social power with the social hegemony of the market in capitalist societies.

The fact that 'dependent spouse' is now an almost archaic term reflects first and foremost the significant increase in the labour market participation of married women over this century (Caldwell, 1980). At the same time as women's labour force participation has been increasing, however, that of men has steadily decreased. In 1964, 84 per cent of men were in the labour force. By 1990 this had shrunk to 75 per cent (Foster and Stewart, 1991). In part, this reflects increased early retirement, population ageing and increased educational retention, but all age groups experienced at least some fall in participation. For some groups however, this fall has been relatively small. The participation rate for men aged 35 to 44, for example only fell from 98 to 94 per cent between 1965 and 1990.

Perhaps as a consequence of this small fall in men's participation, the increase in women's labour market participation has been associated with only a negligible increase in men's home production and caring work. Data on time-use patterns reveal that caring work is still predominantly done by women, and that this has changed little over the past two decades (Bittman, 1991). The increase in women's labour market participation has, however, been associated with an increased commodification of caring work through the growth of state and commercial child care. Indeed, given the low level of caring work undertaken by men, these services are in many cases a necessary precondition for women's participation.

The focus of this paper, however, is on how income support and taxation policies have adapted to these changing norms of labour force participation. In summary, the conclusion is that there have indeed been major changes in these policies — but that we are only halfway towards a new set of principles and policies that might be used to characterise a 'post dependency' income transfer system.

2 The New Social Security System

The *Working Nation* White Paper released by the Australian Government earlier this year (Keating, 1994) provides an interesting indication of the challenge of changing gender roles for social security policy. The primary goal of the White Paper was to get unemployed people back into employment or, if you like, to reduce the dependency of working age people on the state. But with respect to social security policy at least, the most radical changes proposed in the paper actually had a lot more to do with the issue of dependency within the household.

In particular, the White Paper initiated a fundamental move away from the family as the unit of eligibility for income support payments. Under the post-war system of

income support, wives (and sometimes husbands) could qualify for income support by virtue of their role as dependants of someone whose earning capacity was restricted (such as through unemployment or old age). Post White Paper, adult dependency as a justification for income support is very much a marginal category of entitlement - though as we shall see, it has not been entirely eliminated.

The new structure of dependency-related payments in the Australian income support and taxation systems is summarised in Table 1. The table seeks to describe the main features of dependency related payments as they will exist in the second half of 1995.¹ A large proportion of the payments listed in this table have only existed for the last two or three years, with the White Paper being just one of the many announcements of changes to the social security system. An indication of the rate of change is that one payment, Home Child Care Allowance (HCCA), has had its abolition announced even before its introduction! However its abolition primarily (though not entirely) amounts to a change in nomenclature, as it will be incorporated as a minimum payment of Parenting Allowance (PgA). Since the details of this incorporation have still not been finalised, HCCA is retained in the table.

Table 1 groups dependency-related payments into three categories, those related to the dependence of spouses, those providing assistance to people whose workforce participation is constrained because of caring responsibilities, and payments which assist in meeting the additional expenditure needs of families with dependent children. The latter group of family payments include basic and additional family payment together with child care subsidies and related payments.

It is in the first two categories of payment, however, that recent policy changes have had most impact. The most important change was the introduction of Parenting Allowance. This payment replaces the additional allowance paid to recipients with not-employed spouses when the family has dependent children. The rationale for the payment has thus been changed from one of spouse dependency to caring responsibilities.

Indeed spouse dependency will now only imply eligibility for income support for married people aged over 40 who have no recent labour market experience. In this case, if their partner qualifies for a social security payment, they will receive Partner Allowance.² Younger spouses without dependent children will be required to personally fall into a particular eligibility group - such as unemployment.

The main element of continuity with the previous spouse dependency based regime, has been the retention of the dependent spouse taxation rebate (DSR) for families

1 Some disability-related payments such as Domiciliary Nursing Care Benefit and Child Disability Allowance are not included.

2 It appears that this age limit will be based upon a particular fixed birth date rather than age - so that the age threshold will steadily rise.

Table 1: Dependency-related Payments in the Australia Social Security of Tax Systems, 1995

	Eligibility	Max Rate ⁽¹⁾	Income Unit	Income Period	Income Threshold ⁽¹⁾
Dependent Spouse Payments					
Dependent Spouse Rebate	Taxpayer for a dependent spouse without children	\$1,188 pa	Personal (spouse)	Financial year	\$282 pa
Partner Allowance	Partners of allowees and pensioners without children, over 40 and with no recent labour market experience	\$132.65 pw	Mixed	Fortnight	\$231 (spouse) \$30 (allowee) pw
Wife Pension	No new grants from July 1995. Existing wife pensioners continue to be eligible.	\$132.65 pw	Family	Estimated annual	\$78 comb. pw
Caring-related Payments					
Sole Parent Rebate	Sole parent caring for at least one dependent child	\$1,116 pa	Personal (dependent)	Financial year	\$282 pa
Sole Parent Pension	Sole parent caring for at least one dependent child	\$159.05 pw	Personal	Estimated annual	\$57 pw
Home Child Care Allowance	Parent with at least one dependent child	\$30 pw	Personal (carer)	Estimated annual	\$30 pw
Parenting Allowance	Primary carer of children under 16	\$132.65 pw	Mixed	Estimated annual	\$231 (partner) \$30 (allowee) pw
Carer Pension	Person providing constant personal care to a 'severely handicapped' pensioner/beneficiary	\$231.65 pw	Family	Estimated annual	\$78 comb. pw (10 hr limit) (educ/emp)
Child-related Payments					
Basic Family Payment	Parent/guardian having care and control of child under 16	\$10.65 pw	Family	Financial year	\$60,000 pa
Additional Family Payment	Parent/guardian receiving BFP	\$32.1(<13) \$45.3(13+) pw	Family	Financial year	\$21,350 pa
Child Care Rebate	Parent of child under 13 in formal or informal child care	\$28.20 (\$1,466 pa)	-	-	-
Long Day Care	Carer of child in approved full-time long day care centres and family day care schemes.	\$94 pw	Family	Estimated annual	\$475 pw
Outside School Hours Care	Carer of child in before and after school care	a) 68c ph b) 36c ph	Family	As for AFP	Eligible AFP a) full rate b) part rate
Note:	1) Rates and thresholds as at September 1994. Tax rebates and thresholds for 1993-94 tax year.				

without dependent children. The old DSR for families with children, however, has been recast as Home Child Care Allowance (HCCA) - a Social Security payment, rather than a tax rebate. The new rationales for this payment are as a recognition of the caring work carried out by non-employed (married) parents, and as a counterpart to the child care assistance received by employed parents. There is a tight income test on the income of the carer, but no income test with respect to their spouse's income.

Not included in the table, but foreshadowed by the Government, is the introduction of a Maternity Allowance. This will probably be implemented as a component of Parenting Allowance available for the first 12 weeks after childbirth which will be only income tested on the income of the mother.

3 Beyond Dependency

Whilst the last few years has seen a general winding back of the concept of spouse dependency in the social security system, the process of formulating a set of principles and policies to replace dependency is still far from complete. Where do we go from here? The remainder of this paper considers a number of challenges facing the new post-dependency income support system.

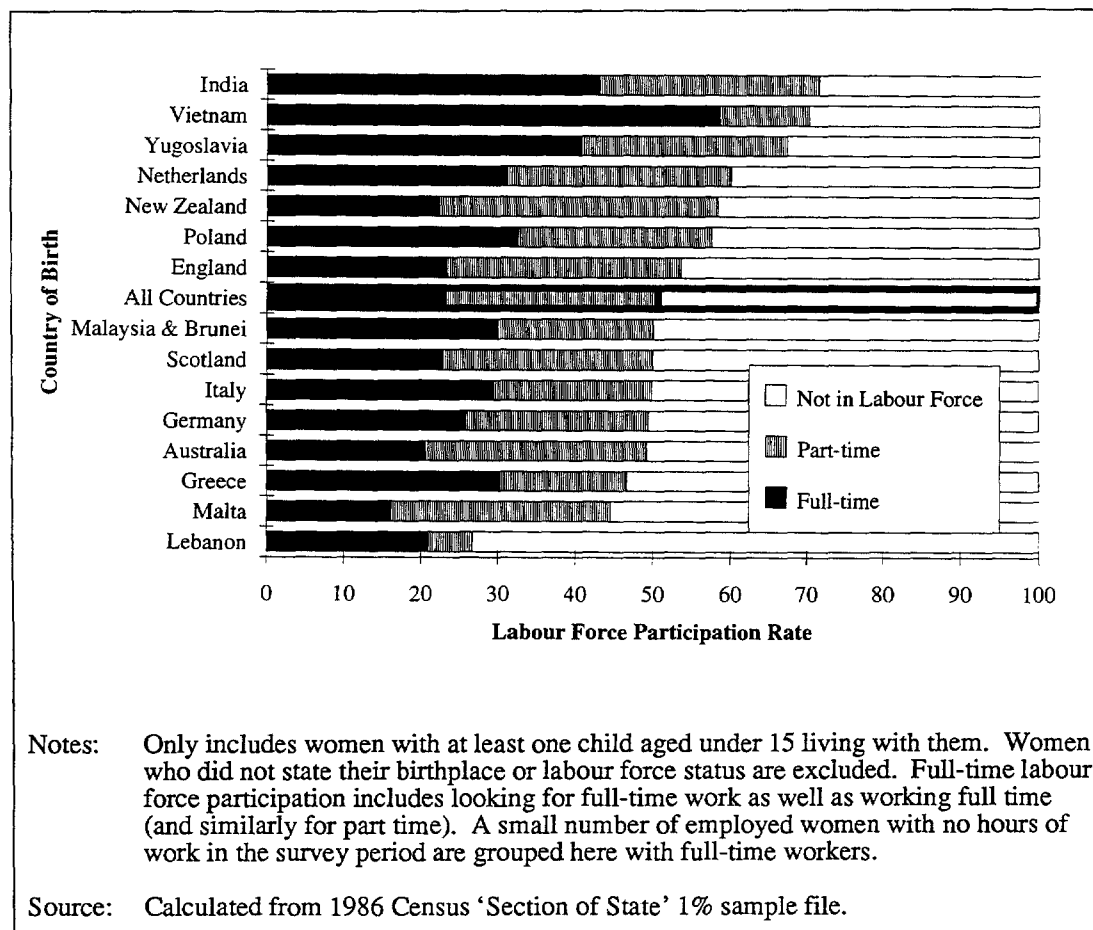
Cultural Heterogeneity

One of the reasons why social security policy in this area has been so piecemeal is that the social transformation of gender relationships in Australian society has itself been extremely variable.

There never was a time when the 'typical family' of employed husband together with wife caring for children was an adequate description of all families. However, in the early post-war years when the modern welfare state was established, this family type was preponderant enough for it to provide a clear ideal type against which to structure policy. This hegemony of the single-earner nuclear family has now vanished - to be replaced by a multitude of arrangements for market and home production (of which the 'traditional' family of industrial capitalism remains one). This variation makes the structuring of family support increasingly difficult. Whilst the variation in women's employment patterns with age is increasingly being used to target policy to appropriate groups (e.g. Partner Allowance) strong systematic variations between class and ethnic groups are more difficult to deal with. Any policy which is appropriate for one group will often be inappropriate for another.

Some indication of the extent of variation across the different ethnic groups in Australian society is given in Figure 1. This shows the 1986 labour force participation rates of married mothers born in selected countries. Only married mothers aged under 40 and with at least one child aged under 15 living with them are included in the figure. Since this figure is calculated from the Census one per cent

Figure 1: Labour Force Participation Rates of Married Mothers Aged Under 40 by Birthplace: 1986



sample file rather than the full Census the estimates are subject to sampling error and should be interpreted with caution. This applies particularly to the countries with fewer immigrants such as India, Poland, Malaysia and Brunei, Malta and Germany where the standard error for the total participation rate is over five percentage points. It would be a valuable exercise to repeat this calculation from the full 1991 Census.

Despite the limited sample size, however, it is possible to conclude from this figure that substantial and significant variations in labour force patterns do exist between different birthplace groups. For example, 70 per cent of mothers born in Vietnam were in the labour force in 1986, compared to an Australian average of 49 per cent. Lebanese born women, on the other hand, are much less likely to be in the labour market, with only 27 per cent working or looking for work. The difference between Lebanese women and the overall average is almost entirely due to their lower level of part-time employment.

Whilst there are many factors which could lie behind these differences, it would be reasonable to expect that they partly reflect very different ways in which families engage with the labour market. Coping with this diversity will remain a major challenge for social security policy, and given this diversity it is perhaps not surprising that politicians and policy makers should want to tread very cautiously. Hence we should expect that policy development in this area will continue to be a continuous, but piecemeal, process for many years to come.

Simplification/Integration

One implication of a piecemeal approach to policy development, however, is the development of complexity - and the current arrangements for family support are certainly very complicated. Simplification and integration of payments is rightly high on the government's current reform agenda. There are a number of issues which stand out as requiring attention.

The first is simply the multitude of different payments. This is probably most acute for families with children aged 16 or 17, where income support administration is divided between the Department of Social Security (DSS) and the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) - two departments with very different administrative cultures. Some of these issues are covered in Anne Edwards' paper elsewhere in this volume.

Even if we put aside this very difficult issue, complexities still abound with respect to family payments for younger children. Income testing arrangements are just too complex. At present there are basically three different types of income test: allowance, pension and taxable. Allowances (e.g. Job Search Allowance, JSA) are assessed on the basis of income over the previous fortnight. Pensions, however, are assessed by a complicated procedure whereby current income is 'annualised'. In principle this means that casual earnings should be effectively spread across the whole year before applying the income test. As far as I can ascertain, the pensions income definition (but not the income test) will apply to Parenting Allowance, so that a family with one spouse receiving JSA and another receiving Parenting Allowance will face two different definitions of income.

For families not receiving pensions or allowances, the primary form of income testing for basic and additional family payments is with respect to taxable income for the previous year. However when incomes vary by a significant amount (basically 25 per cent, but there are exceptions) income is assessed on the basis of an estimate for the current year. This means, for example, that when a person finds employment and leaves JSA the amount of Additional Family Payment (AFP) will depend on when during the financial year they actually start work.

The complexities associated with these different income tests stem from the competing desires to track income movements over time (so as to most directly target short-term poverty) and the desire for administrative simplicity. Also, systems which use longer term income definitions such as taxable income, provide less of a

disincentive for people to increase their income. The inevitable complexity that this compromise engenders is likely to be of increasing importance for family payment recipients as the proportion of people with casual and fluctuating incomes increases.

This poses a dilemma. Should family payments be made more responsive to short term fluctuations so as to track these income movements, or are incomes becoming so variable that the administrative complexity of such tracking will become too much of a burden, and it would be best to retreat to a simpler, annual income-based, income test? This is an area where more research is clearly required to both identify the relative importance of these different complexities, and their likely changes in the future.

Another way of producing a simpler social security system would be to integrate the various child-related payments into one single Family Payment. This could include integrating Sole Parent Pension with Parenting Allowance. In other words, there would be a single payment paid to those with parenting responsibilities, though with two rates of payment: half married rate (for married parents) and single pension rate (for sole parents). (An equivalent to Guardian Allowance would remain as part of AFP). Since couple-headed families seem to be able to muster more political support than sole parent families, this might help in assuring an adequate level of income support for sole parent families.

There are disadvantages of such an integration, however, which should not be overlooked. Many sole parents would be worse off under such a change because the Parenting Allowance income test is less generous than the pension income test. Parenting Allowance is withdrawn at 70 cents in the dollar for incomes over \$70/week, whilst pension is withdrawn at only 50 cents in the dollar. The free area is also greater for pensioners, and the pensioner fringe benefits are more valuable.

Since an increase in the base rate of payment to sole parents with no other income can certainly be justified in terms of the relativities of sole parents to other pensioners, the best way to address this question might be via a package of measures which included an increase in the base rate of payment to sole parent pensioners. Depending on the amount of increase, however, this would not necessarily ensure that no sole parents were worse off. As for fringe benefits, it may well be time to finally remove the artificial fringe benefit distinctions between pensioners and beneficiaries.

Finally, any decision to link sole parent payments with Parenting Allowance must take careful account of the strength of the rationales for Parenting Allowance itself. This question is considered further below. Before doing so, however, it is important to consider another question of central relevance to sole parents: the definition of sole parenthood itself.

Unit Definition: When is a Parent 'Sole'?

Though the new eligibility criteria for the Australian income support system is becoming very much based upon the individual, the level of **entitlement** to assistance is still primarily family based. That is, whilst a not-employed married mother may qualify for Parenting Allowance on the basis of her caring responsibilities, the amount she receives depends on her husband's income (once he is no longer receiving JSA). Since the level of entitlement remains family-based, the definition of the family remains crucial for social security policy.

An ongoing issue in this respect is the definition of sole parenthood. If a sole parent enters what the department terms a 'marriage-like relationship' they lose their eligibility for sole parent pension and become instead eligible for Parenting Allowance, which is paid at a lower rate and income-tested on their partner's income (and also disadvantageous in other ways, see above). But these new 'step families' are not really like the typical 'marriage-like relationship'. There is evidence, for example, that there is much less household income pooling among defacto partnerships of previously married people (Glezer, 1993, cited in Perry, 1994). It seems inappropriate to most people that a new partner should automatically take over responsibility for providing for a sole parent and their children. Indeed the approach of the social security system is also at odds with the concept of child dependency in the Australian Child Support, or maintenance, system, where the non-custodial 'natural' parent still has a financial responsibility for their child irrespective of their spouse's marital status.

On the other hand, economies of scale in household expenses suggest that it would not be fair to continue to pay a full sole parent payment to sole parents who re-partner. While some short-term transitional assistance could be justified, in general, the present system is probably reasonably appropriate with respect to the base rate of payment in these circumstances. It is primarily the income test that should be altered.

There are two options that could be considered. One would be to define parental income for Basic and Additional Family Payment as the income of the child's co-resident natural parents. After a certain period of co-residence (such as two years) a non-biological parent might be considered to be 'natural' in this sense. This would bring the family payments system into greater concordance with the *Child Support Act* (Perry, 1994).

An additional option would be to not include the income of new defacto partners in the income test for Parenting Allowance (provided the defacto partner was not the parent of the Parenting Allowance recipient's child). If these two options were both implemented it would imply only a small drop in income for sole parents who re-partnered.

These changes would make the transition back into a long-term relationship much easier for many sole parents, and in consequence provide offsetting cost savings for the government.

Family Income Support and the Self-employed

Both AFP and Parenting Allowance can be claimed by families with low incomes, but who are not eligible for other categorical payments such as JSA. Currently around one in five AFP recipients in this group are self-employed. Most of these families (except some who are income splitting) would be eligible for Parenting Allowance. The higher rates of payment might also encourage a greater number of self-employed people to take up the payment. The introduction of Parenting Allowance will thus represent a major increase in the amount of financial assistance directed towards self-employed families.

Given the well-known difficulties in measuring the living standards of the self-employed, this is likely to pose particular administrative problems. The solutions to these are not likely to be easy, given that there are sure to be some self-employed with low measured income who have quite high living standards, just as there are some who are undeniably poor.

The Dependent Spouse Rebate

The most obvious remnant of the old dependency model in the Australian tax and transfer system is the Dependent Spouse Rebate (DSR). This is a tax rebate for people who have spouses (or daughter-housekeepers) with low income and who do not have any dependent children. The justification for this rebate is that a dependent spouse reduces one's capability to pay tax.

Can this rebate still be justified in the 'active society'? For the most part, it would seem that the answer to this question is 'no'. This conclusion arises from the principle that taxation should be related as closely as possible to people's **capacity** to obtain an income. Tax and transfer policies should not provide incentives for people to withdraw from the labour force unless there is some strong equity reason for doing so. Spouse dependency is no longer, and perhaps never was, such a reason.

The key question with respect to DSR is whether the low income of the spouse (usually the wife) is due to a) a choice to stay at home and run the household or to enjoy leisure, or b) is due to constraint. A tax concession for those choosing to have a low income cannot be justified. When there are constraints on behaviour, however, the question is more complicated. Constraints can take several forms including a lack of job skills in consequence of a lifetime of raising a family at home, caring responsibilities for people other than dependent children, illness or disability, or unemployment.

Whilst all these constraints are certainly reasonable grounds for state support, it is less clear that this support should be available to middle and high income families as provided by the DSR. Whilst a case could be made that even high income families with individual members with particular labour disadvantages deserve some support, it does seem discriminatory that this support is available only to higher income **couples**. Thus single people with disabilities can receive Disability Support, but this

is an income tested payment, and disabled people who have a higher income do not receive any income support assistance (unless they are blind).

If it is desired to provide some universal assistance to those people who face particular labour market disadvantages, then this assistance should be available to a much wider group than just dependent spouses. One option therefore might be to abolish the DSR but introduce a general minimum income payment (or possibly a tax rebate) for those people who satisfy certain categorical requirements such as unemployment, disability, or significant caring responsibilities. The sole parent rebate fits into this category, but many other categories of need could also be included.

A less radical, and more politically and administratively feasible, means of ensuring horizontal equity between these different groups, would be to limit the scope of the DSR. The best way to distinguish those who are constrained in their employment prospects from those who chose to stay at home, would be to income-test the DSR on the basis of the taxpayer's income. Since leisure is a luxury good, wives of low income husbands who are not working are more likely to be constrained in their behaviour than are women married to higher income husbands. To put this another way, it is primarily the spouses of the rich who have the luxury of choosing whether to seek employment or not. Why should this choice be subsidised?

Home Child Care Allowance

Whilst the DSR is a concession available to high income single earner families without children, the Home Child Care Allowance (HCCA) is the corresponding payment for families with dependent children. Rather than being a concession provided to the higher income earner, however, HCCA is paid directly to the primary child carer. It is income tested, but only on the primary child carer's income. The allowance is described as serving two key goals: as a partial social recognition of the caring labour undertaken by primary child carers, and as a counterpart to the childcare subsidies received by employed parents. Some would argue that HCCA does not go far enough. The Australian Family Association (1994), for example, argues that HCCA should be increased to the level of Parenting Allowance, and hence become a 'Homemakers' Allowance' paid to all families in which a parent devotes full-time attention to the home and children.

There are two reasons why the present structure of HCCA is wrong. These relate to the two rationales for the payment described above. The first problem is that it is not necessarily the best way to recognise caring responsibilities. The second is that, as currently structured, the payment is a very poor counterpart to childcare subsidies.

Choice and Caring Responsibilities

Since HCCA is essentially a cashing out of the DSR for families with dependent children, similar questions of choice arise. The 'choice-based' critique of this payment can be expressed most simply by considering a simple example.

Consider two households where the husbands are both employed and with the same (medium to high) income. In household A the mother is employed and the children attend a child care centre. In household B the mother stays at home to care for the children. In the first household, the family receives childcare benefits from the state (at least the Child Care Rebate) but pays additional income tax which will generally much more than offset these child care subsidies. In family B, the mother receives HCCA. The mother in household A will typically have less leisure and be more stressed than the mother in household B.

Why then, should the state provide a subsidy (in the form of HCCA) to family B but not to family A? Certainly parents staying at home undertake socially useful work in raising children and so it may be appropriate to provide social recognition of this. But all parents care for their children: the care provided by formal child care is only a small part of the total.

The counter to this choice-based argument is that different employment patterns often reflect constraints and attributes over which people have little choice. Thus mothers who have the skills to obtain higher wages are more likely to be employed than low wage workers, and earnings received may be a good proxy for attainable earnings. If this is the case, then the general principle of tax progression makes it appropriate that these women with higher incomes **should** pay more tax.

How can these two views be reconciled? Essentially the argument revolves around the question of which is the better indicator of married women's income earning potential. Is it their actual income, or some other indicator such as the income of their husband. In the context of a discussion of Parenting Allowance (but equally applicable here), Savage (1994) has argued that assortative mating, together with wide variations in preferences by mothers for employment, mean that in fact husband's earnings may be a better proxy for the total income earning capacity of the household. If this is the case, then equity considerations suggest that there should be no income test on payments to secondary earners, though there should be a test on the income of the primary earner.³ In other words, HCCA should be available to all primary carers of children - whether they are employed or not (though a family income test might be appropriate).

A full resolution of this debate, which potentially has quite far-reaching implications for the optimal structure of income support and taxation policy, remains to be

3 A closely related efficiency argument based upon the higher labour supply elasticity of carers reinforces these conclusions.

undertaken. In particular, empirical questions as to the extent of assortative mating and the determinants of female labour supply must first be resolved.

But in the absence of firm empirical evidence we can still say something. The essence of this debate is that the current system of income testing HCCA on the basis of the primary carers' income can only be justified if you think that the variations in employment (for families of the same demographic composition) are primarily due to constraints (such as different wage rates or unemployment). To the extent to which mothers simply vary in their desires to be at home with their children there is no justification for an income tested payment such as HCCA.

If this is the case, then any payment to assist carers of children should be universal or near-universal: in other words, an extension of Basic or Additional Family Payment. The best way to increase the freedom of mothers to choose between staying at home and being employed would be to increase their income irrespective of their labour market status.

HCCA vs Child Care Assistance

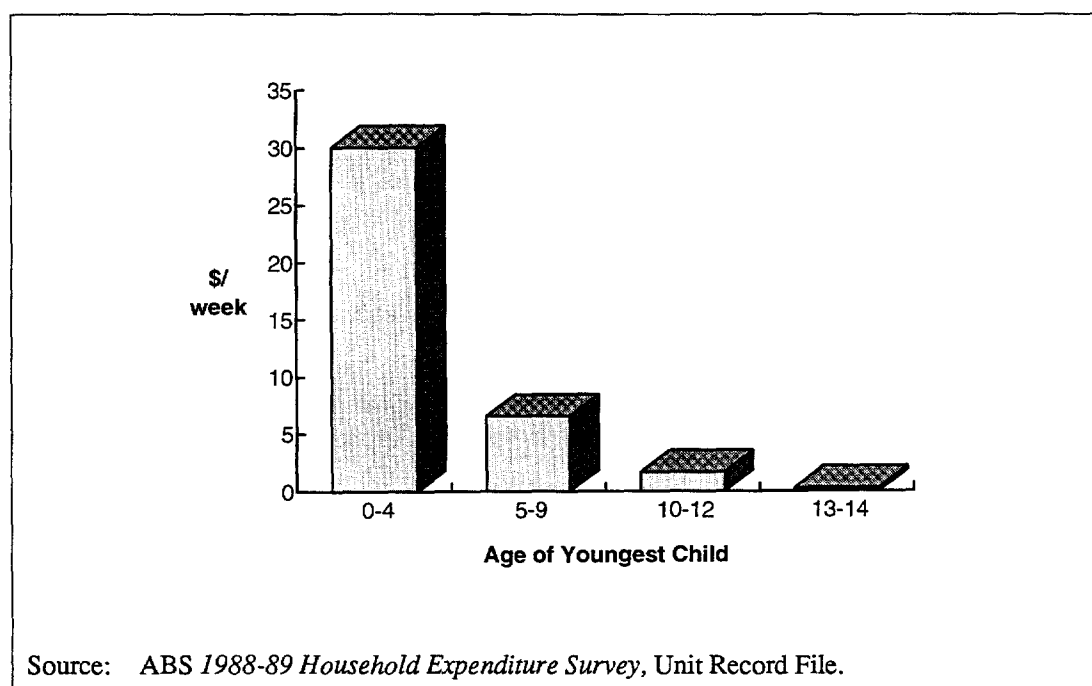
On the other hand, even if this argument is rejected, this still does not imply that the current structure for HCCA is appropriate. If we think that variations in married women's incomes actually reflect their potential earnings variations (and so choice is not relevant), then the case for treating the tax they pay as part of general tax progression is stronger.⁴ In this case it might seem reasonable that HCCA should exist as a counterpart to the Child Care Rebate (CCR) (and other child care assistance) available to working parents. It might be argued that having these two symmetric payments is better than simply a universal payment to families with children because it targets assistance at those who are not able to use free child care.

This symmetry rationale was clearly to the fore in statements by the government when these two payments were introduced. However, the most interesting thing about this comparison is the very different age ranges for children that these two classes of payments cover. HCCA is available in respect of caring responsibilities for any dependent child still at school (and not receiving Austudy). The CCR, however, is only available in respect of children under age 13. Indeed in practice, most recipients of the CCR will have much younger children.

Figure 2 shows in fact that expenditure on child care declines markedly once the youngest child in the household reaches school age. If the symmetry justification is to be given any weight, then surely HCCA should be confined to those families with only younger children.

4 Though there is still the question of differential labour supply responses to be considered (see previous footnote).

Figure 2: Couples Where Both Head and Spouse are Full-time Employees, Mean Child Care Expenditure by Age of Youngest Child: 1988-89



In addition, for the same reasons as were advanced in respect of the DSR, it makes sense to income-test HCCA on family income. Given the short period of time since the introduction of HCCA, this is probably the most politically feasible option. It is hard to justify paying a Home Child Care Allowance to the wife of a stockbroker when working class mothers are forced to look for work in order to make ends meet.

Parenting and Caring: When is Caring Sufficient?

Finally we consider what is perhaps the jewel in the crown of the new, non-dependency based income support system, Parenting Allowance. This payment re-defines the wives (usually) of beneficiaries as no longer dependants but as carers.

In this new context, the future integration of this payment with carers and sole parents pension might seem a logical way to simplify and rationalise income support for carers. It is interesting, however, to reflect on how the different concepts of care associated with these payments fit together. In particular there is a major difference between the level of care required by a current recipient of Carers Pension, and that required by Parenting Allowance recipients with older children. My feeling is that this comparison will inevitably lead to a lowering of the age of qualifying child from its current threshold of 16 years. What this will mean in practice is that a woman married to an unemployed man with a child aged 13, say, will be required to register

for JSA and to search for full-time work in order to receive their current rate of payment.

These sorts of changes are, I suspect, an inevitable consequence of the move away from dependency-based payments. Whether they end up being judged as harsh or not will depend upon the degree of support provided to carers to re-enter the workforce as their children get older.

This also has implications for sole parents. It certainly is much harder to care for a teenage child and work full time when there is only one parent in the household; and so there is no reason to argue for a lowering of the age of qualifying child for sole parents. But an integration of sole parent pension with Parenting Allowance may increase the political pressures for such a change. This is perhaps the most important reason why any such integration should be considered very cautiously.

4 Conclusion

To sum up: the concept of spouse dependency is now almost dead in the Australian social security system and on its last legs in the tax system. Its replacement with payments which recognise the contribution of carers is still incomplete and many important policy issues have still to be addressed. This paper has catalogued a number of issues where further changes in policy will be necessary.

Whether or not these suggestions are taken up, this whole area of policy is likely to be in state of flux for some time for two reasons. First, the changes in gender relationships in Australian society have been highly varied with no clear predominant type of family labour market/caring mode of organisation yet to emerge. Second, despite the labour market participation changes that have occurred, men continue to be reluctant to take up caring responsibilities. Women, who remain the primary carers, feel that their caring labour should be recognised and rewarded, and that they should be given the ability to make their own choices about caring and market work. On the other hand, if the state only rewards caring when the carer is not employed it will discourage carers from participating in the dominant institution of our society - the labour market. These tensions are sure to make for an interesting debate in the years ahead.

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Age Dependency: Myths and Realities

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Age dependency is not, of course, a new phenomenon. It figures in many of the great works of literature and drama. Virgil gives us the powerful image of Aeneas carrying his aged father Anchises on his back as they escape from the ruins of Troy. (A negative version of this story is to be found in the Arabian Nights tale of Sinbad and the Old Man of the Sea). King Lear arranges for his old age to be provided for by his daughters. When they throw him out, he plumbs the depth of his dependency. Turned out of doors to face the wind and the rain, he curses the elements for joining forces with his unnatural children:

I tax not you, elements, with unkindness;
I never gave you kingdom, called you children,
You owe me no subscription ...
Here I stand, your slave,
A poor, infirm, weak, and despised old man.
But yet I call you servile ministers,
That have with two pernicious daughters joined
Your high-engendered battles 'gainst a head
So old and white as this.

Lear's contract with his daughters is an accurate reflection of the practices of that period, when many peasant proprietors made contracts with younger relatives or acquaintances by which they were guaranteed bed, board and care in the medieval equivalent of a granny flat (Hanawalt, 1985). Such arrangements still exist, sometimes with unfortunate or even tragic outcomes. The Russian writer Turgenev's story, *Lear of the Steppes*, portrays the outcome of such a contract, where the protagonist finds his dependency unbearable and ends by pulling down the house he has built for one of his daughters. Some recent court cases in Australia have provided us with real-life examples of similar occurrences.

The modern period - i.e. since the onset of European industrialisation in the 18th century - differs in that dependency has become a large-scale phenomenon, which requires institutionalised forms of social action to deal with it. In the early stages of industrialisation in Western Europe and North America, children entered the work force at an early age and older people continued to work as long as they were physically able. Exit from the work force meant dependency for most people. The prohibition of child labour and the introduction of compulsory schooling changed the meaning of dependency for children. The introduction of pensions and their corollary, compulsory retirement, led to prevalent conceptions about dependency

ratios, intergenerational equity, and the 'burden' of pensions and aged care on the younger generation.

In the past 15 years, there has been a notable increase in the literature dealing with the concept of dependency. One important strand of this literature is concerned to emphasise that dependency is not a demographic or biological inevitability, but a social construct. In the very first issue of the British journal *Ageing and Society*, Peter Townsend argued that the dependency of older people was 'structured', and the structure was a creation of social policy. Townsend summed up his argument in the following words:

The concepts of retirement, pensionable status, institutional residence and rather passive forms of community care have been developed in both capitalist and state socialist countries in ways which have created and reinforced the social dependency of the elderly. Such 'structured' dependency is a consequence of twentieth-century thought and action, and especially of the management of modern economies and the distribution of power and status in such economies. The severity and extent of that dependency cannot be justified by appeal to certain major types of evidence. Empirical studies of capacity and desire for productive occupation, reciprocation of services, and familial and social relationships, as well as self-care, challenge the assumptions which prevail. There is clearly room for an alternative interpretation of the roles to be played by the elderly whereby many more of them continue in paid employment, find alternative forms of substantial and productive occupation, have rights to much larger incomes, and have a much greater control over the place and type of accommodation where they live, and the kind of community services to which they contribute as well as have access. (Townsend, 1981: 23).

It is worth pausing to comment on Townsend's use of the term 'elderly'. If he were writing his article now it is unlikely that he would use the term 'elderly', which is clearly disfavoured by the great majority of older persons. A survey commissioned by the Department of Human Services and Health in 1994 found that the words 'mature' and 'senior' were the preferred terms, each attracting 25 per cent of preferences. 'Elderly' was favoured by no more than four per cent (Shanahan, 1994). Similar results were found in a survey carried out in Western Europe, where the two favoured terms were 'senior' and 'older person', while 'elderly' received the same thumbs down response (Walker, *Eurolink-Age*, 1993: 14-15).

A similar progression may be noticed here in New South Wales, where an annual program arranged by the state government is now called 'Seniors' Week' instead of 'Senior Citizens' Week', which itself replaced 'Old People's Week'. General approval of the term 'senior' may be related to the introduction of the Seniors' Card,

which has been given a strongly positive connotation in all the states where it is now in use (Pfeffer, 1991).

Townsend's paper was followed very shortly by an article by Alan Walker, which endorses the concept of structural dependency, but with much more of a Marxist flavour. Whereas Townsend refers to both capitalist and state socialist societies, Walker is quite clear that age dependency is a creation of capitalism. Dependency, he maintains, is an enforced condition, i.e. a structurally created inferior status involving compulsory withdrawal from the work force at a fixed age. Social policies sponsored directly or indirectly by the state play a central role in the creation or management of this dependency. The assignment of dependent status to the aged is a social, not a biological construct, and there is no necessary connection between age and dependency. He concludes with this striking passage:

The increasing dependency of elderly people in Britain has been socially engineered in order to facilitate the removal of older workers from the labour force. At the heart of this social change has been the narrow financial goals of capitalism, and particularly its constant need to increase profitability. In this interest mass superannuation has been managed through retirement, early retirement and unemployment amongst older workers. Age-restrictive social policies have been used by the state both to exclude older workers from the labour force and to legitimate that exclusion through retirement. Retirement pensions are one of the means by which capitalism is able to enforce changes aimed at reconstituting the workforce. This changing social relationship between age and the labour market has formed the basis for a more general spread of dependency amongst the elderly. Age-restrictive policies in health and personal social services have been reviewed, but also in housing, the failure to provide a sufficient stock of sheltered housing for older people has tended to increase the likelihood of institutionalisation, and therefore increased dependency. (Walker, 1983: 161)

A similar view is taken by Phillipson, who argues that age dependency is a result of the exigencies of the labour market in a capitalist society (Phillipson, 1982). In a detailed analysis of early retirement, Phillipson also suggests that the concept of early retirement is a myth which conceals the existence of prolonged unemployment among older workers, especially men, and that the correct term should be 'early exit' from the work force (Laczko and Phillipson, 1991). In the language of the law, early retirement is a term of art or, more brutally, ideological camouflage for the high incidence of unemployment among men over 50.

A report by an Australian parliamentary committee in 1992 takes a similar view. Known commonly as the 'Jones report' (House of Representatives, 1992) after the name of its chairman, the committee observed that much so-called retirement was in

fact involuntary. There was a paradoxical relationship between demography and the labour market, so that people were living longer but spending less time in the work force.

They concluded that many workers resented the compulsion to retire, and that restrictions on the employment of older people were inequitable. People should have the freedom to choose whether to retire or to continue working, instead of being forced into a situation of dependency at an arbitrary age. The report also noted that there was no substantial evidence to support the argument that jobs would be created for young people if older workers left the work force (House of Representatives, 1992).

In the United States, Binstock (1985) has described the remarkable turn around in public attitudes towards older people since the 1970s. The aged, he maintains, are being used as a scapegoat for failures of public policy and for the growth of unemployment in a depressed economy. The so-called 'crisis' in the social security system stimulated concern that the cost of pensions and of aged care was imposing an intolerable burden on American society. Previously, the stereotype of older persons was that they needed care because of their dependency. They were regarded as the deserving poor because their dependent situation was forced upon them by compulsory retirement. These relatively tolerant stereotypes had been replaced by three new notions:

- the aged are relatively well off because of welfare programs;
- the aged have too much political influence ('grey power', etc.); and
- longevity is making the problem worse.

President Jimmy Carter responded to these concerns by appointing a commission of inquiry, which reported in 1981. The commission's report (White House Conference on Aging, 1981) painted an alarming picture of impending crisis, and was immediately seized upon to justify the widespread conservative claim that the United States was spending too much on welfare programs, a claim translated into action under Carter's successor, Ronald Reagan.

The daily press, the business press and a number of conservative economists used the Carter commission report as a hook from which to hang their own anti-welfare arguments. A columnist in *Forbes* magazine declared: 'The myth is that they're sunk in poverty. The reality is that they're living well. The trouble is there are too many of them - God bless 'em' (Flint, 1980). One of the Reagan administration's economic analysts published an article in a professional journal arguing that the choice for public policy was 'guns versus canes' - an allusion to the notorious Nazi slogan of 'guns before butter'. Martin Feldstein, who was appointed chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors under the Reagan administration, maintained that many older persons were gaining as much from social security benefits as they had earned while they were still working (Binstock, 1985: 489-91).

The Carter commission's report made great play with the age dependency ratio, i.e. the ratio between people aged 15-64 and those aged 65 and over. The commission's report estimated that the ratio would climb from 18 per cent in 1980 to 39 per cent in 2035. It called for a 'renegotiation' of the social contract. Friedmann and Adamchak (1983), in a detailed critique of the commission's report, point out that these calculations ignore the contributions made by older people to the welfare of younger people, in the form of direct services or of cash payments which draw upon accumulated capital or pension income.

They point out, further, that the Carter commission used a 'segmental' ratio, which deals with only one dependent group and relates its numbers to the total 'productive' population. This was then used to infer that changes in the ratio represented changes in the ability of society to carry the load. The report did not consider other kinds of dependency, including young people who are not 'productive'. They suggest two other kinds of dependency ratios, one based on labour force participation and one on a comprehensive 'societal' picture. For an adequate picture, they maintained, three kinds of data are necessary:

- changes in the total, 'societal' ratio;
- relative costs of each dependent segment; and
- contributions made by older people to the economy and to society generally.

Obsession with the age dependency ratio conceals the fact that the size of the labour force is increasing (e.g. through higher female participation), and that the level of dependency related to children is falling because of the decline of the birthrate. With an increased labour force, contributing to the social security system, and the transfer of resources from the declining youthful population to the growing older population, the system need not experience a crisis. The real problems arose not from a pensions crisis, but from the effects of prolonged unemployment and inflation (Friedmann and Adamchak, 1983: 57-60).

Over-emphasis on age dependency ratios is criticised from a different standpoint by the well-known American demographer, Richard Easterlin (1991). He observes that the use of the ratio is characterised by a lack of historical and comparative perspective, and an excessive reliance on simple projections. To test the value of projections into the middle of the 21st century, he examined a similar time span in retrospect, i.e. from the 1870s to the present, covering 10 Western European countries as well as the United States. Over this period, the general trend of economic growth, despite fluctuations, was upward, while the general trend of population growth was downward.

Dealing with the contention that a growing population of retired persons will place an insupportable burden on the work force because of rising public expenditure on income support and health care, Easterlin points out that this ignores the need to look at the **total** dependency ratio, which includes juvenile as well as aged dependants. On this basis, the total ratio has not increased in secular terms, although it has

fluctuated considerably. In the United Kingdom and the United States, he calculates, the total dependency ratio will be lower than it was in the 1880s. In the US, it will be lower in 2050 than it was in the period of the baby boom. This calculation produced similar results for all 11 countries in his study, except France and Switzerland.

Easterlin (1991) maintains that increasing age dependency and decreasing child dependency tend to offset each other. Although public expenditure per head on older persons is relatively high, the evidence is that combined private and public expenditure is much the same for both young and old. Some studies of relative expenditure actually conclude that the cost per head of supporting young people (under 20) is greater than that of supporting people aged 60 and over. He concludes:

Given that total expenditure per dependant is not much different for older and younger dependants, then the total economic burden of dependency on the younger working age population is unlikely to be noticeably higher in the first half of the 21st century than in the past century. This means in turn that the real issue to be faced is not economic but political - how to capture via taxation the savings of households from supporting fewer younger dependants to fund the cost of more older dependants (Easterlin, 1991: 309).

In Australia, the question of age dependency became a front-page issue as the result of an EPAC report, *Australia's Ageing Society* (Clare and Tulpule, 1994), published in January 1994. The report used the standard arguments based on the age dependency ratio to paint a gloomy picture of a growing burden on existing systems of income support, aged care and health care. Some of its major conclusions are as follows:

- the total dependency ratio will rise from 50 to 100 persons of working age to 60 or more by the year 2051;
 - an ageing population is likely to have negative effects on international competitiveness, domestic demand, and the availability of a skilled labour force;
 - while the decline in dependency of the young may release some resources, the aged tend to involve greater costs for the public purse;
 - increased labour force participation by women may decrease the volume of support provided to the aged by their close relatives;
 - welfare expenditures are projected to rise from \$23 billion in 1989 to \$105 billion in 2051, i.e. 9.3 per cent of projected GDP;
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- health expenditure will rise from 8.4 per cent of GDP to 11.1 per cent in 2051, by which time more than 50 per cent of health expenditure will be devoted to the elderly;
- there is a particular problem (which will need 'special scrutiny') regarding the high level of expenditure on patients in their last two years of life; and
- the proportion of the population with disabilities will rise from 10 to 15 per cent (Clare and Tulpule, 1994).

The general tone of the report could be described as one of cautious pessimism tempered by cautious optimism. The authors obviously see the growth of the aged population as a problem, but they also believe that increased costs can be met by modest rises in taxation, especially as GDP per head is expected to double in real terms by their projected year of 2051. However, reactions to the report in the newspapers could only be described as hysterical. Here are some examples:

- 'Pickpocket Pensioners': headline in *The Australian*, 16.2.94. The article went on to claim that most of the savings of the young would go into consumption expenditure by their grandparents.
- 'Baby Boomers Won't Just Fade Away': headline in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7.2.94. The following editorial maintained that the 'baby boomers' would become an intolerable burden on society as they grow older, threatening a 'general sclerosis of Australian attitudes and culture'.
- 'Health Cost A Life and Death Issue': headline in the *Sydney Daily Telegraph - Mirror*, 31.1.94. The writer drew on the imagery of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, where all the physiological stigmata of old age have been abolished, but dying is a state-controlled affair. To be fair, however, the *Daily Telegraph-Mirror* editorial in the same issue warned against talk of euthanasia and the withdrawal of medical treatment for terminally ill people.

We must be careful not to let economic considerations override the rights of the elderly to enjoy their last years without feeling guilty for burdening the young. If the elderly come to be regarded as an unfair burden on the health dollar, it is only a short step to a scenario in which elderly, inconvenient relatives may be persuaded that they want an easy and painless death.
(*Daily Telegraph-Mirror*, 31.1.1994)

The references to euthanasia in the EPAC report, and the shock-horror response in the mass media, bring to mind a much older proposal for a solution to the problem of poverty in Ireland, brought about by the awkward propensity of the Irish to have large families. In 1729, Jonathan Swift wrote his celebrated shock-horror essay *A Modest Proposal*, subtitled 'for preventing the children of poor people from being a burden to their parents or the country - by using them as food for the rich'.

An idiosyncratic note was struck by the columnist P.P. McGuinness in the *Australian* (31.1.94). The problem, he argued, was not the demands of the elderly but the selfishness of the baby-boomers, who expected to live on 'generous' old age pensions for which they have not saved, or even more generous public sector superannuation benefits to which they had contributed little or nothing. Having benefited from social expenditures all their lives, they were now lobbying strongly for more social expenditures on themselves and their parents. Mr McGuinness, although only a few years older than the baby boomers, evidently believes that the younger generation has gone to the dogs.

The most provocative comment was to be found in a cartoon, reproduced here, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* of February 1, 1994. This cartoon apparently provoked more irate responses from older people's lobby groups than anything else that appeared in the press.

As I observed above, the EPAC report is considerably more balanced than the media reaction would suggest. My own criticisms of it are as follows:

- There is little in the way of international comparisons, which is a pity since it is worth stressing what is typical and what is untypical. Ageing of the population is characteristic of all the advanced industrial countries, but their responses show some marked variations.
 - It lacks historical perspective, the data being derived almost entirely from projections. The article by Easterlin (1991), cited above, illustrates the value of looking backwards as well as forwards.
 - Although there is a brief reference to changing rules concerning retirement and paid employment after retirement, the subject is not pursued. This is a significant gap, especially in the light of an earlier report (EPAC, 1988) which argues the case for easing restrictions on post-retirement earnings.
 - Although the report notes that the trend to early retirement seems to have ceased in a number of OECD countries, it fails to observe that a similar pattern is now evident in Australia, as shown in the ABS quarterly *Labour Force* report, which reviews participation rates by age over a 10-year period (ABS, 1993).
 - Special issues relating to women receive only six paragraphs and just one table, projecting labour force growth to 2051.
 - Some data are contestable, especially the assertion (Clare and Tulpule, 1994: 27) that the aged make greater demands on the public purse than the young. This assertion is not quantified, and is contrary to the findings of some of the authors cited above.
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- In general, the report is dominated by the rhetoric of care, need, and dependency. Although the authors include one table (1994: 71) on support given by older people to their families, they appear to regard this as relatively unimportant. Considering the emotive character of some of the matters referred to, the report also shows little evidence of a feel for social and political issues.

Writing in the journal of the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) its former director, Dr Don Edgar (1991), argues strongly against the alarmist use of the age dependency ratio. Like a number of overseas authors, he points out that increased labour force participation rates for women reduce the dependency ratio and are likely to reduce it still further. This point is almost totally ignored in the EPAC report, although it is stressed in a report by the National Population Council (1991: 74).

Research by the AIFS (Edgar, 1991) emphasises the extent to which older family members are involved in assisting other family members. Table 1 gives a breakdown of various forms of assistance.

Table 1: Family Support Offered by Older People

Type of Support	Percentage
Direct Assistance	
Child care	76
Emotional support during crisis	76
Care in case of illness	61
Assistance with home renovations	38
Financial Assistance	
Major purchases	37
Tertiary education	27
Deposit for house or flat	33
Money for travel	14
Bond money	12

Source: Edgar, 1991.

Similar results were found in the survey of aged persons directed by Kendig in the 1980s, using a sample based in Sydney. Kendig also found that older people were more likely to be providers than recipients of many kinds of support. Older persons were more likely to give financial support to their families than the reverse. A quarter of the older persons in the survey serve as volunteers and work long hours in various social services, of which Meals-on-Wheels is perhaps the best known example (Kendig, 1986).

The role of grandparents in providing child care is highlighted in the recent family survey published by the ABS. Table 2 shows the relative contribution of grandparents in providing child care in New South Wales.

Dr Edgar foresees that, as the baby boom generation reaches old age, there will be a 'senior boom', which will require an extensive rethink of existing attitudes, values, and structures. The stereotype of dependency reflects the assumption that older people are 'unproductive'. The meaning of productivity should be redefined to include more than employment. At present, we have a system,

riddled with outmoded structures, outmoded work regulations, outmoded retirement and superannuation provisions..... and media stuck in the cult of youth and pushing an image of the 'aged' that denies their status as elders whose resources can and should be drawn upon. (Edgar, 1991: 17)

Table 2: Main Providers of Informal Child Care, NSW, 1992 (%)

Grandparents (grandmother)	55 (42)
Neighbours/friends	20
Other relatives (siblings)	18 (6)
Privately employed person	4
Spouse, not usually resident	3
	100.0

Source: ABS (1993), *Family Survey*, Cat. No. 4426.0.

By recognising the contribution which older people can make to society, it will be possible to move beyond the artificially framed policy debate about young and old competing for resources and reduce the dependency - real or perceived - of older people.

General Conclusions

Demographic projections for advanced industrial countries assume low or negative population growth and a sharp rise in age dependency. The 'age dependency ratio' has come to be regarded as the ark of the covenant, as in the report of the Carter commission (White House Conference on Aging, 1981) in the US, the recent EPAC report by Clare and Tulpule (1994), and most recently, a World Bank report (IBRD, 1994). Detailed analysis of the projections made in these reports, plus a re-examination of the concept of dependency itself, suggests that these concerns are over-rated.

A number of writers maintain that the idea of dependency arises not from demographic or biological inevitability but from social construction. This has occurred through the introduction of pensions, compulsory retirement, institutionalised residential care, and other economic and social policies which see the 'aged' as a distinct group. Dependency and 'ageism' go hand in hand.

While there may be longer-term problems arising from a 'mortality revolution' which will generate significant numbers of very old people (90 and over), in the medium term (i.e. the next 50 years) the problem is exaggerated. This is especially so because the current and expected population of people between 60 and 80 are better off in terms of health and material resources than any previous generation.

Concern about dependency ignores the substantial contributions made by older people, especially the 'young old', to family members in a wide range of areas of need. Australian data are in line with overseas findings on this point. This concern also ignores or under-rates the significance of increased labour force participation by women.

Interdependence between generations is a much more appropriate description of the actual situation than 'dependency', and provides a more equitable and realistic basis for social policies addressed to the growth in the proportion of older people in society.

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Older People's Constructions of Dependency: Some Implications for Aged Care Policy

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1 Introduction

Maximisation of independence has emerged as a central tenet of Australian aged care policy. Programmatically, it has come to be expressed under the rubric of a 'balance of care' in the differential evaluation and prioritising of various residential environments: 'home' is the 'least restrictive environment' where maximum independence can be achieved; nursing homes are located at the opposite end of the 'continuum of care'; and hostels are somewhere in between. Related terms are used to describe the people for whom these environments are supposedly suitable, with nursing homes being seen as appropriate for the most 'dependent'.

In part this policy goal draws its support from studies which have demonstrated the high value placed by older people themselves on 'independence'. Large scale surveys and smaller qualitative investigations consistently reveal the salience among older people of maintaining their independence and a fierce commitment by most of them to 'staying home'. The fact that the vast majority of older people wish to remain in their own dwelling, often in the face of substantial difficulties, is frequently commented upon. Although a number of positive consequences for well-being have been identified with remaining at home (see e.g. Willcocks et al., 1987; Rowland, 1991), the most highly rated factor is maintenance of independence. Indicators of the difficulties experienced by home-dwellers have been interpreted as evidence that 'older people place a high value on their independence' (NSW Department of Housing, 1990: 7) and that a significant proportion are willing to pay a considerable price for this commitment to 'independent living'.

Within social gerontology, 'dependency' has been a central theoretical concern, from the influential structured dependency thesis (Townsend, 1962; Fennell, 1986), which located dependency in the context of the wider political and economic inequalities experienced by older people, to the sustained critiques of institutional life which flourished in the 1980s (see e.g. Baldwin et al., 1993). It also figures prominently in the burgeoning literature on 'successful ageing', where independence is seen as a key determinant of well-being and satisfaction in later life (see e.g. Day, 1991).

Despite such intense scholarly scrutiny and political action, there has been remarkably little attention paid to the construction of independence by older people themselves. We know they want it, but what exactly is it they want?

2 Research Background

One thing is clear: '(in)dependence' cannot be treated as a free-floating value out of context (see e.g. Russell and Sauran, 1991; Brody, 1977). At the macro level, it is well established that the position of independence as a core value for older people is socioculturally variable. In a recent cross-cultural study conducted by Jennie Keith and her associates (1990), for instance, the responses of older Americans to questions about 'successful ageing' shared with older Australians a central theme of the need to be independent. However, that of elderly Hong Kong Chinese revealed an opposite focus:

people were far more likely to identify dependence, rather than independence, as a reason why an older person was doing well. What they meant was that their dependency needs...were being met through the efforts of others, primarily members of their family. (Keith et al., 1990: 256)

The centrality of independence within the American value system emerged in various kinds of information. For instance, a cluster of attributes that the researchers label 'self-sufficiency', predicated on the ability to live alone, was highly valued. 'By contrast, in Hong Kong, people did not even see the sense of evaluating this ability: "Why would anyone want to live alone?" they asked their interviewers' (Keith et al., 1990: 256).

Recent in-depth studies of community-dwelling older Australians (Davison et al., 1993; Fine, 1992) and Americans (Cohen, 1992) reveal a strongly held conviction that 'staying home' is the way to achieve independence. In the American study, "(l)iving independently" was equated with avoiding or postponing 'a move to a residential establishment (Cohen, 1992: 96). Similarly for most of the Sydneysiders, 'the home was regarded as the natural and the preferred place to live, the place in which they could best remain independent' (Fine, 1992: 63), a finding replicated among frail older people in a middle suburb of Melbourne (Davison et al., 1993).

The meaning of independence to older people themselves, however, remains essentially problematic. Both Australian studies, for instance, identify a similar conceptual dilemma: how to reconcile the 'fierce commitment' of their subjects to independence with their often considerable use of formal and informal support for many activities of daily living.

Davison and her associates frame the issue in these terms:

In examining the whole question of help and what it means to the older person, we need to ask ourselves some questions

about the nature of independence in old age. Are older people living in the community truly self-reliant with the everyday household tasks of cleaning, meal preparation and in the laundry? To what extent do they depend on others for assistance to remain living independently at home? Do those older people that we describe as being fiercely independent actually adhere to an ethic of independence while seeking and accepting help from many different sources, in order to maintain an outward semblance of self-reliance? (Davison et al., 1993: 103)

Following a descriptive account of 'managing the household', the authors conclude that:

even the most self-reliant older people living at home rely on many sources of support to enable them to continue living independently at home...(O)ur study underlines...how strong, and how important for survival, is the ethic of independence, even among frail older people. Belief in the ethic is compatible with a wide variety of lifestyles and degrees of real physical and psychological dependence'. (Davison et al., 1993: 121)

Fine (1992: 66) also suggests that, for his frail community service clients, staying at home should be interpreted as a 'symbol of independence' which is 'expressed in their continued autonomy'. The meaning of home, he comments later:

appears to have undergone a transformation as it became the centre for care...At home they could...escape many of the problems of dependency that their condition inflicted on them...They were thus sustained at home with considerable apparent independence... (Fine, 1992: 99-100)

In other words, the paradox is resolved by assuming that there is a difference in the way that researchers and old people construct '(in)dependence'. To researchers, there is a 'real' state of dependence, associated with physical and/or mental frailty. People in this state must rely on others to do things for them. But old people say that while they are at home, they are 'living independently'. Clearly, the researchers seem to be saying, this cannot really be so. Their independence is only 'apparent' or 'symbolic'. Or, what they 'actually adhere to' is not a reality, but an 'ethic' of independence.

But what exactly does this mean from the perspective of frail older people? How is it possible to be dependent in reality and simultaneously believe that only an independent lifestyle is desirable? The answer from an 'outside' perspective appears to be that older people are practicing a kind of cognitive self-delusion, clinging to a 'belief' or symbolic representation of a state that they cannot in fact attain.

In order to unravel this conceptual confusion, we need to prioritise older people's own views and experiences of independence within a contextualised approach (see e.g. Hazan, 1990; Baldwin et al., 1993). Since 1990 I have been engaged, with co-researcher Dr Vera Sauran, in a research program investigating the relationship between different kinds of residential environments and older people, especially those who are approaching or experiencing frailty. Qualitative research techniques of in-depth interviewing, focus group discussions and participant observation have been employed.

The first two projects, both of which were funded by the Australian Rotary Health Research Fund, were evaluative studies of the experiences of elderly residents of, respectively, a hostel and a retirement village (Russell and Sauran, 1991; Russell and Sauran, 1992). The other project, which is still in progress, is supported by a RADGAC grant. It compares three populations of older people (an envisaged total of about 70 persons) living in suburban homes, a majority of whom receive varying levels of assistance from community services.

This paper draws on data from completed interviews with 55 of these home dwellers. One sub-sample of 33 people who did not use any formal support services was recruited through a variety of sources. It comprised 10 members of a social group who met at an inner western Community Centre, seven members of a branch of the Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Federation, nine members from two other older people's organisations and a further nine people who had attended a public consultation on 'Building Better Neighbourhoods for Older People' held in Sydney in 1992. In this way we obtained a geographically dispersed group of relatively mobile people over the age of 60 years.

Another sub-sample of 22 frail residents of the lower North Shore was recruited through two local community centres. All used at least one formal community service. In addition, about half were found to receive some instrumental help from a relative (typically a daughter or niece). Only four of these 22 people retained sufficient mobility to move about the neighbourhood without help; half rarely left home at all and only three could use public transport.

The interviews were largely unstructured, guided within broad limits by two main topic areas: the meaning of 'home' to the individual and the meaning and significance of 'independence'. All interviews were tape recorded and transcribed. At this stage, the data have not been fully analysed and this paper does not aspire to the status of a comprehensive research report. Rather, it focuses on those aspects of respondents' accounts which reveal the way they construct the meaning of independence.

I should also make the point that only interviews with women have been included. Despite concerted efforts to recruit male participants, their representation in the study thus far remains disappointingly low. Overseas findings suggest that gender may well be a highly significant variable in the construction of independence. American women in the cross-cultural study referred to earlier, for example, were found to 'talk more frequently than men about independence and being "active"'

(Keith et al., 1990: 258). There is some indication that a similar factor may be operating here, but given the small numbers of men this remains at best a tantalising speculation.

3 Findings

In broad terms, the findings have largely confirmed the evidence from previous work. Without exception, all respondents emphasise - and usually spontaneously - the importance of 'independence' to them. When the inquiry is focused - 'Why is independence so important to you?'--the response is invariably a look of incredulity: Why would anyone ask such a question? Almost like the need to breathe, the need for independence is seen as self-evident.

It is possible to identify a number of recurring elements in the way respondents talked about independence. Expressions such as 'I am very independent' or 'I have been independent all my life' were commonly used to describe themselves, and they all used similar terms to describe what 'independent living' meant to them:

Independence is doing everything you want.
I do as I please.
I can do what I like here.
...if I want to do something I can do it.
I can do what I like and go where I like.
I like to be in control.
I am my own boss.
(Independence) is doing what I think is best for me.

Clearly, the central referent here is the concept of autonomy or control, which has been identified in numerous studies as a key element of well-being in later life (see e.g. Rowe and Kahn, 1987; Day, 1991). Service users, not surprisingly, referred more frequently to some inability to perform daily activities and to various sources of assistance they received with them. But, usually in the same breath, they would maintain that they were 'independent'. There was, for them, no contradiction between these two propositions.

It was among this group that the achievement of independence, whatever its meaning to them, was potentially most problematic. Interview and observational data revealed the many difficulties their often substantial disabilities posed, and the effort they had to expend in dealing with basic tasks.

I made myself a big calendar and I cross off the days - that's the way I can beat my poor eyesight and find out the day it is. I have learned to manage my life. I wheel this tea-table to the kitchen and bring my meals to this chair in the lounge. I can't carry things easily because I need these sticks to walk, but by leaning on the table and one stick, I found a way to do these things. (Mrs J, 76, service user)

For some, life revolved around a single room, or even an arm chair. One woman spent much of her day sitting near the screen door through which she watched the comings and goings from neighbouring flats. Nonetheless, when they spoke about what they could and could not do, it was clear that they did not see themselves as 'dependent' in any way. On the contrary, they emphasised that they were in control:

I can look after myself.
 I've always looked after myself.
 I am self-sufficient.
 I'm pretty well organised.
 I manage-alright.
 I've got everything arranged.
 I can manage in my own flat.
 I am not a burden to anyone.
 I don't feel ready to depend on people.
 I suppose old age means that you are dependent on other people...and I am not very fond of that.
 I am 79, so you do need some sort of help when - say from Council - when in need...Independence is very important to me.

However the full significance of the topic is not revealed through selected phrases and statements taken out of context. Respondents' discourses revealed a complex interweaving of related themes. The dominant feature which has emerged from this preliminary analysis is the recurrent patterning of talk about 'independence' in terms of contrast with its perceived opposite. In his discussion of community service clients' preference for remaining at home, Fine remarks that it 'was perhaps most clearly expressed in terms of their attitude to alternative accommodation' (1992: 95). However if we approach these transcripts from another perspective, they can reveal far more than expressions of preference in relation to where they live.

Within mainstream gerontology, we are used to adopting a 'conventional scientific attitude' in analysing the ageing experience. Having such an attitude means three things, according to Gubrium and Wallace:

(1) thinking of the ageing experience as a world essentially separate and distinct from the world of theory, (2) empirically orienting to age and ageing as a configuration of principally self-evident facts, and (3) assuming theory to be an explanatory language informed by science, **not** derived from the world of experience in its own right. (Gubrium and Wallace, 1990: 132)

We are used to thinking about the 'world' of the elderly as the world of data: experiences, behaviours, attitudes, and the like which old people have or exhibit in relation to 'real life' practical concerns, of which 'maintaining independence' is a particularly important one. We do not, by and large, see older people as 'theorising' about such matters, 'at least, not in the same way as...theorists do' (Gubrium and Wallace, 1990: 133).

But I would propose that this is precisely what these elderly people are doing. In response to an inquiry about the meaning to them of living at home, they have engaged in a process of analytic activity which 'give(s) shape and substance to their experiences in their own right, separate from how we, as social scientists, interpret them' (Gubrium and Wallace, 1990: 146-47). We can see them, in other words, as engaging in what Gubrium and Wallace have called 'ordinary theorising'. When older people talk about independence, they reveal 'a whole world of reasoning about the meaning of growing old, becoming frail and caregiving...' (1990: 147).

Gubrium and Wallace propose that we need to 'refocus social gerontology from behaviours to meanings embedded in ordinary discourse' (1990: 147). Discourse analysis has emerged over recent years as a powerful tool for the analysis of verbal communications in their social, political and cultural context. The method relies for validation of its interpretations on the 'extensive use of the actual textual material' (Lupton, 1992: 148). Accordingly, I have reproduced below three substantial interview extracts.

Eighty-one year old Mrs B's dark flat is in an old dilapidated building in North Sydney. She 'lives' in the front room, which opens onto a gloomy covered passageway leading to the half dozen other flats on the first floor. Near her arm chair is a low table with the telephone, a dish for the expected Meals on Wheels delivery, some magazines and the TV remote control. She has her legs up on a stool. She has a 'nasty ulcerated toe' and is recovering from shingles. She is completely housebound. A neighbour takes out her garbage and calls in daily to see if she wants anything. She receives occasional visits from family members and regular assistance from Home Care.

I get Home Care coming in once a fortnight. They put my washing through the machine. The nurses come three times a week...to dress my toe and bathe me. A woman comes once a fortnight to do the floors, I can no longer do it. But I don't want to go to a hostel, full stop... I can't see why I should. I can do what I like here. I get up when I want to and get to bed when I want to, sit down when I want to. It's a big difference being in your own home, doing what you want. A home run by other people is not for me, and while I can manage in my own flat, why should I go into a home? I would lose a lot of my independence. I don't worry here if things aren't done, they don't get done. The girls who come in just do what they can, the rest can wait.. I manage alright except that I can't walk around much...Here I do as I please. I read a bit, I watch television all night if I want to...with the Community Care and the lady upstairs, I manage quite well...I don't want to be surrounded by people. When I had this knee done I was sent to ...Hospital for respite. I simply hated it with all those old people, half of them spewing up their meals...It's too upsetting and too much worry to see the old people all the time...There is

nothing worse than hearing others talk about their sickness all the time...There is not a person around in my age that haven't got aches and pains. It's not a very exciting period in your life. And you get that more if you were in a retirement home...When I was...in the nursing home, I'd go to therapy and I'd see all those old people...too depressing. I could not get home quick enough. If you can stay in your own home, you are better off.
(Mrs B, 81, service user)

Clearly Mrs B is saying a number of things. She begins with the observation that other people perform a variety of household tasks for her because 'I can no longer do it'. She follows this by introducing the topic of hostels: she doesn't want to go to one, and 'can't see why' she should. She doesn't want to go because there is 'a big difference' between the two settings. The contrast is presented in terms of control: at home 'I can do what I like' but 'a home' is 'run by other people'. She can 'manage alright', even if the conditions are less than ideal. If she went anywhere else, 'I would lose a lot of my independence'. Later she returns to the topic of residential facilities to make a further point, which she illustrates through her personal experience of convalescence in a nursing home. She hated being 'with all those old people'. Old people are not only sick ('There is not a person around in my age that haven't got aches and pains') but they 'talk about their sickness all the time'. It is 'too depressing' so, she concludes, 'If you can stay in your own home, you are better off'.

Mrs T, aged 85, is also largely housebound. She suffers poor balance following a broken hip four years ago and can only go out when a family member accompanies her. She lives alone in a two bedroom flat which opens on to a landing just opposite the staircase. From her lounge she can see people going by, and she spends much of her days watching these comings and goings through a screen door. She receives assistance from neighbours, relatives, and the local Community Centre.

I can look after myself. I get three meals a week from the Community Centre - only three a week because I feel that while I can cook for myself it will keep my brain active and I won't develop into a vegetable. I mean, elderly people are inclined to do that, you know, they lose all interest in everything. And I think to keep yourself interested is very important. It keeps your mind active and keeps you young, and to mix with younger people, not a lot of older people. I don't like old people, not really. They change and become dull. I like the atmosphere of young people, they are always brighter and happy. Older people are not, that's why I like to be in my own home. Also, if I want to go to bed and I want to lie down, I can do that without someone telling me I can't do this and I can't do that. That's what I don't like....(At home) If I want to do something I can do it and if I don't want to do it I am not going to do it, that's all there is to it....(In a retirement place

where her friend lives) it is a very lazy life, you feel you don't want to do anything. They even read the newspapers to you...She loves that, she is in her 90s. It would not suit me. I'll get bored...I would want to go into the kitchen and do a little baking. I think those places are marvellous for people who are not able to cook. (Mrs T, 85, service user)

Mrs T's discourse contains many of the same themes articulated by Mrs B. However she elaborates on some of these. The first thing she says is that 'I can look after myself'. She refers to the meals she receives in relation to the ones she cooks for herself. Cooking for herself, she maintains, is important not for its dietary value but because the activity itself has meaning: being active is an important value in its own right. It 'keeps you young'. Young people are preferable to old people - indeed, 'I don't like old people'. They are dull and unhappy. She 'likes to be in my own home' because there she is not surrounded by old people. Another reason is that at home she is in control; she can do whatever she wants 'without someone telling me I can't'. She then draws on her own observations of a friend to elaborate on the characteristics of 'retirement places' and the kind of people who live there. Such an environment produces a 'lazy life' in which people 'don't want to do anything' because everything is done for you. That is good for her friend who is in her 90s and for people who can't cook. But 'it would not suit me'.

Finally, let us consider Mrs S, the 79 year-old widow of a professional man and herself a retired social worker. She lives alone in a luxurious apartment overlooking the harbour. She has severe mobility problems and pays her own housekeeper to come in for several hours each day.

People are better in their own home, if it is any way possible....(After eight weeks in hospital following a joint replacement) I had to decide what to do, where to go when I was discharged. There are so many differing opinions about these things...Being a social worker myself, I realised I needed coordinated opinions and help (Describes home visit and minor modifications and arranging of home nurses)...Three different sisters come. They are all highly trained. They are marvellous people. ...Then I have to have home help. I had help through home help (i.e. Home Care) at (suburb) over the last five years. They sometimes send people I don't like too much. Now I have Katherine...She comes five days a week for two hours. She does the things that need to be done - bed, dusting, cleaning. She is very pleasant ...At least here I am surrounded by my books and my hi fi system. I would hate to live in a village...I'll try to keep living by myself as long as possible...You see, I have always worked all my life...and I feel that my generation of women did not do that...I feel I've got different ideas from people of my generation. I probably wouldn't find anyone congenial in an old people's home...A lot

of my friends are telling me, 'You ought to go into some sort of care', but I don't want to! I just couldn't bear the thought of living with a lot of dull people...I pay Katherine \$120 a week to come...I could get community care, but they only come once a fortnight and it's not the same. I've got everything arranged. I've got a washing up machine, a blender, a food processor--all these things that make life easier and Katherine does all the things I can't do.....(Independence) is doing what I think is best for me, not taking too seriously the well-intended advice of other people. I've always looked after myself, I've looked after other people...I suppose it's because I like to be in control. I suppose old age means that you are dependent on other people to a certain extent and I am not very fond of that. Why should I move to an old people's home if I can possibly stay here? I am not a burden to anyone. I am still relatively alert for my 80 years. I pay for my own housekeeper. (Mrs S, 79, service user)

Mrs S's explanation opens with the general observation that 'People are better in their own home'. Then she clearly locates herself at the centre of the decision making process which followed from her hospitalisation and resulting disability. She refers to various sources of assistance she has received: the visiting nurses are described as 'highly trained' and 'marvellous people', but Home Care 'sometimes send people I don't like too much' so she has used her financial resources to employ a private housekeeper who 'does the things that need to be done' and 'is very pleasant'. She contrasts her continued capacity for involvement at home - 'here I am surrounded by my books and my hi fi' - with her expectation that she 'wouldn't find anyone congenial in an old people's home'.

Others, she tells us, believe she needs 'some sort of care', but she lists her reasons for rejecting this 'well-intended advice': she 'couldn't bear the thought of living with a lot of dull people' and anyway she has 'got everything arranged'. She has the independence to do 'what she thinks is best. She 'supposes' that 'old age means that you are dependent on other people' but does not see this equation as applying to her; she may be 81 but she is still 'alert' and in control.

The discourses of other women reveal a similar structure of topics and themes. They emphasise the mental apathy and disinterest which they perceive as characterising the category of people who move to retirement accommodation, contrasting themselves as active and interested people. One respondent compares her own commitment to independence with a friend who was both a 'bingo lady' and 'dependent on her husband' and who now lives in a village. The other also knows 'that kind of woman' - she occasionally goes to a day care centre 'to cheer them up'.

... a retirement village with all these people sitting there, people who can't get themselves moved to do something besides playing bingo and crocheting coat hangers...it's not for me.

The majority of people who live there are like that...She (friend) was a bingo lady. She was very dependent on her husband. Once she lost him, she was lost. I am the opposite. I am very independent. In that village at (place), people seem to sit around and wait for the end. All these women not knowing what to do with their time...the village bus was always empty - no-one was interested in going anywhere. These women were not living in the now...I could not see any connecting point to talk to such people. no ideas to exchange...It would not be for me...(I: And what if you needed support in later years?) I am not too keen to think about that at this stage. I'll be a good candidate for Meals on Wheels, I've done it for years. But I would not rely on other services. I hope my friends...would help...They are friends from way back. For little things I can call on my next door neighbours. They always offer their help, they are very caring...I have always been a good giver but a very bad receiver...I find it very difficult to receive... (Mrs V, 70, non-service user)

It is not important for me to be in this place, it is not the place itself, but a place where I can be myself...Never entered my mind (to look at alternatives). No, retirement villages are not for me. I have been independent all my life!...I have no idea (what life in a retirement village is like). But in my present condition I'd rather be here than with lots of people who have lost their marbles...It has entered my head that if anything happened and I couldn't carry on, my nephew would come and live with me. If the worst came to the worst, he would look after me...I hope that will not be necessary... I have never thought about going to a retirement place because I don't feel old. I know I am old, but as long as I can keep going here, I'll stay here. It would drive me mad to have to interact day after day with the kind of women who move to retirement places. It would be boring and tiresome. They have no interests at all. They are perfectly happy to talk about nothing. I meet that kind of woman at the day centre where I go from time to time to cheer them up. (Mrs P, 85, service user)

A further recurring theme is that 'retirement places' may well suit other people, but would represent an intolerable loss of control as far as these women are concerned. The contrast is expressed in relation to the nature of 'care' that is seen to be characteristic of the different settings.

When one stays home, one keeps one's independence. But naturally - I am 79 - so you do need some sort of help when - say from Council - when in need... (Describes six services she uses) Independence is very important to me. Independence is

doing everything you want ...just after my husband died, ten years ago, there was a delightful lady who was the president of Legacy which I joined at the time. She had a very nice, happy atmosphere...So for several months I was happy to belong and help. Suddenly the president died and the vice president took over and she turned into a monster...She became so arrogant and overbearing and everybody hated her...If I bought into a retirement place or went into a home or anything like that...I would be in that sort of situation where a person dominates your life. Perhaps other people could accept it, but I can't. I feel that unless I am really bedridden or not able to do much for myself, I'd rather stay in my home...I suppose as long as I am here. (Mrs T, 79, non-service user)

Well, I'd like to (remain at home) if I can. Everybody likes to remain in their own home, don't they?... Claire (worker from the local community centre) comes and does my work and any message I want. In those places - what do you call them? - hostels, you've got to be up by a certain time, be dressed and all that sort of thing - too regimented...I manage here alright, you know...Claire does my work, she does my washing...I have not dressed for a week, but I've got to go and pay the rent today or tomorrow...Claire goes and gets other things for me. She pops in a lot just to see if I need anything. She does it out of her own kind heart...I don't (get lonely)...I like my own company. If you depend on your children, you've had it...If my daughter comes down she's a bit bossy. She tried to tell me what to do...I manage...I'm pretty well organised. I don't think I could stand people around me in one of those retirement places. You've got to make an effort to make conversation. I can't be bothered with people I don't know...What do you know about the place down there (names retirement village)? Do you have to get up for breakfast? ...No (don't find out for me)...I don't think I could stand it. If not for breakfast, you'd still got to be there for the other meals...I've got plenty of people I can talk to here if I wanted to...No, I think I'll just leave it as it is. Because I smoke...If they made me give it up in one of those places, I'd be a nervous wreck. (Mrs D, 87, service user)

No, no, no - not for me (a retirement village), no. The Council, they are wonderful, they have so much going for older people in their own homes and I have got a wonderful son, and when I get too old, I can get someone to come in and help me, and I can get home care. I'll stay here until the end. I know I am old, but I would not like all those old people around me. No, I don't think I would like that, all those people on walking

sticks. I never want to be like that. I have a dear friend...You know, she was such a beautiful woman. When she started to lose her memory she was put in a home. By then, she did not even remember me. I made a decision that I'm not going to be like that. I'd rather die. I cannot see any point me leaving here to go into a retirement village, being boxed up in one room and I'd have to go out for meals when told. I have some private means. I could afford to have people come in and help me, besides...Council. (Mrs W, 84, service user)

Only the occasional voice was raised against the possibility that using formal services may not be compatible with continued independence. In the text below, we can see how Mrs H has weighed up the options:

I have Home Care and (after a fall and hospital discharge) a lady from the Council...arranged for Meals on Wheels. I thought, 'I have arrived, I am old'. But now I am improving and I can walk around without a stick...I am 76. I don't feel it...Sometimes I think perhaps I should look around for a good retirement place, but then just as quickly I think, 'Oh no, it's too soon...I am still getting the meals from the Council, but I don't know how long I should keep that up...I don't really feel ready to depend on people. I am very independent, and to depend on people to do this and that and the other, makes me wonder whether I am wrong about not wanting to go into a retirement place. I am just living in the hope that I'll pass out before I have to make a decision...I really don't know what to think. I don't want to become a cards and bingo lady. I have been independent for so long, I just could not face being recruited into those kinds of activities with a lot of others. (Mrs H, 76, service user)

Other service users drew on personal experiences of residential care to illustrate their accounts. Uniformly negative, these experiences are often recounted with considerable emotion. Mrs W gives several examples of the loss of control she associates with being 'in a home' in contrast to the freedom of choice of being 'at home', a freedom which includes the ability to reject unsuitable assistance.

I wanted to go home (from hospital) because you can't sit down all damn day and do nothing...(I: What about the option of a retirement place?). There are too many other people that's got things wrong with them. I know a friend of mine who was very active, then she got sick and they put her in a convalescent home. She only lasted 12 months. She found it was no good. She told me she loves to sing...but they told her, 'For God's sake, stop that noise'...My sister was pretty crook and she was in a home. She couldn't eat the food...If I don't like the meals

(from the Council) I just have a sandwich. I've got a lot of food in the cupboard if I don't feel like eating theirs. Here I can do what I like and go where I like...it's hard in a home to do that...In those places, you'd be looking at four walls all the time. I'd be locked up. I'll be on my own. What difference would there be between dropping dead in my yard or the hospital? (Mrs W, 78, service user)

Others had come closer to thinking about residential accommodation as a possible option for them. One had actually made the move when she was 'not well', but had since come to regret the decision and is now back in her own flat.

I was not well for a while (so she moved into a private hostel which she has since left) but ...I got well...You had to be up at 8 o'clock to get your breakfast...And when they started to take in people who were mentally ill, I thought, 'That's the last drop, I can't stand that'. They put a man and his wife next to me. They both had Alzheimer. They would fight and scream and he would belt her up. I just couldn't take it. Then they started all that business, 'You must eat your vegetables raw'. I just couldn't eat anything...I am better off here...I am my own boss again. I don't have to watch some of the ladies being nasty to the old ones who could not hear well. I was always helping the ones who could not bend down to pick up what they dropped...It was also upsetting for everyone to have these people walk into your room. I knew they couldn't help it, and I felt sorry for them...I hope I never get like that. (Mrs M, 84, service user)

I don't particularly want to go to a retirement village. Last year I spent some time in respite care. I initially thought, 'That's good, it will give me some idea of what it is like to live in a hostel'. I found that only four or five people were not senile and could have a conversation...I realise that it may be different in a retirement village, but I have become apprehensive. I haven't any choice. I don't want to go, but I cannot stay here unless someone came to live with me. Without that, I would run out of goodwill from the neighbours. You can't go around asking neighbours to do things for you...When I feel the blues, I start cleaning out the wardrobe... I just won't let myself sit here and do nothing because I'd go to pieces. (Mrs H, 82, service user)

I have considered (a retirement village or hostel)... I have put my name down just round the corner from my daughter's place in (country town), but...I don't want to go until I've got to...You know, because...how can I say this? I am self-

sufficient. I can do my own cooking. I don't even need Meals on Wheels. With the hot summer, who needs a cooked meal? So I manage with salads... I prefer to stay here and live my life alone as long as I can manage...Another thing that puts me off, although I realise that there will come a day when I'll need help, is that they take your bank book. A lady I was talking to told me they do, and a bank book is your last independence item. I'd hate that to be taken from me. I couldn't stand it...There is also something about retirement places that bothers me. While I remain here and I am independent, I can keep going. But if you shut me off, I know I would not battle on. I would let go. This is a fear I have. The surroundings would have nothing to stimulate me. Here I have my videos, my books on tape, my music, my radio and can also attend the meetings of the (local) community group... In this manner, I remain self-sufficient. (Mrs J, 76, irregular service user)

...I went and saw (two retirement villages)...Both were enormous places. I don't like large places. At my age - I am 81 - and though I forget names, I am not senile. There are still lots of things I like to do... (Mrs R, 81, service user)

4 Discussion

We can see that all these discourses contain a remarkably similar pattern of topics and themes. These elderly people have put forward an explanatory model of their experience which links in systematic ways the dimensions of (in)dependence, ageing and 'care'. This model is based on comparison and contrast, both implicit and explicit, between types of people and types of care. (In)dependence underpins the construction of the resulting typology.

Like the elderly people described in a recent British research study (Thompson, 1992: 27), these women 'do not feel, in their real selves, that they are old':

I don't feel old. I know I am old.
I am 76, I don't feel it.
I know I am old, but I would not like all those old people around me.
My memory isn't as good as it was, but at least I remember what I said a minute ago.
... a lady from the Council... arranged for Meals on Wheels. I thought, 'I have arrived, I am old'. But now I am improving, and I can walk around without a stick.

Denial of old age is defiance of a spoiled identity...The old to them - as to so many social scientists - are typified by the dependent inmates or members of...institutions; they will call

them 'old' even when chronologically younger than themselves, especially when working for them as volunteer social assistants, to emphasise their distance from such a condition. (Thompson, 1992: 27)

These elderly women are keenly aware that an outsider might put them in this category on the basis of age and/or lack of self-reliance, but they make it clear that this is not the case. It is others, not themselves, who exhibit the undesirable characteristics of 'really' old people:

... all those old people, half of them spewing up their meals.
 ... elderly people...lose all interest in everything.
 They have no interests at all.
 I don't like old people...they change and become dull.
 ... older people are not (bright and happy).
 ... old age means that you are dependent on other people.
 I've got different ideas from people of my generation.
 ... the kind of women who move to retirement places.
 ... a lot of dull people.
 ... a cards and bingo lady.
 ... people who were mentally ill.
 ... people that's got things wrong with them.
 ... all those people on walking sticks. I never want to be like that.
 ... the old ones who could not hear well.
 ... senile.
 ... lots of people who have lost their marbles.
 ... people I just couldn't get along with.
 ... inmates.
 ... all these people sitting there...who can't get themselves moved to do something.
 ... people...sit around and wait for the end.
 ... no-one was interested.
 ... they couldn't help it, and I felt sorry for them. I go... to cheer them up.

In contrast to these 'dependent inmates', they emphasise that they are in control of their 'care'. Whatever they can do for themselves they do, and they are still in charge of any help they might receive. A major theme in this context is what we can interpret as the personalisation of service provision.

Hazan has suggested that the members of a Jewish day care centre he studied had adopted certain 'behavioural strategies' in their 'struggle to achieve autonomy' (1983: 485) in the face of the implied dependency conferred by participation in centre activities. One of these was 'a persistent endeavor to obliterate cognitively the presence of staff' (1983: 485). This was achieved by reducing members of staff 'to their nonprofessional identities. Hence, members tended to relate to staff as

"nice" or "unpleasant" people rather than to address them in their official capacities' (1983: 485-86). These elderly Sydneysiders appear to be doing this when they distinguish the personal nature of the help they get at home from the anonymous, controlling 'care' which is meted out to 'old people'.

They are marvellous people.
Home Care... sometimes send people I don't like too much.
Now I have Katherine... She does the things that need to be done. She is very pleasant.
Claire comes and does my work... She does it out of her own kind heart.

Being in control, they assert, is worth a reduction of standards or limited choice; at least there is a choice, even if it is to go without:

I don't even need Meals on Wheels. With the hot summer, who needs a cooked meal? So I manage with salads. If I don't like the meals I just have a sandwich. ...why should I go into a home? I would lose a lot of my independence. I don't worry here if things aren't done, they don't get done. The girls who come in just do what they can, the rest can wait.

Really old people, on the other hand, are no longer in control of what others do to and for them, something which would 'not suit' any of these women:

...a home run by other people is not for me.
I would lose a lot of my independence.
I don't have to do what someone else tells me to do.
...they are a good place if you can't do much for yourself.
...those places are marvellous for people who are not able to cook.
...it is a reasonable thing for others, but not for myself.
...they even read the newspapers to you...[my friend] loves that, she is in her 90s.
...a person dominates your life.
'You must eat your vegetables raw'.
...they take your bank book.
...too regimented.
...locked up.
...it's hard in a home (to do what you like).
They put her in a convalescent home.

'Old people', in other words, are simultaneously recognisable through their 'spoiled identities' (Russell, 1981) and their relinquishment of activity, interest and control. These women can be seen to share with professionals a belief that there is 'real' dependence and that this is appropriately catered for by certain kinds of 'aged care' services. The point they are emphasising, however, is that this is a condition only of other people, not themselves. They distinguish between chronological age and age-

as-dependency. They themselves are not 'really' old because they are still active, interested and in control of whatever help they receive. This is in sharp contrast to the portrayal of 'really' old people. The interviewees emphasise what they can still do, while clearly acknowledging that there are some things they can't do. They are not saying that they are 'apparently' independent, nor that they believe in an ethic of independence. They are saying that they are independent. People who are not independent belong to a different category: old people.

5 Conclusion

British sociologist Bryan Green has argued that the concept of dependency, though rendered with a variety of meanings, underpins the entire field of gerontological discourse through its articulation within a 'care-dependency continuum': 'the category [old] is constituted in acts of care correspondent to dependency' (Green, 1993: 82). 'What the aged have in common is subjection to certain conditions and procedures of recognition, certain methods of knowledge production, central to which is the grammar of dependence' (1993: 95).

Discourse analysis reveals underlying meanings inherent in the way the issue of independence is framed by ordinary older people. In one sense these meanings parallel in significant ways the scientific and political construction of the same phenomena. What is distinct about each discourse only becomes visible through its articulation with the constructed 'self' of each individual. 'These women could be heard, outside gerontology, to be resisting the categorial basis of care for dependency, and challenging the validity of the grammar' (Green, 1993: 89).

It is Green's argument

that whatever disagreements exist about the particulars of old age policy, there is an implicit agreement about the meaning of a rational provision of care: a shared way of recognising it. Moreover, this agreement runs through the field of gerontology as well as social administration, being part of a grammatical contract of discourse about care. In the contract is a rule that the term care can...be mapped onto a measurable continuum running from independence to dependence. Its grammar of usage dictates that care is a measurable and distributable kind of thing... The 'continuum of care is not simply a response to prior needs of the old, it is, in conjunction with the dependency continuum, a means of making the old a determinate knowledge object. (Green, 1993: 81, 82)

As the British sociologist Paul Thompson has observed:

there has been a growing acceptance in the policy field that 'older people are entitled' to select their own destiny, within

given limits. It therefore follows that we need to know what it means to be old, to them... (Thompson, 1992: 24).

One of the more striking features of Australian aged care development over recent years has, indeed, been the extent to which policy has sought to incorporate what is usually referred to as a 'consumer perspective'. Processes of consumer consultation and 'appropriate' social research designed to provide the views of older people from 'ground zero' are now firmly entrenched in the rhetoric of needs identification and service development (Sax, 1993; Howe, 1992; DHHCS, 1991; Russell and Schofield, 1994).

Yet the perspective that only professionals (researchers or providers) can recognise 'real' dependence continues to underpin the 'continuum of care' with its way-stations marked by 'outside' assessment. Since 'real' dependence is a product of objectively measurable conditions which attach to individuals, access to services must be controlled by experts who can recognise it when they see it.

Gubrium and Wallace (1990: 132) have argued that there are often 'striking parallels' between the everyday theorising of older people and the scientific constructions of gerontologists. The data reported here suggest that the care-dependency continuum has become part of a public culture of ageing which is used not only by gerontologists and policy makers but by older people themselves to theorise about ageing. These 'theories analytically reproduce and empirically confirm' (Gubrium and Wallace, 1990: 147-8) the existing social care arrangements for 'old people'.

However, such a perspective is at odds with the way that individual older people give meaning to the lived experience of ageing for themselves. They deny that they belong - yet - to the category of 'old people' for whom such arrangements are appropriate. They fear that one day they might and, significantly, when contemplating this prospect they do so in relation to places along the formally defined care-dependency continuum.

Each brings to this scenario a different set of resources. Those with financial means can contemplate with relative equanimity the deployment of paid help in their own homes, with or without recourse to public services as well. Others, particularly those still in good health, expect to be able to coordinate an acceptable mix of formal and informal assistance. Both these groups envisage a future in which failing physical capacities will not necessarily bring with them the loss of control over their lives. Still others, however, are keenly aware of their limited resources. As they see it, their only hope is that they will 'pass out' before this time comes. Ordinary older people may not be familiar with rock songs of the 1960s and 1970s, but they would no doubt recognise the sentiment underpinning The Who's emotive plea: 'Hope I die before I get old'.

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An Overview: Five Papers on Dependence, the Life Course and Social Policy

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The five papers that we have heard have dealt in interesting and original ways with social circumstances and policy regimes at different periods of the human life-cycle. They have ranged across several intellectual traditions, and drawn upon a variety of research methodologies. I have much enjoyed having some brief time to reflect on them and the questions they evoke when brought together.

Given the diversity of the speakers and their papers, there is remarkable agreement among them, though of course the five do not represent all possible points of view. All regard dependence and the life course as social constructions, and moreover as social constructions which are at variance with social facts in important respects. All are critical of suppositions about dependence and the life course which underlie contemporary social policy, and a number of authors regard these suppositions as oppressive of the group concerned. Finally, all the papers note the complex, multi-dimensional character of dependence and the life course as they affect the ability of researchers to generalise and policy makers to respond.

It might be useful to stand back for a moment and try to place some of the questions about dependency, the life course and social policy considered in these papers in the broader context of the meaning of the individual and individualism. I want to suggest that dependence and the life course are problematic precisely because the nature of the human individual is problematic in modern - and perhaps especially in 'post-modern' - society. There is little that is new in the contradictions that surround the character of the individual and the individual life in contemporary capitalist society, but these contradictions have been sharpened by the social changes of recent decades. These contradictions make invisible the complex interdependencies of which human society consists, obscuring at the same time the relations of power and control that structure these interdependencies.

Contemporary perceptions of 'dependency' have their origins in the concept of the person as an individual born of the Enlightenment and western capitalist society. With the advent of modern society the interwoven solidarities of kinship, village and estate were fragmented. New separations were established between the sacred and secular, rural and urban life, the economy and the polity, production and consumption and in paid and unpaid work, and in the family between nuclear and

extended groupings. Underlying all went a new emphasis on the importance of the person, who was conceived as having an individual self with individual rights, freedoms and obligations.

The individuality of the modern person is expressed in a variety of social domains. As a person, he or she has individual values, beliefs, and identities. As a family member he or she may be the partner, parent, child and cousin of others, in relationships the meaning and content of which are likely to undergo changes over the life course. As an economic actor the person is a participant in market transactions, as a worker and as a consumer, only some of which are continuous over a period of time. - In the community the person is likely to be the member of one or more organisations: religious, cultural, recreational, or social; and as a citizen may participate both individually as taxpayer and voter and through organisations such as political parties and interest groups.

Some theorists argue that modernity is now giving way to 'post-modernity'. Whether or not we accept this claim, it is clear that profound changes are taking place in the social and economic fabric of contemporary society in countries like Australia. These include the emergence of a 'post-industrial', service-based economy with associated changes in full-time, part-time and casual employment; changes in family and gender relations in which the two-income household is increasingly the norm, but in which other household forms are also common; and increasing ethnic and cultural heterogeneity. Life stages of education, employment, marriage, parenthood, and retirement are no longer experienced as linear, to be lived in fixed, serial order. These changes have heightened the contradictions surrounding the modern notion of the individual.

Central to all these dimensions of social participation is the recognition of the person as unique, separate and autonomous, and of personal behaviour as an expression of individual circumstances and values. Included in the notion of the individual is a strong, psychologically bounded self, and the possession of the social, physical, mental and material resources to act out a personal history of social and moral choices.

Plainly 'dependency' is the obverse of individualism of this kind, a condition in which full and proper personhood is not, or cannot be, attained. Diane Gibson's six 'spheres of dependency' make this point very clearly. Economic dependency reflects the failure of the individual to achieve self-sufficiency in command over resources, through the market or informal economy. Psychological dependency refers to weakness in the personality of the individual due to flawed personal development or cultural transmission in, for example, the formation of an 'underclass' or 'culture of poverty'. Emotional dependency she sees as the lack of affective support through close personal relationships, and political and socio-legal dependencies as defects in legal or political rights of citizenship. Dependencies arising from mental and physical disabilities have to do with inability to fulfil social or behavioural expectations on one's own account.

In mapping of the social meanings of dependency Gibson makes a number of important points. She notes that the content of dependency varies with the life cycle of the individual, and I think we should assume here that this also captures related variations associated with gender, culture and geography as they shape the transitions and passages associated with ageing and maturation. She observes that dependency is fundamentally relational in character, that one is dependent on someone or something for some needed or valued object, and that while some dependencies are socially legitimate others are not. This relational character is the key to dependency as stigma, where the discourse serves to transform dependency from a relational statement about need to a flaw in the character of the person who is dependent.

In unpacking the complexities of dependency it may be helpful to distinguish between two strands of change in the social individual. I refer here to the distinction between **individuation** and **individualism**.

Individuation describes change over the last two centuries or so in the way people understand themselves and relate to each other. It refers to the emergence of persons as increasingly separate and distinct entities with individual personalities, preferences, and life trajectories. It is most important with respect to associated change in nature of groups, in which the members see themselves less as part of an undifferentiated whole and more as an aggregation of distinct and individual persons. This is characteristic not only of the modern family but also of many other groups, including those of the workplace and in cultural and religious life.

The suggestion, and I think it is persuasive, is that society is increasingly made up of individuals and groups of this kind. Social structures are looser, mobility greater, people's circumstances more varied, and life course sequences more variable. The solidarities of kinship, neighbourhood, class, religion and ethnic identity which make up society continue to exist, but are less easily perceived as the interdependencies that they are. They are undoubtedly also less secure as sources of support and assistance in times or conditions of need.

Anne Edwards' paper provides a superb exposition of the meaning of individuation in the life trajectories of young people. Historically, youth is a newly differentiated period in the life course, providing for a complex and multi-faceted transition from childhood dependence to adulthood independence and full status as an individual. Anne gives us both an account of the present social circumstances of young people and an intellectual history of their treatment in sociology and social policy. She argues that an adequate understanding of this transition must be similarly complex, recognising the many bases of individual and social difference and the possibility that paths through it may be non-linear. Her data from interviews with young people show how shifting and multi-dimensional the notion of adulthood is, with young people themselves clearly separating its psychological, economic and familial dimensions in their minds and expectations.

In *The Division of Labor in Society* (1933) Durkheim argued that the complex and cross-cutting interdependencies of modern society would provide a new basis for

social cohesion. He thought, however, that on its own what he called 'organic solidarity' would not be enough to ensure social order and stability and that there would be a continuing role for politics and governance. The modern welfare state is in part a fulfilment of that prophesy.

Individuation has made the complex interdependencies of human need increasingly problematic, and it is no wonder that this is the central concern of much social policy. Titmuss' (1970) definition of social policy as 'institutionalised altruism' nicely captures its role in overcoming the vulnerabilities of modern social life through the sharing of command over resources. Nineteenth century solutions such as working class mutual aid and middle class philanthropy have been replaced by public provisions such as income support, social and community care, and much of fields such as health, employment, housing and education.

Much modern social policy has served to define dependency as a collective issue in which certain social groups are dependent on society and the state. Much of this is defined and organised on the basis of ideas about family structure and the life cycle. Both Diane Gibson and Sol Encel make reference to the 'dependency ratio' as a term taking for granted the dependence of some age groups on others. Sol Encel's paper is concerned with the social and political arguments surrounding demographic expectations that the relative proportions of people in older age groups will increase in coming decades. As Encel points out, the supposed dependence of this group is not a natural phenomenon but a social construction. It reflects both the social organisation of work, family and the life course, and social policy arrangements which put people in the position of dependency. Like Anne Edwards, Sol Encel argues that the life course is not appropriately understood as a uniform and necessarily linear progression of stages: there is a great deal of variation in the needs, circumstances and preferences of individuals.

Bruce Bradbury turns to the question of social security and the construction of dependency and interdependency within the family unit, and to the way in which social policy is reflecting and reinforcing changes in marriage and the sexual division of paid and unpaid work. Bradbury argues that Australian income support payments have themselves begun a process of individuation in which the family policy norm of breadwinner and dependent spouse is being supplanted by one of two individuals, both with the capacity to take part in paid employment, who share responsibility for their dependent children. He expects further changes in the next few years and the emergence of what he terms a 'post-dependency' income transfer system. Like Edwards and Encel, Bradbury argues that there is considerable heterogeneity in expectations concerning dependency and autonomy within the family, taking as one instance differences in labour force activity among women from different ethnic backgrounds.

If individuation describes the underlying tensions of an individualistic society, **individualism** refers to its ideological celebration. Individualism refers to an ideological valuation of the individual rather than the group as the rightful basis of society. According to C. B. Macpherson (1962), 'possessive individualism' is the

core ideology of capitalist society. It starts with the fundamental proposition that what makes the person human is freedom from dependence on the wills of others. Possessive individualism derives from the view of the human being as the owner of one's bodily capacities, including the capacity to labour, and of human society as enacted through relationships of freely chosen exchanges. The notion extends more broadly to see life as a process of individual self-realisation, and that self-realisation occurs through the process of making choices.

Individualism is, among other things, the source of stigma associated with 'dependency', and this has come up in several of the papers. Thus Diane Gibson notes that some forms of dependence are viewed as legitimate while others are not, and briefly reviews the argument that a 'culture of dependency' corrupts the rugged individualism that is proper for a member capitalist society. Sol Encel argues that the supposed dependence of older age groups is used in ageist ways. As his paper shows, giving and receiving cut both ways. In another area not covered in these five papers one also might note the slur of 'welfare dependency' applied to indigenous peoples in Australia and North America, and the ability of this image to evoke racist political biases.

Cherry Russell's paper explores some of the more subtle dimensions of individualism as it is expressed in the views of older women themselves. Russell suggests that the notion of a 'continuum of care' widely used in gerontology is only partially reflected in the way old people themselves theorise their own situation. The women she studied constructed a discourse in which the receipt of assistance was not inconsistent with the independence of a fully adequate individual. She identifies two important themes in the way they made sense of their present circumstances: these were a distinction between themselves as active and independent in mental outlook, and others who were 'old' in the sense of passive and dull, and the construction of themselves as in control of their lives and the assistance they received. This latter construction was quite compatible with the receipt of substantial amounts of assistance from kin, market services and formal services from public providers.

The contradictions surrounding individuation, individualism and dependency are most problematic in our particular kind of welfare state. Needs and interdependencies are the basis of social policy in all the countries of Europe, North America, and Australasia, but they have been given a marked individualist inflection through the heritage of English liberalism. These countries, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and to some extent Great Britain, are often grouped together as 'liberal welfare states' (Esping-Andersen, 1990, but see also Castles and Mitchell, 1992) because of the primacy given to the market in their social arrangements. These are the countries currently attempting to roll back the state, especially the welfare state, and are those in which the rhetoric about the problem of 'dependency' is most strident.

It is relevant, then, to consider the particular characteristics of these welfare states. Though they vary significantly among themselves, what distinguishes the liberal welfare states from those of Europe is their narrowness of social provision,

especially in income support, and their increasing reliance on instruments targeted through means testing. These are the classically residualist welfare states in which Titmuss' institutionalised altruism is limited to support in the event of market or family failure. It is important to recall that other welfare states balance dependence as the basis of social intervention more equally with other social goals including the relative equity of life course and other population groups. This does not always mean that they aim for redistributive equality: the intended outcomes may be quite conservative. But it does remind us that there are other discourses than those of dependency.

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