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Jobless families in regional New South Wales

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***JOBLESS FAMILIES IN REGIONAL
NEW SOUTH WALES***

**A Thesis Presented to the School of Social Sciences
Southern Cross University
Lismore, NSW, Australia**

**In Fulfilment of the Requirements of the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

**Yvonne Hartman
B. Nurs, (Hons)**

Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief, the work presented in this thesis is original except as acknowledged in the text, and the material has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for a degree at this or any other University. I have acknowledged in the relevant places the use of material from two published papers of my authorship which formed a part of this research.

.....Signed

.....Date

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Publications

The following works were produced as a part of this research project.

Refereed Journal Articles

Hartman, Y. 2005, 'In bed with the enemy: Some ideas on the connections between neoliberalism and the welfare state', *Current Sociology*, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 57-73.

Hartman, Y. 2002, 'Precarious stability: Jobless families in the new millennium', *Journal of Economic and Social Policy*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 83-98.

Conference Papers

Gilmour, J., Hartman, Y. & Jennings, L. 2000, *Challenging Capacity: Can the Government meet its Mutual Obligation?* paper presented at 7th National Conference on Unemployment, University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown, 30 November-1 December.

Hartman, Y., Jennings, L. & Gilmour, J. 2000, *The Rise of Compulsory Voluntarism*, paper presented at The Australian Sociological Association 2000 Conference, Flinders University, Adelaide, December 6-8.

List of Abbreviations

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACIRRT	Australian Centre for Industrial Relations, Research & Training
ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Services
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AFDC	Aid for Families with Dependent Children
AGPS	Australian Government Publishing Service
AIFS	Australian Institute of Family Studies
AMRC & HCIC	Asia Monitor Resource Centre and Hong Kong Christian Industrial Committee
ANU	Australian National University
ANZ	Australia and New Zealand
AWT	<i>Australians Working Together</i>
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
DETYA	Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
DEWRSB	Commonwealth Department of Education, Workplace Relations and Small Business
DSP	Disability Support Pension
DSS	Department of Social Security
DVD	Digital video disc
FACS	Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services
HILDA	Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia
JSCI	Job Seeker Classification Instrument
LGA	Local Government Area
NATSEM	National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling
NSW	New South Wales
NTEU	National Tertiary Education Union
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
PRWORA	Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act
SCU	Southern Cross University

SPRC	Social Policy Research Centre
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TANF	Temporary Aid for Needy Families
TASA	The Australian Sociological Association
UK	United Kingdom
UNSW	University of New South Wales
US	United States (of America)

Abstract

At a time when welfare regimes in Anglophone countries are being reshaped to reflect neoliberal ideology, there is little by way of empirical, qualitative research which directly addresses the question of how jobless families live or are affected by their circumstances, particularly in regional Australia. This study combines a consideration of questions of social structure as they pertain to jobless families at the theoretical level with an ethnographic journey into their life worlds. It aims to understand the impact of long-term joblessness upon the families and to explore the interconnections between system and life world.

I adopt Layder's (1997, 1998) theoretical and methodological formulations as the most appropriate means to underpin an investigation of this nature. The study is comprehensively situated within a structural context which examines discourses and events that have exerted an influence on our present social arrangements, including an analysis of relevant social policy. Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with two non-purposive samples and analysed using a modified Grounded Theory approach as advocated by Layder (1998).

It was found that the current welfare regime helps to stabilise the capitalist global economy and does at least provide a precarious stability for those excluded from the labour market. Whilst families receiving long-term income support are not a homogeneous group, they are subject to hidden injuries in common. The linkages between system and life world are theorised in terms of the displacement principle,

which holds that the displacement of a problem does not solve it, but merely relocates it elsewhere. It is used to explain both large-scale displacements as well as microprocesses occurring within jobless families. Long-term joblessness is found often to have destructive consequences for intimacy, though family structure may remain intact. This is partly due to a welfare regime which disrespects its beneficiaries. I argue that social policy must be informed by an alternative discourse which includes social or welfare rights as a part of human rights, based upon a recognition of mutual interdependency and an ethic of care. This is vital if future policy directions are to accord equal respect to all citizens.

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Chapter One: Introduction

It is quite possible for statistical averages and human experiences to run in opposite directions. A *per capita* increase in quantitative factors may take place at the same time as a great qualitative disturbance in people's way of life, traditional relationships and sanctions. People may consume more goods and become less happy or less free at the same time (Thompson 1980, p. 231).

We live, we are told, in “boom times”, meaning that Australians are experiencing a period of unprecedented prosperity. Increasing growth in the median income and a falling rate of unemployment are often cited as the evidence for this assertion (McNamara et al. 2005) and indeed a short tour of the “McMansion suburbs” of any metropolis might seem to verify this conclusion, particularly when compared with living standards of the past, or conditions in other countries. The plethora of large vehicles in the driveways, the surfeit of dishwashers, DVDs and other domestic technology in these many-roomed homes and their very newness might lead one to concur with the misplaced assumption that nearly all Australians are living in a paradise of affluence and comfort¹.

So often, though, the image belies the reality. Even in these gladlands, families are burdened with debt as never before (Reserve Bank of Australia 2004) and housing prices in the last decade have escalated at rates that historically are amongst the highest (Productivity

¹ See also Hamilton & Denniss (2005) who characterise this state of affairs as “affluenza”

Commission 2004). And is there another Australia that we do not so readily see? My purpose in writing this thesis is to cast some light upon the hidden lives of those who exist in the shadow of this dominant impression.

Those who are faring less well in this landscape of prosperity are mainly those who are on or outside the margins of the labour market - the precariously employed and the unemployed. Yet, unemployment has a particular meaning; historically, it is associated with men of working age without any form of paid occupation upon which to subsist (the wealthy who do not work are not categorised in this way). Unemployment has been a feature of capitalist societies since the Industrial Revolution. The Marxist view is that it provides a pool of surplus labour which ensures a compliant workforce – the reserve army argument. Too large a pool can lead to threats to civil order if mass poverty becomes endemic and also may threaten the expansionary nature of a capitalist economy by eroding the consumer base.

In Western democracies the historical solution to this problem has been the welfare state, which has sought to stabilise levels of unemployment through government intervention in national economies and to provide relief to the unemployed through subsistence payments. The poverty experienced by so many during the Great Depression was consequential upon the collapse of employment, which left the unemployed dependent upon a very underdeveloped version of state support. The post-war welfare state was conceived in response to the mass immiseration experienced during the Depression years. It grew from a

notion of citizenship as conferring social rights as well as the civil rights associated with the liberal tradition.

Even in our own times, unemployment – and particularly long-term unemployment – has many well-documented deleterious impacts, and therefore has generated a voluminous body of research. Notwithstanding this sustained attention, the effects that long spells of unemployment may have on the *family* as the unit of analysis is an area that has been somewhat overlooked. Although much work has been directed at investigating the effects (of unemployment) on the individual psychologically, physiologically and socially, the dimensions of how the individual's problem impacts on their family has often been only the subject of cursory summaries and there are relatively few empirical studies on the topic. However in the context of neoliberal reforms to the welfare state and the declining official rates of unemployment, it (unemployment) has become a term which does not adequately reflect the position of many families who lack secure, long-term employment today (Gilmour, Hartman and Jennings 2000), particularly in regional Australia.

This study originally began as an investigation into the effects of long-term unemployment on regional Australian families. However in the light of changed circumstances (addressed below), the focus was changed to jobless families. My research therefore seeks to understand the impact of long periods of joblessness on families in regional New South Wales. As I have intimated above, this thesis will argue that joblessness is now experienced as a hidden phenomenon, having been displaced from the public sphere. This has occurred partly as a result of the discourses and practices which have helped to shape a

post-traditional society in which dependency is seen as a form of moral failure. In the post-traditional society, the disembedding of some traditions - such as prescribed family forms, or the concept of a “job for life” – and the disavowal of certain social structures, for example class, have led to “individualised biographies” (Wallulis 1998) where meaning and identity have to be renegotiated continually in an atmosphere of perpetual uncertainty. Paradoxically, such a configuration leads to the stabilisation of certain forms of domination associated with a late capitalist global economy. Jobless families experience a form of precarious security, being caught in a net, not of safety, but of disciplinary mechanisms which serve, not only to keep them from view, but also to ensure that escape is unlikely.

1.1 Some Definitions: Family, Joblessness and Income Support

It is acknowledged that the term “family” is a problematic and contested concept; this is explored at further length in Chapter four. However, for the practical purposes of the research I have relied upon Edgar (1995), Gilding (1991) and Cass (1994)’s notions of family. A family has been taken to mean in the broadest sense any adult or adults with dependents. Usually that will mean one or two parents with children, since most policy aimed at families is geared towards this type, but allows for variations such as same-sex families, couples where one partner depends substantially upon the other, as in the case of illness, and adult children living with aged parents.

The term “income support” is used interchangeably with “benefits” and “welfare” throughout the thesis. It indicates that a person or family relies to a significant degree upon government-provided financial aid for survival. Long-term income support is defined as

significant reliance upon income support for twelve months or more. This follows the official definition of long-term unemployment, where twelve months is the minimum standard now used to designate “long-term” (ABS 2002a).

The term “jobless” is used to indicate an absence of “standard” work, that is, full-time, secure employment in the formal economy. This is so because, as we shall see, many persons designated as jobless by virtue of their receipt of some form of income support are in fact often engaged in making both economic and non-economic contributions to society.

1.2 Why Study Joblessness?

When the Howard government initiated its welfare reform agenda in 1999, it commissioned Patrick McClure of Mission Australia to head an advisory panel to investigate the then current position regarding welfare provision and to recommend changes (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000a, 2000b)². When the Reference Group published its reports, it erased the distinction between unemployment and other types of benefit by speaking in terms of joblessness, and recommending that income support payments be streamlined to consist of one basic payment with add-on elements for varying circumstances, such as sole parenthood and disability. The report noted that Australia had one of the highest rates of jobless families in the OECD, with nearly one in five children growing up in a jobless family (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000a). In the event, income support payments have not been integrated in this manner. In fact, one of the key arguments made in this thesis is that a “hierarchy of benefit” exists which severely disadvantages those in

² It is important to note that cost was an acknowledged “driver” for reform (FACS 1999).

receipt of the unemployment payment, Newstart. However, the effect of the use of this language was to commence the conflation of unemployment with other forms of non-participation in the labour market. Further, the Reports' insistence upon participation and "giving something back" in return for receipt of benefit has contributed to a renegotiation of the meanings of work, while the boundaries surrounding employment and unemployment have also been blurring due to the rapid growth of non-standard or precarious employment. This, combined with the suspicion that many income support recipients not on Newstart were in fact unable to find employment, led me to adopt the Reference Group's lexicon and consider the problem of joblessness, as opposed to unemployment.³ This allowed the research to access sole parents and disability pensioners as well as Newstart recipients, the three main categories of income support for working-age persons. It will be seen in a later chapter that, as the number of persons in receipt of Newstart has declined over the last few years, so the number of persons in receipt of other types of benefit – in particular Disability Support Payment – has risen. Taken all together, these facts make it more relevant to study jobless families rather than unemployed families.

It may justifiably be asked how this study will contribute to new knowledge, as much qualitative (and quantitative) research has been carried out on poverty and its effect on families. To accept this current research as definitive would be to suggest that poverty can be equated with joblessness, a position I wish to contest. I will be arguing in my concluding chapter that whilst poverty can be experienced in a variety of circumstances,

³ Interestingly, the term "jobless families" or "families and income support" do not yield satisfactory results when entered as a search term in literature searches. This indicates this terminology has not gained widespread acceptance, at least in the academic community.

reliance upon long-term income support carries with it a particular train of consequences, of which poverty is but one.

At a time when there is debate in the public sphere about welfare reform, there is little by way of empirical research which directly addresses the question of how jobless families live or are affected by their circumstances, particularly in regional Australia. Therefore it would make sense for policy-makers to seek to understand these questions before formulating policy responses.

1.3 Why Regional New South Wales?

There has been a steady decline in the official rate of unemployment since it peaked at 10.7 per cent in 1993 (ABS 2004a). As I have already suggested, in such an environment, the assertion that unemployment is an important social problem seems difficult to support. I will argue that is because unemployment has become invisible, having been largely displaced from the large cities to the regions. According to Gabriel (2000) there is considerable evidence to show that regional Australians are disadvantaged in comparison with their urban counterparts. Gregory and Hunter (1995) have shown that joblessness is concentrated in particular configurations, one of which is locales which are work-poor while more recently, Mitchell and Carlson (2003) have attempted to explain the continuing persistence of disparities in regional unemployment. I chose to study three sites in regional New South Wales partly due to reasons of accessibility and partly because of the high rates of dependence on income support in these regions. The Far North Coast, which hosted two sites for the study, historically has had one of the highest unemployment rates in New

South Wales. It also boasts one of the highest rates of dependence upon other types of income support. In fact, the most recent figures available demonstrate that approximately one in every three persons is in receipt of some degree of income support in this region (ABS 2004b). The third region, adjacent to south-western Sydney, was chosen also for its high rates of welfare dependency and to act as a counterbalance to the northern sites.

1.4 Research Aims and Questions

Since the phenomenon of jobless families is hidden from public view (except for stereotypical representations as deviants), it is an under-researched area. Therefore it is vital to contribute to the knowledge base from the standpoint of social equity for the voiceless. This study seeks to understand the impact of joblessness on some regional Australian families and to discover how, to use Habermasian terms, system and life world interconnect in the lives of these families. Such an understanding is necessary to provide a basis for future policy directions which recognise human interdependency rather than punish dependency, and accord equal respect to all citizens.

These, then, are the aims of the research, which can best be achieved by seeking to answer the following questions:

- Who are jobless families?
- How do jobless families live?
- Are they a distinct group?
- What impact does long-term joblessness have on family structure, relationships and relations with the wider society?

- What are the social implications of the findings; and
- How can policy best address the issue of jobless families?

1.5 The Thesis Outlined

This study combines a consideration of questions of social structure as they pertain to jobless families at the theoretical level with an ethnographic journey into their life worlds. I argue it is necessary to do both in order to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of “what is going on” for this group and why, and to be able to formulate effective policy which does not diminish the dignity and personhood of the jobless and their family members. Such an approach does lead, however, to some difference of style and theoretical depth within each part of the thesis. Further, in line with critical theorists’ commitment to praxis, which includes the idea that research should be accessible to those it attempts to serve, I have written my findings chapters in language that is relatively easy for non-academic readers to follow. These chapters rely less upon the theoretical literature than earlier chapters relating to large-scale considerations. Instead, in these findings chapters, the voices of the participants are allowed to come forth, sometimes without the intrusion of additional theoretical commentary allowing the findings to arise from the data itself, as the outcome of an inductive process of analysis.

This thesis is not organised strictly in the traditional manner, as it does not contain a separate chapter which reviews the literature. Rather, literature is incorporated into various chapters as it seemed appropriate. This is particularly the case for early chapters, which

discuss relevant theory, contextualise the study and provide a survey of systemic elements relevant to the topic of the study.

Chapter two outlines the theoretical framework I have adopted to underpin the study. I have chosen to use Layder's (1997) Domain Theory, which proposes a stratified ontology in order to explain how macrological and micrological social processes interact to produce lived social reality. I argue that other theoretical approaches (such as Giddens' Structuration Theory) tend either to conflate structure with agency - thereby making the linkages between each difficult to study - or give more weight to one aspect at the expense of the other. Layder's approach broadly accepts Habermas's conception of system and life world with some qualification and elaboration. The chapter presents a detailed explanation of the reasons for the use of this framework as well as providing an outline of Layder's thought and the influences upon it.

Following on from this chapter is an explanation of the methodology used in Chapter three. Again I have drawn upon the work of Layder, who has developed an approach to qualitative research which resembles Grounded Theory with some modifications to take account of some of the limitations inherent in the earlier methodology. The chapter also describes the study's research design and execution, including problems encountered and methodological limitations. The data collected comprised semi-structured in-depth interviews, fieldnotes, ethnographic observation and relevant documents such as government policies. Analysis technique followed a modified grounded theory-type process as advocated by Layder's (1998) methodological approach. This involves coding

data into categories, making connections between categories, theorising about the relationships between phenomena, writing theoretical memos and if necessary, gathering new data until the process is complete and a “story” has emerged which is validated by the data.

Chapter four provides a structural context for the study, in terms of examining discourses and events that have exerted an influence on our present social arrangements. The competing discourses surrounding the nature of modernity and post-modernity are evaluated. Post-modern and Risk Society accounts of contemporary social reality are found to be wanting in respect of acknowledging the continued importance of social structures in shaping people’s lives. However, whilst disagreeing with Giddens on his Third Way prescriptions, his analysis regarding the contingent nature of what he calls a post-traditional order is accepted as persuasive, pointing as it does to the fluid constructions of identity and relationships which characterise an increasingly individualised and uncertain world. The ascendancy of neoliberalism and its relation to capitalism is examined which, in combination with a certain form of communitarian discourse, is found to have exerted a profound influence, particularly on social policy formulated in English speaking democracies.

Chapter five examines the specific policy context which has resulted in the present day phenomenon of jobless families. I give a brief outline of various types of welfare regimes as well as discussing their function in contemporary societies before going on to consider the origins of current welfare policy. The relationship between neoliberalism and Third

Way communitarianism is analysed further to show that both have effectively been fused in what students of Foucault's governmentality theory have called neoliberal rationalities. Chapters four and five thus represent a consideration of what both Habermas (1987) and Layder (1997) call "system", while the next three chapters present the findings in terms of the "life world" of the participants.

Chapter six presents a generalised portrait of jobless families in regional new South Wales today. This is contextualised by a review of past relevant literature. The nature of contemporary joblessness is then examined, showing unemployment to be much higher than official figures would have us suppose. Such a finding furthers my contention that it is a hidden phenomenon. This context is followed by an exploration of the participants' understandings of family before providing a word picture of the families and their locales. This chapter therefore directly addresses the first three research questions; namely, who are jobless families?; how do jobless families live?; and are they a distinct group?

Chapter seven investigates the common elements in the experience of jobless families and so may be thought of as going some way towards answering the third and fourth research questions regarding the impacts of joblessness upon families. These elements are organised in terms of five themes, Poverty, Stigma, Coping/Adaptation, Trauma and Being in the System. It is found that it is the combination of these elements rather than joblessness by itself that conspires, not only to keep jobless families hidden from view, but also to entrench this way of life on an apparently permanent basis.

Chapter eight seeks to understand the linkages between system and life world in the lives of the jobless families studied by an exploratory theorisation of the data in terms of the displacement principle, which holds that the displacement of a problem (such as joblessness) does not solve it, but merely relocates it elsewhere. The mechanism of displacement as an explanatory metaphor arose from the data itself and is used to investigate both large-scale displacements such as those of geography and labour, as well as microprocesses occurring within jobless families. This chapter therefore attempts to comprehensively answer the fourth research question regarding the impacts of joblessness as a way of life upon family structure, relationships and social integration.

This research is grounded in historical conditions which led to the development of the post-war welfare state. Arguments surrounding dependency, obligation and the nature of care arise from particular discourses inherited and adapted from this historical legacy. This, together with the question of how the experience of relying upon income support for long periods differs in other times and places (for if all experiences were the same, it would render this research project irrelevant) makes it reasonable to compare current circumstances with those of the Depression years in Australia. The final chapter briefly undertakes such a comparison and in addition uses both the data arising from the fieldwork as well as the theoretical literature to draw conclusions and make some general recommendations. This undertaking addresses the final two research questions regarding social and policy implications. I show how current welfare arrangements operate to produce a kind of social cohesion which, however, is far from ideal; whilst the combination of current policy and the growth in precarious employment actually stabilises capitalist

economies in developed nations rather than undermines them. The general finding is that jobless families today are both more dispersed physically and more materially comfortable than their forbears. However in regard to their contemporaries they suffer from hidden injuries. Invisibility, relative poverty, social isolation, stigma and entrenched disadvantage colour these hidden worlds and conspire to produce a situation from which escape seems increasingly unlikely. This is so, partly because of a policy regime which disrespects its beneficiaries, but also because of an absence of suitable employment – a fact upon which there is almost universal silence.

This is far from that apparent suburban utopia referred to earlier. Some concrete suggestions which might produce an amelioration in this state of affairs are the creation of productive jobs by government spending on infrastructure, a policy of decentralisation and the possibility of introducing a basic income. However these are unlikely to be adopted in a climate where the government adheres to neoliberal economic principles and Third Way discourses that assert that dependency is a state of moral indebtedness which must be corrected, by coercion if necessary. I argue that what is needed is an alternative discourse which includes social or welfare rights as a part of human rights, based upon a recognition of mutual interdependency and an ethic of care. That we may be as far from this ideal as ever is no reason to abandon the field.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Perspective

2.1 Introduction

The stated aim of this study is to understand how joblessness is experienced by families in three parts of regional NSW and to attempt an appreciation of how and in what forms the possible impact of joblessness may be felt by the family as an entity. In addition it is hoped that social and policy implications arising from the data may be drawn. In Chapter four we will see that the terms joblessness and families are problematic in terms of definition, particularly in the context of what Giddens (1994) has called “post-traditional society”. Firstly, however, it is necessary to attempt to situate the study within the parameters of a theoretical framework capable of sustaining this type of inquiry.

The task of studying jobless families involves a multiplicity of aspects of the social world. There are political features, for example the family’s role as an institution in a capitalist society, which might usefully be explored from a neo-Marxist point of view. However the fact that the family is widely regarded as belonging to the private sphere whilst joblessness (or unemployment as it is still called) - is usually viewed as a public matter means that there is a meshing of the public and private worlds, or the micro and macrological aspects

of social life, something to which feminist theory has paid much attention. Feminist theory has also been deeply concerned with the gendered division of labour and its implications, which is of direct relevance to joblessness and family life. Nevertheless an exclusively feminist approach to the problem would be too narrow in its scope since joblessness is not in itself a gendered phenomenon, particularly in the case of sole parent families.

While critical theories can illuminate systemic or structural features associated with the research question, there is also an important psychological and subjective dimension to the problem which a structuralist perspective does not emphasise. The common tenet of all denominations of critical thinkers from Marx onward is the idea firstly, that social reality has an objective existence and second, that it is a product of human domination rather than a creation of nature. Thus all critical theories have an explicitly emancipatory agenda which seeks to liberate those identified as oppressed through praxis.

However critical theorists have been challenged by post-structuralists and post-modernists for their totalising, reductionist and deterministic accounts of the social world. Harvey (1990) disputes this view, asserting that

the meta narratives that the postmodernists decry were much more open, nuanced and sophisticated than the critics admit. Marx and many of the Marxists...have an eye for detail, fragmentation and disjunction that is often caricatured out of existence in postmodern polemics. Marx's account of modernization is exceedingly rich in insights into the roots of modernist as well as postmodernist sensibility (Harvey 1990, p. 115).

Furthermore, as Seidman and Wagner (1992) have noted, “one of the most basic failings of post-modernism...is its failure to distinguish the relativism of the frameworks within which sociological theorizing must proceed from the knowledge generated by employing those frameworks” (Seidman & Wagner 1992, pp.8-9). It is also noteworthy that post-structuralists, in focusing on the centrality of language and the quest to deconstruct taken-for-granted meanings, are engaged in an undertaking which can be likened to the uncovering of the false consciousness which critical theorists often attempt. This, it can be argued, is an area of commonality between critical theorists and post-structuralists, as is the insistence on subjectivities being constructed principally by external forces (Layder 1997, pp. 44-47).

These remarks are made by way of an abbreviated attempt to defend critical theory from some of its detractors. Nevertheless there is a perception among many that critical theory, which provided the rationale for ideologies which legitimated now collapsed socialist regimes, has been proved to be in need of substantial revision in the light of the unfolding of events in the last fifteen years (Giddens 1994, pp. 51-2). But the proclivities of the researcher toward critical theory as a generic approach have not been abandoned, and it is necessary to acknowledge this predisposition since it will suffuse the spirit in which the study is attempted. In addition, as I noted in the introductory chapter, I take to heart the prescription that, in insisting upon an emancipatory agenda, critical theories maintain (in common with grounded theory approaches) that research must be *accessible* to those whom it purports to serve. Equally, however, it is also important to recognise the limitations of the applicability of critical theories to the problem under scrutiny which, as has already

been noted, is multidimensional in nature, embracing the dualities of public and private, structure and agency, objective and subjective, social and psychological.

This plurality - combined with the desire to explore the lived experience of jobless families - contains elements suited to an interpretive methodology which Neuman (1997) maintains consists of a “systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds” (Neuman 1997, p. 68). A person’s experience of joblessness, for example, is made up of the face to face, everyday transactions which constitute their life world: for instance, the experience of being escorted from their workplace upon learning of their sudden retrenchment; at the Centrelink office registering for Newstart (unemployment benefit); attempting to gain new skills or employment; and those ordinary day-to-day interactions with members of their household of family and the community in which they live.

Clearly such a person’s psychological and emotional state will influence these transactions and the meanings attributed to them by the various actors involved in a two-way direction: the events will impact on the psyche and emotions, which will influence how the person manages the events and the memories they create will influence future transactions. Yet interpretive methodology on its own does not address questions of structure and domination, seeking rather *Verstehen* (and for phenomenologists, the emphasis is more heavily weighted towards ontology than epistemology (Neuman 1997 p. 68; Holub 1991 p. 52). What is needed is a framework which recognises that ontological and epistemological

questions are “inextricably bound together” (Layder 1998 p. 23) and in which both subjective *and* systemic aspects of the social world can be investigated.

To continue the example as a means of illustrating this point, the person described above will be subject to many systemic constraints: his or her redundancy may be the result of a company policy of downsizing (possibly as a response to global economic influences); the process of applying for unemployment payments will make manifest the control the person is subjected to by government agencies; whilst other institutions, such as the person’s own family may exert pressure on the person to behave in a particular manner and adopt particular attitudes, such as looking for a job or accepting work on any terms. These institutional constraints will in turn influence the individual’s state of mind, attitudes and behaviour. Thus the problem of disentangling these multifarious influences and effects calls for a theoretical perspective which will allow the various dimensions of the problem to be acknowledged, exposed and elaborated in order to uncover what may be occurring in the lives of the unemployed and their families. I have chosen to adopt Layder’s (1997) theory of social domains as a perspective which provides a conception of the social world best suited to the multidimensional nature of the research problem. Hence, a brief introduction to the work of Layder including the major influences upon his thought will now be given, followed by an account of Domain Theory.

2.2 Layder’s Principal Sources

Layder is a contemporary British sociologist who has concerned himself with the problems presented by the legacy of social theory and current responses to that legacy (Layder 1998,

1997, 1993, 1990). Layder acknowledges the value of many approaches which have stressed the primacy of one or the other aspect of what have been presented as irreconcilable dualisms in social theory - macrological/micrological, objective/subjective, determinist/agentive - and seeks to build a theory of the social world which will not dispense with the insights of these competing approaches. As has been seen above, the present inquiry is in need of such an approach since it is precisely the problem of how these various dualities meet, interact and produce effects in various domains of social life that is under investigation. Layder's model offers a means of resolving such tensions as will be demonstrated.

Layder is by no means the first to recognise the inadequacy of models which emphasise one aspect of the social world at the expense of another. Nearly fifty years ago C. Wright Mills defined what he famously called "the sociological imagination" as "the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self - and to see the relations between the two" (Mills 1959, p. 7).

In his theory of structuration Giddens attempts to collapse structure and agency into one amalgam by proposing that various "dualities" represent two sides of the same social coin. (Willmott 1999; Layder 1997, 1996). Willmott (1999) believes that this results in making structure indistinguishable from agency because it "provides no methodological springboard from which to theorise the relative weightings of structure and agency" (1999 p. 2) and an unfortunate conflation is the outcome. Layder (1997) has argued that Giddens adopted this stance because he sees dualisms as (irreconcilable) oppositions or polarities

rather than viewing social reality as a layered or textured phenomenon. This assumption leads him to reduce two distinct orders into one by asserting that reality is unified but has a dual nature. Consequently there is no means of assessing interrelations between two orders. By contrast, Layder adopts a realist stance which seeks to accommodate the existence of dualisms by postulating a stratified ontology, envisioning a series of distinct orders or domains in social life which are irreducible to each other and yet are interdependent⁴. Such an approach is necessary if one is to tease out the complexities of social reality which, it is here argued, cannot be achieved by conceiving of it as a unitary phenomenon. In relation to the present study, it should be clear that systemic features represent standing conditions which are independent of, and yet impact considerably upon, the lived experience of jobless families; conversely it is equally clear that subjective considerations such as innate predispositions are not reducible to effects of the social order and yet profoundly affect how members of such families will deal with the intrusion of social structures. Thus it is helpful to be able to distinguish between distinct social orders in order to be in a position to understand what processes and outcomes are occurring. Layder has followed up this standpoint with a methodology called Adaptive Theory which reflects his theoretical commitments. This will be examined in the following chapter.

2.2.1 The Realist Position

The realist position is one which is relatively new in social theory and has to date been concentrated in Britain (Willmott 1999). It derives from critical realism in the philosophy of science as developed by Harre (1986) and Bhaskar (1978) and represents a reaction to

⁴ Not all British social theorists accept that realism and structuration are ontologically and methodologically incompatible; Stones (2001), for example, suggests a judicious combination of the two would assist in driving “formal and substantive progress in the social sciences” (Stones 2001, p. 193).

the postmodernist tendency to reject theorising “as a necessary adjunct to empirical research” (Layder 1996).

Bhaskar (1978) commits to an objectivist position which proposes that reality exists at three levels: the empirical, which consists of what can be observed; the actual, which comprises all events, whether observable or not; and the real, an order which consists of the properties and mechanisms which bring about events. These three strata of reality constitute an open system where a complex interaction between multifarious factors produces tendencies toward certain empirical outcomes. For critical realists, theory is meant to “capture the not-directly-observable causal mechanisms and structures that generate observable phenomena and events” by means of methodologies where “contextualization and conceptualization are central, indispensable and interrelated parts of the search for causal explanations” (Ekstrom 1992, p. 117).

Layder acknowledges the influence of critical realists such as Bhaskar upon his own conception of the social world. He sees himself as proposing a version of realism which accepts Archer’s (1995) morphogenetic approach. The morphogenetic approach is a realist stance which attempts to avoid the conflation of structure and agency by “analytic dualism”; that is, structure and agency each has its own emergent properties which means that the one cannot be reduced to the other. It thus proceeds from the assumptions “that the social world is stratified and that structures and actions are temporally distinguishable” (Layder 1996 [online]). The emphasis on time is one of Archer’s central tenets because she believes that “structure and agency can only be linked by examining the interplay between

them over time” (Archer 1995, p. 65), establishing the need to take pre-existence and posteriority of structures into account.

Having established that a stratified ontology is the best means by which to resolve the tension between structure and agency in social theory, Layder has formulated his own model of social reality which is characterised by four distinct but interrelated dimensions. In so doing Layder has drawn upon the thought of three sociological theorists of different orientations; Habermas the critical theorist and defender of modernity, Foucault whose name is almost synonymous with post-structuralist theory, and Goffman the symbolic interactionist. This is consistent with Layder’s desire to incorporate the insights of varying theoretical persuasions into a coherent theory of social life. As discussed earlier, this multi-layered approach is crucial to this study, which seeks to understand the lived experience of jobless families in a way which takes account of and reflects the complexity and interrelations of the social world. Therefore, a brief overview of the relevant work of these three scholars will be given before proceeding to describe Layder’s conception of how together they can provide a coherent account of social processes, such as those which may occur in jobless families.

2.2.2 Habermas

Described by Outhwaite (1994, p. 3) as a “Marxist Weber” who has consistently advocated a critical theory of society, Habermas has pursued themes throughout his career as diverse as the public sphere, methodology in the social sciences including a concern with the limitations and dominance of positivism and its offspring scientism, the ‘reconstruction’ of

historical materialism, discourse ethics and communicative action, and an overarching defence of modernity and the Enlightenment project.

The second part of Habermas's theory of communicative action, life world and system, has a significant impact on Layder's theory and is germane to the ontological issues associated with research with jobless families, since their experience of life world and system can be taken as an empirical demonstration of Habermas's theoretical construct. The *Theory of Communicative Action* (1987) cannot be condensed into a few paragraphs without grave omissions, but its starting point was the concept of communicative competence which Habermas had developed earlier. Outhwaite (1994, pp. 38-39) claims that this theme was a preoccupation for Habermas in all his work up to the publication of the abovementioned text and that this engagement in the debate on hermeneutics sharpened the focus on intersubjectivity and mutual understanding.

Communicative action, characterised by "ideal speech situations" where consensus (to simplify somewhat) rather than asymmetrical social relations prevails, is taken to be the use of language to achieve common goals and is distinguished from strategic communication, "which simulates a communicative orientation in order to achieve an ulterior purpose" (Outhwaite 1994, p. 46). It is conceded that "ideal speech situations" may rarely occur but Habermas contends that a genuinely free social order cannot exist without them.

Habermas puts forward a model of rationality grounded in communication in which communicative action, defined as interaction between actors who "seek to reach an

understanding about their action situation and their plans of action in order to co-ordinate their actions by way of agreement” (Habermas 1984, p. 86), is one of four possible types of action and seeks to represent the inner and outer worlds of the speaker. For Habermas, then, subjectivity is not so much a knowing, willing self as “a totality of subjective experiences...to which an actor has privileged access” (Habermas 1996, p. 140). As Outhwaite (in Habermas 1996) comments, Habermas believes that a truer understanding of subjectivity can be obtained by an emphasis on intersubjectivity and communication. This is true of the present study, where communicative interaction between members of jobless families and the other social actors within their ambit is an important dimension for the understanding of their life worlds.

Habermas’s thesis is that society be conceived as both life world and system. Life world refers to the everyday world of actions, including a “culturally transmitted and linguistically organized stock of interpretive patterns “ (Habermas 1987, p. 124). System on the other hand is understood as those self-regulating, reproduced institutional features of society which are external to the life world such as economic markets. In developed societies, these two components become differentiated from each other to such a degree that they “uncouple”, becoming separate spheres.

Habermas believes that systems “colonises” the life world in a way that is pathological in modernity: “the rationalization of the life world makes possible the emergence and growth of subsystems whose independent imperatives turn back destructively upon the life world itself” (Habermas 1987, p. 186). An example cited of this phenomenon is the incursion of

the legal system into family life. One might also use as an illustration the possible impact on unemployed individuals of the regulation of their behaviour under the Howard government's policy of mutual obligation for welfare benefit recipients. Layder (1997), however, contends that although the concepts of life world and system are valuable, the distinction between them is too sharply drawn and "unrealistically pure" (1997, p. 103) and that rather than being solely pathological, the relation between them is one of complementary embeddedness. Accordingly, Layder adopts these concepts in an attenuated form. Life world becomes "lived experience in the context of a shared world" (1997, p. 87) while system elements refer to structural and institutional social features. For Layder (1997) both are "deeply interconnected with each other through the medium of social practices and activities" (1997, p. 79). This interconnection is a necessary device for understanding practices and activities in jobless families. Furthermore, the incorporation of this element of Habermas's thought allows a basis for interrogation and critique in a way that Goffman's work does not.

Layder thus adopts Habermas's insistence that institutional features merit substantial consideration in any account of social life, advocating what he calls a "moderate objectivism" (1997, p. 20). This includes an acceptance of Habermas's teleological conception of modernity as a worthy project which must be guided primarily upon rational principles. In this respect Habermas and Foucault were at odds over the idea of modernity, though critics contend that their differing methodological concerns masked a number of areas of agreement (Kelly 1994). Certainly they were both concerned with critique; however Foucault's insistence that Enlightenment concepts such as knowledge, reason and

truth were outmoded and that modernity is now “a matter of perpetual self-transformation, a process carried on in the absence of truth-claims or validating grounds” (Norris 1994, p. 175) appears to place his views at direct variance with those of Habermas.

Thus, whilst wishing to incorporate some of Foucault’s insights into the nature of power, (explained shortly) Layder relies to a much greater degree upon a Habermasian, or modernist conception of the social world. However the issue of how far such positions are applicable to the lives of ordinary persons is not considered in great detail by either of these theorists. Layder is insistent that day-to-day life (the life world) must form an integral part of any theory of society and that any theory which does not explicate how it (the life world) is both influenced by and influences wider social arrangements is of questionable value. Though Habermas did in fact devote considerable attention to intersubjectivity, it was at the theoretical rather than the empirical level. For this level Layder turns to Goffman.

2.2.3 Goffman

Goffman is renowned for his microsociological approach to the study of social interaction. Widely regarded as part of the Chicago School of symbolic interactionists, his work follows the Meadian tradition of intersubjective analysis. His interpretation of social interaction from a dramaturgical perspective was spelled out in *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1971) which attempted to understand face to face interaction as a series of encounters in which individuals attempt to influence how they are perceived according to the role conferred upon them by work situations, or as Goffman expresses it, how an individual “guides and controls the impression (others) form of him (sic)” (1971, p. 9).

Goffman thus presents individuals as literal actors capable of adopting various guises according to the demands placed upon them by social situations and encounters. This is the overarching theme of his oeuvre; the analysis of face to face interaction in terms of the information a person is able to both give and gain from another.

In *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, Goffman continues to pursue this perspective with respect to “the situation of the individual who is disqualified from full social acceptance” (1963, p. 9), elaborating many insights. This work is particularly relevant to the study of jobless families, many of whom express a sense of social disqualification as will be seen. Goffman’s method is to analyse various strategies in social encounters by which information about self and situations are managed in order to achieve various ends, for example, putting a “normal” person at ease in the presence of stigma. In the present study, such manoeuvres can be observed when welfare recipients routinely hide this fact when asked “what they do”, preferring to speak of their community roles or their (precarious) employment.

This approach thus emphasises not only the intersubjective nature of social interaction but also takes into account to a significant degree the *intrasubjective* events which lead to any particular encounter. In other words, although such a perspective does not embrace psychological factors as determinants of sociological behaviour, it does concede the influence of the individual’s inner, mental processes on social life. What it does not appear to do - and is often accused of in overviews and introductory texts such as Bilton et al (1997) - is take account of the structural elements of the social world which may also be

said to act in some measure as determinants of social encounters.

This is because Goffman concentrates on a level of social life which he conceives as the “interaction order”, which may be thought of as dealing with the social organisation of face to face conduct. Layder accepts Rawls’ (1987) analysis of the concerns of the interaction order as being the care and maintenance of selves, the moral nature of face to face conduct, the production of meaning which is internal to the encounter and the durability of the order in the face of threats to its survival (Layder 1997, pp. 197, 211-212). However he believes Rawls’ interpretation of the interaction order accords it such importance that there is an implication it *generates* other orders (such as the institutional order) though paradoxically she is also of the view that encounters are separate from and do not contribute to social reproduction.

Layder contends that this is a distortion of Goffman’s own conception of social orders and the relationship between them, in particular his idea of the interaction order as being enveloped in a membrane that is permeable to elements from others orders (such as class, ethnicity and gender) - in effect that there is a “loose coupling” between the interaction order and an institutional order. This, according to Layder, means that the implication of such logic is that no one order is pre-eminent so that one cannot adopt unifying syntheses as valid theories of society.

Thus Layder views Goffman’s work as “an attempt to trace the ligatures that bind institutional constraints and resources with those that are specific to the interaction order

itself" (1997, p. 12). He therefore holds that Goffman is not merely to be categorised as a symbolic interactionist - a view shared by Burns (1992) - but that it should be recognised that Goffman actually does attempt to situate his microanalyses within an institutional order even though it is hardly ever explicit. Furthermore Layder believes a major part of Goffman's value lies in the fact that his work is grounded firmly in everyday life, something which affirms the centrality of the human subject, in opposition to post-structuralist theorists. The present research proceeds from the position that it is of fundamental importance to investigate the lives of jobless families from their own perspective, that is, in terms of their day to day lives and their own interpretation of their subjective experiences.

Nevertheless Layder also believes that to accurately account for social life it is necessary to acknowledge the contributions of other perspectives where the emphasis may be differently weighted. Thus, while he relies extensively on Goffman's contributions in formulating and articulating his domains of Psychobiography, Situated Encounters and to some degree Settings as further detailed below, the idea that these domains of social life are permeated by elements such as power relations leads Layder to a consideration of some of the ideas of Foucault.

2.2.4 Foucault

Foucault's influence on social theory in the last two decades has been such that his name is now ubiquitous in the social sciences. Commentators argue that one of his major contributions was to re-examine taken-for-granted conceptions of history through an

analysis of particular fields of knowledge - such as psychiatry - in the light of the nexus between power and knowledge and to reconceptualise the intersection between what can be known about something and a specific period in history as discourse (Moss 1998; McHoul and Grace 1993; Smart 1985).

Foucault's emphasis on the analysis of history in the light of the interplay of discourses leads him to the conclusion that the subject is discursively created through these intersections of what can be known and the boundaries around what it is possible to know at a given period in history. Thus McHoul & Grace (1993) explain Foucault's use of the term discourse as "*whatever* constrains - but also enables - writing, speaking and thinking (about a given social object) within such specific historical limits" (1993, p. 31). Furthermore discourse is intimately tied to power, which Foucault conceptualises as a "set of relations" (McHoul & Grace 1993, p. 40). Foucault demonstrates how discourses operate in the construction of certain types of subjects in works like *Madness and Civilisation* (1973) and *The Birth of the Clinic* (1975) which deal with the emergent discourse of psychiatry and medicine in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Foucault's method of exposing discourse and its effects on how subjects are constituted is undertaken by two methods. The first he termed archaeology - or the examination of an "archive". By archive Foucault was referring not only to documentary evidence which may make up a conventional historical record, but as Smart expresses it,

what statements survive, disappear, get re-used, repressed or censored; which terms are recognized as valid, questionable, invalid; what relations exist between 'the system of present statements' and those of the past, or between the

discourses of 'native' and foreign cultures; and what individuals, groups or classes have access to particular kinds of discourse (Smart 1985, p. 48).

The purpose of archaeologies of knowledge is to expose the conditions under which a particular discourse can exist and how it is utilised. Discourse is the means by which knowledge in a particular field develops and hence helps to shape events.

Foucault's second method of investigating discourse and discursive practices, which he terms genealogy, has as its focus the relationship between knowledge and power and the ways in which bodies are governed. It is therefore concerned with the articulation between discursive and non-discursive features of life, in particular power. Genealogy attempts to uncover, not the evolutionary course of events but rather the disjunctures and discontinuities which shape events. History is seen in the light of successive forms of domination, rather than a linear progression towards ever-improving conditions of life. Foucault thus is undertaking a form of critique similar in spirit if little else to critical theorists but he is in direct disagreement with Enlightenment thinkers like Habermas in his conception of modernity.

It is Foucault's concept of power which Layder finds most useful. Though Layder believes that any understanding of power must be able to conceptualise it both as a process as well as reflecting society's ontological depth - that is, as multifaceted (1997 p. 15), part of this model owes a considerable debt to Foucault's insights. In fact, both Foucault and Habermas are committed to a critique of power, in particular the "pathological consequences of the operation of state welfare bureaucracies" (Outhwaite in Habermas

1996 p. 19). It should be clear that such a concern is of direct relevance to the present project; in fact a new discourse has developed around the concept of the deleterious effects of “welfare dependency” which is being used to legitimise the reformulation of benefits and services (see Mead 2000) with obvious impacts upon the lives of welfare recipients.

By means of his genealogical investigations, Foucault reaches an idea of power which accentuates its existence as a set of force relations which is ubiquitous, circulating through the micro capillaries of society. Thus for him it is not a property which can be possessed by sets of persons or institutions, but rather is deployed by all persons in terms of the relations between them. In his later work, Foucault also entertains the possibility that individuals are not only sites for domination but also retain possibilities for resistance.

However the idea that individuals may resist raises the question of agency: if subjects are discursively created to produce “docile bodies” acted upon and constructed from without, how does Foucault explain such resistance? In fact troubling gaps have been identified in Foucault’s stance on subjectivity, in particular the relationship of the subject to ethics, which also implies the presupposition of the autonomy of the subject (Smart 1998; Norris 1994;). As Smart comments, “in his work up to and including the first volume on *The History of Sexuality*, the subject appears primarily as an effect of social practices and subjection”. Furthermore, “there are...few signs in his work of a serious consideration of social interaction, or of the interactional contexts in which selves are constituted” (Smart 1998, p. 80). However, Norris (1994) and McNay (in Smart 1998) point out that Foucault, in his later consideration of ethics, appears to have based his discussions on normative

notions of an autonomous self, contradicting his avowed position that subjects are constituted through modes of objectification (Smart 1998 p. 105). In his advocacy on the care of the self as a foundation for an ethics based on aesthetical stylisation it is contended that Foucault does indeed rely on an almost “Goffmanesque sense of the subject” (Smart 1998, p. 83). The primacy that Layder accords social interaction and psychobiography therefore is capable of defence even when Foucault’s ideas on discourse and power are adapted and integrated into his overall model, because it is primarily to Foucault’s later work that Layder addresses himself, in particular *The History of Sexuality* (1988, 1986, 1979a).

In these volumes Foucault utilises his genealogical method to examine the ways in which government came to focus on whole populations in an effort to control individuals through the use of bio-power. Subjects are constituted by the definition of what is (sexually) acceptable and the promotion of “techniques of the self” which refers to “the means by which individuals can affect their own bodies, souls, thoughts and conduct so as to form and transform themselves” (Smart 1985, p. 108). Hence government interest in birth and death rates, life expectancy and related epidemiological factors led to the shaping of discourses of sexuality in an effort to administer populations (Layder 1997, pp. 150-151).

Foucault (1991) coined the term governmentality to refer to this process. He argued that from the eighteenth century onward there was a distinct change in the exercise of rule which made populations the object of government, the primary means of achieving this objective being economic. Political rationalities are specific manifestations of this new

way of thinking about government. According to Beeson and Firth (1998), political rationalities cannot simply be reduced to philosophies or ideologies because “the incorporation of economic doctrines or political philosophies into governmental practice is always partial and necessitates connection with administrative techniques and forms of calculation which modify, if not transform, the theories and their objectives” (Beeson & Firth 1998, p. 217).

Foucauldian analyses of governmentality such as those of Rose and Miller (1992) have been influential in the investigation of specific rationalities such as welfare. In recent times, Harris (2001), Dean (1999) and Beeson and Firth (1998) have focused on welfare provision in Australia, exposing the discourses underpinning this type of rationality and the way in which they help to construct particular subjectivities.

Layder argues that Foucault’s idea of discourses and the way in which they are related to power need to be incorporated into any theory of social life, though he believes there is no reason why “older” conceptions of power - as something that can be possessed (for example by the state) should be jettisoned. Furthermore Foucault’s contributions regarding the way that discourses help to shape subjectivities possesses considerable explanatory power, but with the proviso that human beings are not mere ciphers existing at the intersections of various discourses. In this Layder is much closer to the views of Giddens regarding agency and the subject.

To say that subjects are entirely constituted from the discourses available to them is highly deterministic and appears to adopt a species of structuralism. Layder wishes to acknowledge the partial influence of discourse without abandoning a measure of agency for the subject as well. He agrees with Giddens' emphasis on the active subject, though believes that Giddens overstresses its importance and minimises the role of systemic constraints in shaping social behaviour. Giddens believes that social systems only exist through "recreation in every encounter as the active accomplishment of human subjects" (Giddens 1977, p. 118). However Layder argues that this is an attempt to reduce two distinct social orders into one because of Giddens' rejection of any form of objectivism.

2.3 Domain Theory

Having briefly canvassed the three major contributors to Layder's own conception of the social world it is now necessary to provide an outline of what Layder has called Domain Theory, which is an attempt to incorporate classical with contemporary social theory and to bridge the divide between institutional and interpretative analysis. Before proceeding it should be briefly mentioned that Layder has also been influenced to varying degrees by the work of Giddens, Blumer, Bourdieu, Crespi, Laing, Lewis and Scheff in ways not developed in any depth in this chapter. Layder's stated aim is to provide an account of social life in general and face-to-face encounters in particular. To this end he proposes that society is "a series of distinct but interdependent layers or domains", partly autonomous from each other but also mutually interdependent (Layder 1997, p. 6).

Thus he distinguishes his theory from other synthetic approaches (such as Giddens' structuration theory) which attempt to melt institutional and interpretative theories into a unified whole. Rather, Layder proposes that the domains of social life cannot be considered as a unity but instead consist of four domains, which should be understood as being layered or stratified, namely **psychobiography, situated encounters, settings and contextual resources**. These layers or elements have some degree of autonomy but also are interwoven, each affecting the other in various ways, and existing across time and space.

The use of the term "layer" gives an impression of the vertical aspects of the way the domains operate in social life but they also exist temporally as well as spatially, so that the layers are also somewhat "horizontally" stretched. It is important to realise that this accent on the passage of time is a feature of analytic dualism which distinguishes it from other approaches, because it is argued that history bequeaths a set of inherited standing conditions which represents to a large degree reproduced social practices, whereas the present helps to shape the emergent features of social practices. These two temporally distinguishable characteristics mutually influence each other to produce the fabric of social life. This argument (and the realist position) entails an acceptance of what Layder calls moderate objectivism, which he has defined in the following manner:

Moderate objectivism is not linked to reification, claims to universal truths...structural determinism, or even functionalism. Instead, it simply registers the relative autonomy of external objective (and collective) features of social life (Layder 1997, p. 246).

The domains are bound together and interpenetrated by three elements, **social relations and positions, power, and discourses and practices**. The four domains may be thought of as constituting an elaboration of two 'meta-domains', system and life world; psychobiography and situated encounters being part of the life world, whilst settings and contextual resources belong to system. Layder has conceptualised the relationships between his domains diagrammatically as follows:

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Fig 2.1: Layder's Social Domains (Source: Layder 1997, p. 78)

These domains and the elements which bind them will now be considered consecutively, however it must be borne in mind that this is merely an analytic device which allows their exploration; in reality elements from all domains mingle in varying measures, producing emergent effects and impinging upon each other to varying degrees.

2.3.1 Psychobiography

The domain of psychobiography covers the inner life of the individual, including their

psychological and emotional disposition as these are moulded by the person's unique biography, as well as their personality. In a departure from Mead's understanding of the self as essentially a social construction relying on conscious, cognitive processes, Layder asserts that the unconscious must also be taken into account. For Layder the unconscious contains the realm of emotion, "affectual energy that constantly interacts with the social entanglements of the individual" (Layder 1997, p. 33). In this study which uses in-depth, semi-structured interviews, it is only partly possible to assess the impact of this realm. However one way in which some appreciation of this dimension can be explored is through participants' reports of their emotions.

An example of the range psychobiography covers might be a person who is by nature anxious and whose life experience has included long periods where he or she relied on insecure employment. This person's inner life might well be characterised by excessive anxiety regarding job security, even where there was no apparent reason to be so anxious. That these feelings and cognitions impact on how the individual will behave in face-to-face situations is beyond question: what has been disputed is whether these inner processes and attitudes are shaped entirely by external forces such as discourses and culture. The case of unemployment may be used to illustrate the argument.

Unemployment is a social construct about the way society conceptualises work and identity. A person may perform unpaid work and yet be categorised as unemployed in order to receive income support. If the construct is then internalised by the person, they may begin to lose a sense of self-worth, become apathetic and finally suffer health effects.

Here the mental processes are dependent on the discourse of unemployment. Layder argues that the interior life of the individual will also have some bearing on how they accommodate the experience of unemployment. Thus a person's previous experience of dire poverty as a result of an absence of paid work, added to the innate anxiety trait will also play a role in ordering the person's reaction to the situation.

Layder therefore argues that the psychological aspects of individuals must be taken into account as well as social factors in considering mental processes and their effect on social action. He believes it is essential to accept "the notion of a separate ego as part of the duality between psychological (subjective) and social realms" (Layder 1997, p. 27). Furthermore, in contending that a conception of persons must acknowledge both the existence of ego - the individual's singular mental world which is both of and beyond society - as well as the person as a social being, Layder recognises that this gives rise to conflicts which pull the individual in opposing directions. He calls this tension the "dialectic of separateness and relatedness" (1997, p. 27), a concept bearing a striking similarity to Freud's (1985) position on the structure of personality and motivation as expressed in *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In other words, although the mental interior of an individual is partially constituted by the social realm, in another sense, "as individuals, we are alone in a fundamental sense" (Layder 1997, p. 71), giving rise to contradiction and tension within individuals which must be managed. Layder expresses it thus:

...individuals are complex and contradictory beings capable of self-deception to varying degrees and intensities as well as consciously formulated intentional behaviour...people constantly veer between manipulative and altruistic modes of relating to others, sometimes managing to combine both in the same sequence or episode of face-to-face conduct...The contradictory tensions and pulls of emotional exchanges and the energies emanating from particular personalities all

combine to create an individual who is far from a coherent unit acting in a uniformly rational manner (Layder 1997, p.3).

An individual's sense of identity and therefore ontological security derives from the relative balance between separateness and relatedness, that is, the desire for autonomy and the interdependence with others. This dialectic is partially played out in social encounters and thus is a factor in shaping events. Layder contends that we veer between conscious awareness of our intentions, desires and motives and self-deception, in an effort to manage our emotions. The self is not unitary, but has many facets.

Scheff has contributed to the sociology of emotion and its relationship to social interaction by postulating the existence of an "emotion-deference" system whereby the principal "social" emotions of shame and pride regulate social interaction in a hidden manner, producing a form of social control too subtle to be registered by social researchers, since it often operates outside conscious awareness (in Layder 1997, p. 58). Scheff thus seeks to combine inner and outer (social) emotional processes and has introduced the concept of attunement in social interaction - that is "the achievement of joint feeling and attention between people in interaction" (in Layder 1997, p. 61). However attunement is variable and discontinuous, since participants in interaction operate on both a manifest and a non-manifest level. In practice this may mean that there is superficial attunement whilst in fact the thoughts and feelings of the interactants vary wildly.

Layder believes it is important to acknowledge this psychological dimension of social encounters, without reducing the one to the other. The actor thus operates at several levels of awareness, where the cognitive and the emotional direct thought and action in varying

measures. Therefore any account of the social world which does not give due weight to the role of psychobiography risks the loss of significant explanatory power. Nonetheless on its own psychobiography does not constitute a satisfactory depiction of society in its entirety; it is necessary also to consider the role of intersubjective action.

2.3.2 Situated Activity

By the domain of situated activity, Layder means actual episodes of social interaction or “communicative interchanges between participants that take place in social situations” (Layder 1997, p. 3), which may range from intimate dyadic encounters through to massed gatherings such as rallies, ceremonies and so forth. Following symbolic interactionist theory it is argued that meaning arises from this face-to-face conduct owing to elements internal to the encounter, such as detailed contextual knowledge, the responses of others and the negotiations of meaning that occur between interactants (1997, pp. 88-89).

Layder distinguishes between three types of encounters between persons: transient encounters, which are impersonal and occur between strangers, such as asking a passer-by for the time; intermittent encounters, which are casual and from which acquaintances are formed, for example attending a weekly yoga class; and regularised encounters, which are volitional and emotional, such as encounters between family members or friends, or compulsory, such as going to work.

Domain Theory centralises situated activity as a “delivery system” for what occurs in social life and thus it is embedded in all the other domains that Layder posits. Furthermore,

situated activity has the quality of emergence because it is linked to other encounters which propel the course of events as they unfold over time. Such encounters form the material which symbolic interactionists study. One can understand situated activity, then, as communicative events.

Layder distinguishes the domain of situated activity from the interaction order. It has been noted previously that the interaction order as formulated by Goffman is concerned with the organisation of social conduct at a micro level. Layder sees situated activity as actual events occurring *within* the broader concerns of the interaction order, whilst both psychobiography and the interaction order exist within the encompassing “meta-domain” of the life world.

In addition, situated activity is influenced by elements of other domains, which contribute to its emergent nature: “Elements of psychobiography, setting and contextual resources will also play a role in structuring the activity. In so doing they will overlay and inter-mix with elements of the other domains to produce new dynamic properties in the activities themselves (Layder 1997, p. 92).

2.3.3 Settings

Situated activity takes place in the third domain, that of settings, by which Layder means not only the geographical locations such as Centrelink office, Job Network Agency, workplace, school, church, club or home, but also the “organisational features” (Layder 1997, p. 3) of the setting, such as structured authority relations (as in the case of Centrelink

or Job Network) and the social rules which accompany such settings. These relations are reproduced and are not dependent on specific individuals. Non-institutional settings, whilst not characterised by formal structure, still feature understandings about the behaviour which is to take place in them, for example people will not walk naked in the street. Settings are therefore “local holding points for aggregations of *reproduced social relations and practices* (1997, p. 80) (emphasis in original). As such, settings as a domain contains social structural elements, in dealing with norms and rules. In this sense it belongs to the macro-domain of system.

There is an enormous diversity within settings, depending on numerous variables, as for example the difference between the family and a government agency such as Centrelink. Settings exert power influences such as the governance of the individuals within them. For example workers being paid by piece rate will adopt behaviour linked to this form of payment. However, in a radically different labour market, for example that of actors who work on fixed-term contract, the focus will be on the need continually to renegotiate trust in work relationships. Layder gives these examples to show how settings “critically affect the intersection between life world and system elements” (Layder 1997, p. 145).

Layder conceptualises settings as existing within social fields, a notion which he borrows from Bourdieu. Fields consist of a “set of relations between objective social positions within particular fields”, for example art or education (Layder 1997, p. 166). Internally they are hierarchical, whilst externally they intersect with other fields, competing for resources (such as government funding) and hence involve power and domination. Thus

fields and the settings within them are tied to the domain of contextual resources.

2.3.4 Contextual Resources

The last domain, contextual resources, refers to structural factors which determine the distribution of various kinds of resources in society. Three orders of resources are delineated: material resources such as money and property, dominative resources such as status roles, and cultural/discursive resources, whose basis is the possession of types of knowledge. This domain deals with social life on a collective level and patterns of power and inequality which result from the uneven distribution of resources. Resources underpin fields and settings and are conceptualised as existing in both a distributive and an interactional sense. It is easy to see how material and dominative resources feed into the stabilisation of forms of dominations and indeed this has been extensively delineated by critical structuralists. Cultural and discursive resources, on the other hand, are about how domination is signified in a social or cultural form.

Culture, ideology and discourse covers values, norms, expectations, commonsense, skills, knowledge, rules, taste and other social artefacts and serves a huge range of social and psychological needs and functions. This means that such resources have an interactive as well as a distributive dimension. The interactive dimension represents the selective uptake of cultural and discursive resources during interaction, based on their availability and the individual's predisposition to use them. Layder asserts these three features or modalities (that is, distributive pattern, individual predisposition and selective uptake) exist within the context of the dualism of subjective and objective social life (Layder 1997, pp. 122-126).

Hence the theory of domains understands social reality as having both dualism and depth, in contrast to Foucault, who focuses on discourse as if it were the only medium of social life.

Layder believes that in drawing upon discourses, which are acknowledged to exist “above and beyond the consciousness and intentionalities of people (Layder 1997, p. 126), individuals exercise agency in that they select and filter those pieces of discourses that serve their needs and in so doing actually contribute to the alteration of discourses in some instances. The interaction order helps to mediate the influence of discourse, something that Foucault ignores. As such, then, the individual is something more than simply a nodal point at the intersection of discourses; rather discourses should be seen as serving as resources for individuals to draw upon as much as constituting subjectivities in a deterministic manner.

2.3.5 Power, Social Relations, Discourses and Practices

As previously noted, these domains comprise distinct levels or layers of society while at the same time influencing each other. Interlacing these are the elements of power, social relations, and discourses and practices. Layder takes up Foucault’s notion of power as dispersed through every level of society, circulating in diffuse and localised ways at microscopic levels, but also wishes to retain the idea that power also emanates from institutional or systemic sources as understood by critical theorists. Power therefore “spans both the objective and subjective aspects of social life” (Layder 1997, p. 147) and has both a productive as well as a prohibitive aspect. Layder rejects Foucault’s abandonment of

subjectivity, arguing that his (Foucault's) vision of power as networks of shifting alliances means that it is only a "relational" phenomenon (Layder 1997, p. 152). Going further than both Foucault and Habermas, he argues that various dimensions of power are located in the domains of self-identity and psychobiography, lending qualified support to Giddens's idea of power as transformative capacity where power exists as a shifting force between agents in an interaction. Layder also suggests that individuals possess "subjective power", such as charisma, or physical strength.

But, following Habermas, Layder believes power also resides within social structures and institutions, such as the state and its various organs. In Domain Theory power is thus a multiform phenomenon, existing across all levels of society; it exists subjectively but at the same time interlocks and co-exists with social and systemic power, influencing the shape of social encounters. Power thus is omnipresent, existing both as transformative capacity as well as in a systemic sense. These power forms meld and intermix, producing what Layder calls "shape-shifting" or hybrid forms of power (Layder 1997, p. 186).

As a concept, social relations is differentiated from situated activity on the basis that they are ongoing bonds that exist beyond specific social encounters, for example the employer-employee relationships or the parent-child relationship. Thus social relations are described as the "trans-situational ties that join together particular episodes of situated activity" (Layder, 1997 p. 83). Social relations are inscribed by power and discourses and practices which ultimately reproduce and serve to "establish and fashion the points of contact, convergence and overlap between the social domains" (1997, p. 251).

Discourse has already been discussed above in the context of resources. Suffice to say here that discourses can be understood to mean a body of communication on a particular theme which contains what is known about it, therefore giving rise to a particular set of practices, although Layder does not believe that discourses are invariably linked to practices. (In terms of discourses assuming an objective existence, Layder distances himself from the positivist sense of the word objective, which he uses in the sense of externality rather than “truth”.) It follows that power is intrinsically linked to discourses and practices.

Here Layder accepts Foucault’s power-knowledge nexus, though he rejects the idea that discourses entirely direct the lives of individuals, citing proof of intentionality and transformative power from humanist and interactionist schools - and it is this that allows individuals to reconfigure and select pieces of discourses for their own ends. In addition elements from the interaction order assist in mediating discourses, something which Foucault ignores. Layder asserts that both Giddens and Foucault fail to distinguish between social production and reproduction; on the one hand Foucault denies creativity, whilst on the other Giddens tends to collapse most things into “individual motivations and reasons” (cited in Layder 1997, p. 129). Finally, Layder accepts that discourses do affect subjective assessments of what is “normal” and provide a cultural milieu for the constitution of individual identity (1997, p. 84).

2.3.6 Summary

The foregoing has provided a description of how Layder envisions the social world. In a sense his conception may be likened to Russian eggs: with orders residing within larger fields which fit into “macro-domains”. There are two macro-domains, system and life world although these must be understood as being somewhat superimposed upon one another. Within system are found fields (in which settings reside) and contextual resources, whilst in life world one finds the interaction order (where situated activity takes place) and psychobiography. All of these domains are threaded together by social relations, power and practices and occur on a spatio-temporal continuum. The researcher’s own conceptualisation of this model is presented in Figure 2.2.

It needs to be re-emphasised that in practice, none of the domains or the elements that bind them can be empirically separated, since in social life they are mutually interpenetrating and inextricably imbedded in each other. Thus in conducting empirical research such as the current project, it is impossible to formulate a methodology which will clearly expose them as separate entities - and this is not the aim of the study. However one may adopt Layder’s model as an overall paradigm of the social world which allows sufficient latitude to explore the ligatures between system and life worlds and the influence of the various elements of the social world on jobless families in a way that other perspectives, which concentrate either on structure or subjectivity or attempt to weld both into a unified synthesis, do not. This ought to enable an analysis of texts and ethnographic data which allows for an exploration of the impact of these

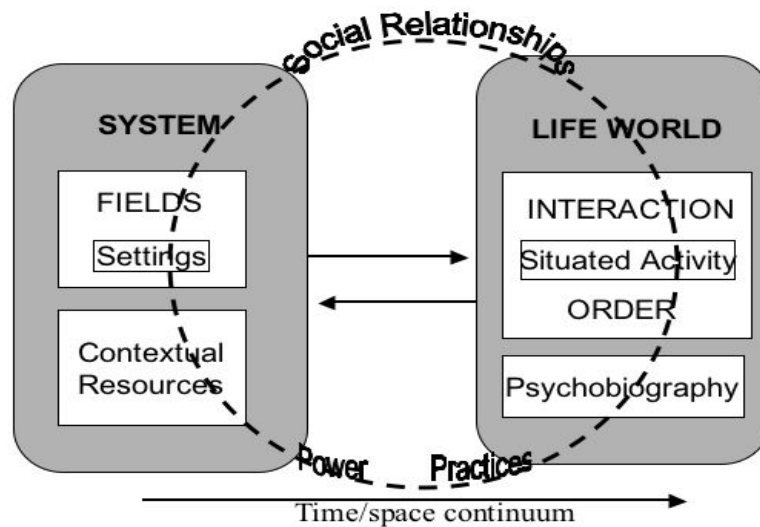


Figure 2.2: Hartman's conceptualization of Layder's Domain Theory

elements, exposing to at least some extent their operation as they occur in individual's lives, and in so doing provide a coherent account of whatever processes may be unfolding for jobless families. As stated earlier, Layder has developed a methodology which he named Adaptive Theory which is congruent with his theory of domains which this researcher proposes to utilise. It is accordingly developed in Chapter three.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to situate the investigation of jobless families in regional New South Wales within a theoretical framework capable of sustaining such an enquiry. It has been argued that Domain Theory is the most suitable perspective for this task because, in postulating a stratified ontology, it acknowledges both the objective as well as the

subjective characteristics of the social world and avoids the conflation of structure with agency. Domain Theory and the sources from which it derives have been outlined and examined so as to provide a coherent theoretical account of how both the emergent and pre-existing features of social life converge to produce empirical reality. It is proposed to use this account as an overarching set of assumptions, which will guide and inform the research.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the preceding chapter, Layder's theory of social domains was outlined as a suitable theoretical framework upon which to construct the present project. It was mentioned that Layder (1998) has also developed a methodology which complements his theoretical commitments. Accordingly, I have adopted what Layder has called Adaptive Theory as my methodology. This chapter will provide an account of the main elements of Adaptive Theory before proceeding to report on how the research was conducted.

In formulating a methodology consistent with the theory of Domains, Layder has been concerned to revive the role of theory in sociological research, arguing that the atheoretical approaches of some schools, such as post-structuralists and ethnomethodologists impoverishes and restricts the range of sociological knowledge that might otherwise be available. In his view, research therefore, should not simply confine itself to descriptive, localised accounts or to giving voice to marginalised minorities (though some post-structuralists would no doubt protest this is too limited a

description of their endeavour), but should also engage actively with the data to produce new knowledge. As Layder expresses it, the practical purpose of Adaptive Theory is to “generate theoretical models of the social reality that is the subject of the research” (Layder 1998, p. 152).

Being a recent contribution to the social science corpus, little empirical research which utilises Layder’s theory has been published so far. Layder himself has conducted research into actors’ professional careers in the UK (1984) which, although it predates the formalisation of his ideas, fits methodologically with his later prescriptions. Layder (1998) also makes use of O’Connell Davidson’s (1998) research on prostitution as illustrative of his approach. I have also located three further studies based on Layder’s work. Anelay (2002) undertook doctoral research on men on low incomes while Valsecchi (2000) examined control and self-discipline within home working using Adaptive Theory. Roberts (2003) has used Layder’s Domain Theory in investigating identity reconstruction in student teachers. My research appears to be the only Australian study to utilise Domain Theory and Adaptive Theory.

3.2 General Outline of the Adaptive Theory Approach

Layder asserts that Adaptive Theory is neither positivist nor interpretivist but rather that it represents a judicious blend of a moderate objectivism combined with subjectivism as the nature of the inquiry demands. He contends that the positivist endeavour is tainted by the attempt to graft the principles of natural science onto “meaning-conferring human beings whose behaviour is quite unlike that of the inanimate phenomena of the natural

world” (Layder 1998, p. 139). However, he proposes a broadly realist position in that he believes that there are causal mechanisms at work in the social world which can be accessed by means of a rationalist approach. Therefore, whilst accepting the interpretivist position on subjectivity and intersubjectivity, he opposes an extreme interpretation, which would have it that social life is entirely composed of these elements alone. Rather, the emphasis of Adaptive Theory is to expose and explain the connections or *ligatures* between system and life world by means of a flexible combination of inductive and deductive techniques. Layder (1998, pp. 49-51) argues that while this eclecticism tolerates a diversity of standpoints and resources, it must nevertheless adopt a systematic and disciplined manner, which does not do violence to the underpinning epistemological and ontological assumptions of both approaches. That is, although he rejects the idea that “theories are perfect end products in their own right”, he acknowledges the potential incommensurability of “radically discrepant discourses” (Layder 1998, p. 40), which must be acknowledged and attended to. Layder emphasises the provisional nature of knowledge about the social world, which is always open to modification and revision. Consequently, he endorses a methodical yet creative attitude to facilitate the generation of new knowledge about social phenomena.

Layder acknowledges Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967), whose central purpose is the production of theory from data, as a significant influence in the development of his own methodology. As such, Adaptive Theory preserves a core of Grounded Theory, but it is “stripped of its empiricist limitations” (Layder 1998, p. 150). That is, whilst Layder accepts that theory must emerge from

empirical data, he disagrees with Glaser and Strauss (1967) on two counts. Firstly, he differs on the point that one must dispense with prior theoretical knowledge in analysing data, arguing that this is simply a waste of good extant theory, which might help to clarify and/or elaborate what is emerging from the data. He rightly points out that in practice, it is impossible to approach a research task as a “tabula rasa”; we are always imbued with presuppositions and theoretical assumptions and it is better to acknowledge them and use this to advantage rather than to attempt a naïve objectivism. Secondly, he disagrees that a consideration of systemic elements should be excluded from the research process. Interestingly, Strauss and Corbin (1990, pp. 255-256) appear to contradict their own prescription on this point by suggesting that a “good” Grounded Theory study should take account of what they call the “conditional matrix”. This includes factors such as economic conditions, social movements and cultural values – factors which are a part of the system elements that Layder wishes to acknowledge and elaborate upon. The ultimate aim of Adaptive Theory, therefore, is to develop a model of agency-system interlocks which explains “*what is going on and why*” (emphasis added), (Layder 1998, p. 152) by means of a continuously reflexive synthesis of extant theory with emergent data (Figure 1). I argue that this approach is particularly well suited to my own research problem, as set out in Chapter one.

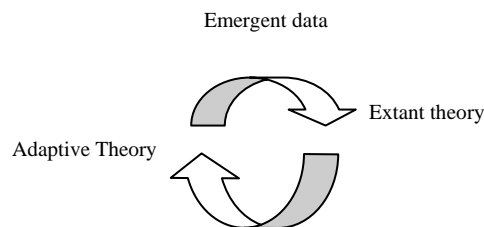


Figure 3.1: Links between extant theory, emergent data and Adaptive Theory (adapted from Layder 1998, p. 167).

3.2.1 The Research Process: Data Collection

In common with a Grounded Theory approach, Layder argues that the research process does not necessarily follow an orderly procedure, but is rather a messy affair, with analysis, theorising and data collection occurring either simultaneously or in a haphazard manner. He suggests the use of multiple data sources, which can include both qualitative and quantitative material, as the research appears to require. He endorses Glaser and Strauss' (1967) concept of theoretical sampling, which suggests adjusting the sample to extend and interrogate the theory that is emerging, rather than following a rigidly predetermined approach often prescribed by a positivist method. Likewise, he generally eschews the use of probability samples which, whilst allowing generalisation, are more suited to quantitative analysis. Rather, he suggests that it is more likely that in qualitative inquiry one will use a non-probability sample (for example snowballing). Though such samples do not admit generalisation, he believes that "the validity, meaningfulness and insights gained from qualitative inquiry using purposive sampling have more to do with the information-richness of the cases...and the observational and analytical capabilities of the researcher than with the sample size" (Layder 1998, p. 146). As with Grounded Theory, sampling continues until no new information is emerging.

3.2.2 The Research Process: Strategies for Analysis

As with his Domain Theory, Layder borrows from a variety of traditions in developing his methodology, and although he advocates a multi-strategy research method, his approach emanates from the tradition of qualitative research. Whilst Adaptive Theory draws together disparate research strategies (for example interviews, participant observation, surveys and historical comparison), it nevertheless follows the same

analytical trajectory of Grounded Theory of “adjusting to, or being altered or modified to accommodate the analysis and interpretation of data which is being collected in an ongoing fashion” (Layder 1998, p.150).

Layder advocates what he calls pre-coding, which consists of underlining or highlighting sections of data which seem significant. One may use provisional codes as a tentative attempt to classify the data. This is similar to open coding in Grounded Theory, however in Adaptive Theory the search for new codes occurs in tandem with the use of one’s extant theoretical assumptions and continues at all stages of the analysis and collection, rather than becoming more selective and restrictive. However, this stage of the analysis should be geared to what seems relevant rather than attempting to generate as many codes as possible as in Grounded Theory. Layder argues that this is wasteful, since coding all data will inevitably generate superfluous and irrelevant codes. The pre-coding therefore enters into a dialogical combination with extant and emergent theory.

More refined coding of core and satellite concepts is the logical outcome of the pre-coding process. This means giving specific names to help classify the data into categories. This is an attempt to target theoretical pertinence as soon as possible and can be derived from the prior theoretical assumptions, but these should be provisional.

The writing of theoretical memos should occur in tandem with the coding process. This means making notes about the problem as the data collection continues. This may take the form of asking questions of the data, making connections, or exploring links between

codes or identifying gaps in the data. However this should occur in conjunction with the development of theoretical models. These may be provisional in nature, but their function is to order the data. Layder (1998, p. 152) states that “the model is then refined and elaborated on as further data is gathered. If however the data do not seem to fit or seem to contradict the model, the task then becomes to modify the model to reflect what is emerging from the data”.

This process of theorising should be accompanied and assisted by the use of extant theory where it seems helpful. Layder suggests that both general and substantive theories may make a contribution, or may suggest ways in which to understand and order the empirical data. Additionally, theories or concepts which exist in adjacent disciplinary fields which seem relevant may be co-opted and applied to what is emerging from the data. An elementary example is the way the concept of “career” has been borrowed from an organisational paradigm and applied to the subject of deviance. To summarise, theory generation therefore starts with orienting concepts, which provisionally order the data. They are then elaborated into conceptual frameworks, which are modified as the analysis progresses. In this way, extant theory and emergent empirical material enter into a dialectical relationship to produce new and more powerful explanatory models of social phenomena.

3.2 The Current Study

3.3.1 Data Sources

The study relied on four sources of data concerning jobless families. This is consistent both with the general principle of triangulation, and also with Layder's exhortation to collect a variety of data in order to enhance the validity of the research. The first source was the sample of jobless families who volunteered for participation in the study. A second source of evidence about jobless families was my own ethnographic experience - both of living in a region characterised by high numbers of income support recipients - and of living as a member of a jobless family at various points in my life. Situated epistemology provides a rationale for the inclusion of this type of data, although the older anthropological methods also sustain the use of information gathered in this way. Situated epistemology or situated knowledge is a concept borrowed from feminist theory which holds that embodied knowledge, or knowledge gained from the standpoint of the individual's experiences is valid and must be taken into account (Haraway 1991). Haraway (1991) claims this approach is not incompatible with realism, though she is rather dismissive of realism's ability to explore agency. However, it is unclear as to what variety of realism Haraway is referring.

A third source of data was a wave of interviews conducted with community workers. A range of counsellors, welfare workers and social workers were interviewed in each of the three regions in an effort to obtain information about those families whose lives might be in considerable disarray - enough to warrant their contact with one of these workers. It was theorised that such families would be unwilling to come forward for interview, but that community workers would be able to provide an accurate picture of the specific

impact that income support had upon their lives. The study also utilises a range of documentary data such as the older, large-scale studies of the effects of unemployment on the family as a source of primary evidence for a historical comparison, literature from various government agencies such as Centrelink and materials found in facilities I visited, such as counsellors' rooms and Job Network offices.

3.3.2 Research Sites

Three sites were chosen for the research; the southwestern rural Sydney fringe, and two areas of the Far North Coast. The decision to choose these sites was made for three reasons. Firstly, these areas consistently have recorded three of the highest unemployment rates and income support dependency rates in New South Wales. According to unpublished data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics obtained by Megalogenis (2004), the three areas come twelfth, fifteenth and twenty-fourth in the fifty electorates with the biggest share of unemployed families in Australia as a whole. Secondly, I have lived in two of the areas under study for periods of eighteen and seventeen years respectively. This lived experience confirms the reliability of the ethnographic observations given for these areas. The third area is adjacent to one of the other areas and therefore I have detailed knowledge of this region as well. Thirdly, the three sites were expedient in terms of my ability to access them without incurring large expense.

A further rationale for choosing the southwestern site was that it provided a contrast both in terms of its culture and demography, which enables valid comparison with the data

gained from the other two sites, an investigative technique endorsed by Layder (1998). As it is located on the outskirts of Sydney, there is some degree of urbanisation because of its proximity to the metropolis. Additionally, the ideas, practices and standing conditions are quite different from those of the Far North Coast sites.

3.3.3 Obtaining the Sample – Difficulties and Ethical Considerations

The research environment at present is vastly different than when the large scale Depression studies of unemployed families (Komarovsky 1973; Jahoda, Lazarsfeld, and Zeisel 1972; Bakke 1940) were carried out. As described in Chapter six, these researchers often obtained their sample without revealing to the participants the true nature of the project. The 1930s and 1940s were a time when a hierarchical division still existed in the social sciences between the researcher and the subject, even where the researchers were following a critical methodology. In the three major studies of unemployed families carried out in this period, methods are described which would now violate human research ethics committees. That the methods employed for obtaining a sample were reported unabashedly demonstrates how well accepted this strategy was.

The obvious reason for not revealing the true nature of the research to the participants was in order to enhance validity and reliability, and it is probable that it did so. However, the ethical position of this researcher and the requirements of her university's ethics committee have meant firstly, that the subject of the study be fully disclosed to the prospective participants; secondly that the participants choose freely and voluntarily to participate (informed consent); and thirdly that their privacy and confidentiality be

safeguarded in the most conscientious manner possible. This entailed several problems both in obtaining the sample and in ensuring the validity of the research.

My ethical stance has been influenced by feminist methodology, in particular Oakley (1981), who drew attention to the inherent inequality in the nature of the researcher-participant relationship. I committed to equalising as much as possible the power relations between myself and the participants, whilst realising they cannot be wholly erased. My use of the word “participant” rather than “subject” is consistent with this commitment. In interview, I attempted to establish a sense of ease by emphasising my own humanity rather than my role as a researcher. When participants asked for further information or referral, I assisted to the best of my ability. The participants chose a venue for the research where they would feel most comfortable, and I offered the participants a choice as to whether the interview was taped or written. Participants were free to withdraw at any time until the writing-up stage. None did so.

The most apparent problem presented by the ethical approach is that only participants who have a degree of active agency will approach the researcher voluntarily. This means that the sample most probably is skewed in favour of such individuals. For example, the homeless are a category of vulnerable individuals who are inaccessible without significant violation of their already diminished privacy. Persons receiving income support who are demoralised or alienated from social institutions are unlikely to be represented in the sample and the same is true of persons who wish to conceal such things as criminal activity.

A further problem in obtaining the first sample was encountered as a result of the conditions imposed by the University's Ethics Committee, and also the Department of Workplace Relations and Small Business (DEWRSB). The approach I originally proposed was to ask case managers of unemployed clients (who satisfied the criteria of having family dependents) to inform their clients of the study and invite them to ring the freecall number which I had established at the university to leave their details. However it was felt by the Ethics Committee that this might be construed by clients as an attempt to coerce them into participation. They considered that a poster placed in the premises was a better approach and imposed a condition that notices be placed in the agencies advising clients of their freedom to decline participation. In addition, case managers themselves stated they did not have time to invite clients to participate, owing to the time constraints imposed by newly instituted procedures - consequent upon the marketisation of the Job Network - which they were obliged to follow.

One of the Job Network agencies approached forwarded my request to DEWRSB, who then requested more information to determine the legality of the proposal, primarily in terms of privacy and confidentiality restrictions. Permission was given to conduct the research after lengthy negotiation of the proposed procedures. Some further conditions were imposed, such as the requirement for a disclaimer informing potential participants the research was not in any way associated with Job Network or DEWRSB.

Unsurprisingly, few participants were in fact obtained by this method. I visited the agencies in person and on two occasions was able to address groups of unemployed

people, which resulted in some individuals volunteering to participate in the study. However these numbered only five in total. An advertisement therefore was placed in the free press in the three regions, which enjoyed a much better response rate, providing the majority of rest of the sample. Finally, some participants were obtained by the snowball effect. In this case, the person was contacted by their acquaintance who either knew of the research or had participated in it, and was asked to call me. The difficulties in obtaining the sample are a limitation in one sense; but any similar research will encounter the same problems and this makes the research valuable, since it will rarely be undertaken on a large scale in the present climate. Further, though it is unrepresentative, the sample meets the criteria of a non-probability sample, which, while not representative, is valuable for its ability to provide “information-rich cases for in-depth study” (Layder 1998, p. 46).

By the time I had conducted twenty in-depth interviews out of a total of twenty-two participating families, a large degree of saturation had been reached in the data analysis of these interviews, with no new themes emerging. Consistent with the Adaptive Theory approach, whereby themes emerging from the data dictate new directions or the need for empirical verification of theoretical suppositions, and in an attempt to test the validity of the provisional findings and extend the analysis, I sought (and gained) approval to approach a sample of community workers for interview. This sample consisted of twelve participants comprising two counsellors (one of whom specialised in Indigenous clients), one parole officer, one Community Support Program worker, three welfare workers, a Family Support worker and four Centrelink social workers. The community workers

were spread evenly across the three regions, and their clientele all included a substantial number of jobless families. As mentioned earlier, I theorised that on the one hand, families who felt relatively confident of their coping abilities would have come forward in the first sample. On the other hand, families experiencing acute distress or severe problems would be unlikely ever to come forward to volunteer for interview. The only practicable way of accessing knowledge of these families was second-hand.

A further consideration was the notion that knowledge of the purposes of the research may introduce either a conscious or unconscious bias on the part of participants. Stoller (1987 in Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 26) has gone even further than noting that participants often have a desire to “help” the researcher by giving the “right” information, asserting that “informants routinely lie”. Although I would argue that this is a distortion of the process of gathering information and an oversimplification of what constitutes truth in how participants tell their stories, it is a useful reminder that data needs to be approached from as many angles as possible. In this case, some of the findings of the first data set were tested in interview with the second sample. Even though community workers had less contact with families whose coping resources were not taxed to the limit, they nevertheless still encountered these families, particularly the Centrelink social workers who took part in the research.

Clearly, the second sample are also open to the charge outlined above, namely that they wish to “help” the researcher. In this case, a further constraint for some of the workers (Centrelink in particular) was the policy environment which dictated the language they

were obliged to use and the forms of assistance they were authorised to provide. Some workers may also have felt it necessary to follow “the Government line” and not reveal personal opinions or preferences, or alternatively, subconsciously reflect the prevailing policy culture. I was acutely aware of these complications in the interview process and took extra care in observing and interacting with these participants, and in the interpretation of the transcripts and analysis of the data. In reporting my findings, I have also made a very clear distinction between the two types of participants.

3.3.4 Method: Data Collection

As stated above, the first wave of interviews consisted of participants who were members of jobless families. Upon initial contact, the prospective participants were informed of the purpose and methods of the research and a meeting was arranged. Participants were given a choice of venue; although I wished to visit as many participants as possible in their own homes, some were not comfortable with this notion and instead chose a public space such as a park or library.

Informed consent was obtained verbally. The purpose of a verbal consent was to protect participants’ identity. Participants received a consent form signed by myself (see appendix), after the research had been discussed. Participants were not required to sign their name anywhere and I recorded their consent only by a Christian name and the number written on the consent form. The name was subsequently changed in accordance with Ethics Committee requirements, so that there was no possibility that the

participant's identity could be divined. All documentation relating to the research is securely filed.

In the writing up phase, any identifying details, for example particular health problems, were modified. For example, someone with a disability such as a history of cerebrovascular accident (stroke), which limits mobility, may be described as having cardiac problems, since the effect - in this case, impairment of mobility - is broadly similar. Likewise, if a person has some form of precarious employment which might lead to identification, it has been changed to a comparable occupation. Connell (1990) set a precedent in this respect when he presented "composites" of his participants in order to protect their confidentiality. Further, sometimes participants were referred to by two different names when it was deemed that consistently using one name might lead to the revelation of their identity by the particular combination of circumstances discussed. However, this was kept to a minimum in order to protect the integrity of the findings, and as faithful a representation as is possible has been provided.

The interview proceeded by means of a semi-structured format. Prompts were on a schedule (see appendix). I found a narrative method the best way of eliciting data. I would begin by asking something like, "Tell me how you came to be in this situation". This had the advantage of providing relevant background information about family of origin as well as permitting a conversation with the participant, which established a sense of rapport, and helped to reduce the status differences between researcher and participant. As the interviews progressed, certain themes which appeared consistently were explored

further by means of additional questions on the interview schedule. This is consistent with both Grounded Theory and Adaptive Theory techniques. Ethnographic information was recorded after each interview by means of field notes, which were then appended to the transcript.

Each jobless participant was followed up after a period of twelve months. This took the form of an update on the participant's circumstances. Additionally, I took this opportunity to clarify any issues arising in the initial interview. Most of the follow-up interviews took place by phone. A number of the participants remained in contact with me and seven of the original sample were still in contact in early 2004. This has allowed the study considerable longitudinal depth, from 2000 to 2004.

Member checking was not carried out, as questions have been raised over the reliability this is supposed to produce. For example, Sandelowski (1993, pp. 4-8) questions whether revision of initial statements enhances veracity or validity in qualitative research.

3.3.5 Method: Data Analysis

After the first wave of interviews was collected, a preliminary analysis was carried out, the results of which were published in 2002 (Hartman 2002). Upon completion of the second wave of interviews, a new round of analysis took place on both sets of interviews. Except for three of the interviews, all transcripts were typed by myself as sole researcher, after which coding took place. In transcribing the transcripts myself, I was able to re-

experience the interviews as they occurred, which aided in the recall of much unrecorded data, such as the participants' appearance, demeanour and surroundings.

I chose not to use computer software designed for qualitative data analysis. This was because I adhere to the notion that it is possible to become somewhat removed from the analytic process in so doing. Further, use of such software can foster a reliance on codes as the sole method of analysis (Charmatz in Denzin and Lincoln 2003, p. 268), whereas I sought to integrate my coding with both my field notes and my theoretical memos, which I constantly referred to and refined as analysis progressed (Layder 1998). Though it was far more time-consuming, the coding and cross-coding process continually connected me to my data to the point where I became intimately conversant with every transcript. I would also argue that the use of software does nothing to assist in recognising and interpreting latent as opposed to manifest content in the transcripts. Whilst not arguing for a wholesale rejection of analytic software, Coffey, Holbrook and Atkinson (1996 [online]) have pointed out that many qualitative analysis computer programs do not offer much by way of conceptual advances upon manual methods, and that "analytic procedures which appear rooted in standardized, often mechanistic procedures are no substitute for genuinely 'grounded' engagement with the data throughout the whole of the research process".

Once I had coded the data, I constructed related sets of concepts by clustering all the relevant codes from each transcript. A major organising feature of the coding was the use of two overarching categories, life world and system. I then theorised about the nature of

the relationships between the concepts and produced a provisional theoretical model which related to the core concept in each subcategory. Ongoing theoretical memos recorded the evolving theoretical results. Further, throughout the whole research process, I was continuously reading the technical and non-technical literature. This allowed me to use extant data to develop and extend my findings and also contributed relevant extant theory, which was modified as the analysis progressed.

3.4 Organisation of the Study

Layder maintains that Adaptive Theory particularly lends itself to problems which seek to elaborate the linkages between agency and system. He further contends that though system and life world are inextricably linked, they are not fused. Rather, each affects the other independently, though simultaneously. However, in order to present the data, he acknowledges that it may be necessary at times to examine them separately as a heuristic device. An important aim of my research has been to bring to light the life world of jobless families. Equally, I have been concerned to describe the standing conditions as they affect these families and additionally, I attempt to explain the impact of systemic features on the families. Accordingly, the following two chapters, which are contextual in nature, may be thought of as representing systemic features such as social structures and discourses which affect jobless families. The next two chapters are concerned with representing the life world of the jobless families I studied. Finally, Chapter eight specifically examines and theorises those linkages between the system and life world, which draws together both those aspects in the manner advocated by Layder.

3.5 Methodological Limitations

I have discussed above the difficulties encountered in obtaining a sample and the measures I took to ensure the research was not compromised as a result. I therefore do not intend to address that issue further here. Rather, I would like to address the question of standards of evaluation for this kind of research, which combines elements from both subjectivist and objectivist paradigms. This combination is open to the accusation that it represents an attempt to unite elements which are epistemologically and ontologically incommensurable. However, as Pickel (2004, p. 169) notes, paradigms can “be used to immunise one’s own approach from fundamental critique” rather than attempting to deal with the questions raised by philosophers of social science. Layder does attempt to deal with these questions and devotes extensive attention to showing that a moderate and open approach to mixed methodology is viable. Whilst this does not “immunise” Adaptive Theory itself from critique, the point here is that all theoretical formulations are equally open to this kind of challenge.

However, Layder is uncommunicative on how such research should be evaluated. But in light of the significant reliance on Grounded Theory techniques, it could be suggested that the evaluative criteria applicable to Grounded Theory can also be applied to Adaptive Theory. Strauss and Corbin (1990, p. 31) suggest these are “significance, theory-observation compatibility, generalisability, reproducibility, precision, rigor and verification”. It can be seen at once that several of these criteria are unrealistic: studies such as mine cannot be replicated because of the dynamic nature of the social world, thereby compromising reliability and validity. Further, we have already noted that such work is not generalisable. Layder himself denies his methodology is positivist, thereby

implicitly negating these standards of evaluation. However, if we discount this line of reasoning, we are left with all but generalisability and reproducibility, that is, the criteria of significance (in the qualitative sense), theory-observation compatibility, precision, rigour and verification. Whether this is sufficient or indeed relevant is open to debate. In this chapter I have tried to show that my study does meet these remaining standards.

3.6 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to provide an overview of Layder's methodological prescriptions, with particular attention paid to strategies for analysis. The rationale for these formulations was seen to be the development of new theories which explore the links between systemic factors and the life world of social actors. My own research methods and the problems I encountered were then described, after which the limitations of this study were considered, namely, what evaluative standards to apply. My theoretical formulations are, in that sense, tentative and open to revision in the light of further research. However the study is valuable in that it provides a window into a life world that is rarely rendered transparent, and attempts, in Layder's (1998, p. 149) terms, to elaborate "the manner in which the everyday worlds and social activities...are reciprocally linked with systemic factors".

Chapter Four: The Context and its Discourses

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a contextual overview against which the research can be foregrounded, progressing from a “broad brush” perspective to a closer examination of relevant issues. It begins with a sketch of the contours of contemporary Western society and the discourses which help to shape it in order to situate the current study within this wider context. In this preliminary section, the main focus will be the prevailing economic and social arrangements which make a major contribution to what Giddens (1994) calls a post-traditional order. Then within this wider milieu an introduction to the smaller-scope issues relevant to the study will be presented. This involves a discussion of the changing nature of the family and work, as well as an overview of regionalism in Australia, since this study specifically examines jobless families in regional New South Wales. As outlined in the introductory chapter, some of the literature in these areas is surveyed here and some in the chapters dealing with the findings of the study according to its relevance and utility. In order to facilitate the comparison between joblessness in the Great Depression and the present undertaken in Chapter nine, brief historical overviews are incorporated into the accounts of work and the family.

The provision of a contextual chapter can be considered as an integral part of the research process for anyone using Layder's (1998) methodological approach, not only for its utility in providing a background, but also because it can illuminate data analysis and point to new directions for the researcher. It is also necessary in terms of the commitment to Layder's (1997) theory of domains, which was seen in Chapter two to theorise the social world in terms of system and life world. As I pointed out in the preceding chapter, whilst the life world can be accessed through the lived experience of participants, it can be argued that a consideration of contextual factors amounts to an examination of the systemic elements of social life.

In attempting to provide a context for the study, it is necessary to say something about what is meant by context and discourses. Since Foucault conceptually reworked it, the term discourse has come to be used in a generic way to indicate what is said and what is known about a particular area of life. Chapter two considered in detail the specific use that Foucault made of the term in relation to an overall theoretical perspective but in a general sense, it means that particular events, behaviour or phenomena are interpreted in terms of whatever the discourse has to say about it. For example, certain behaviour designated by the word madness is now understood as an illness rather than, say, as psychic powers because it has been absorbed into medical discourse. As noted in Chapter two, Layder (1997) has pointed out that discourses are not static entities; they change as conditions change and are drawn upon by actors to suit unrelated purposes, in the process possibly becoming altered themselves, somewhat akin to a dialectical process. For instance,

neoliberal discourse interprets what is called globalisation in an entirely different way to Marxist discourse; however dissatisfaction with some of the features of a globalised society has produced the new discourse of communitarianism, which draws something from both neoliberalism and Marxism, as will be presently discussed. It might be objected that this example is providing instances of political ideologies rather than discourse; but in the very general sense that the term is used in this chapter, discourse covers all bodies of knowledge, which are themselves never value-free. Layder (1997) has argued for the inclusion of ideologies as a particular type of discourse which is concerned with forms of power. In accordance with this precept, various political ideologies are discussed as discourses below. However, my purpose in this chapter is not to argue for the privileging or validity of one particular discourse over others; rather, it is to examine the influence and effects of discourses that have been understood to be predominant during the period under consideration. My own ideological commitments have been made plain in the previous chapters, that is, a predilection for critique which interrogates forms of domination and subjection.

The use of the term context in conjunction with discourses in the chapter title implies that discourses occur within a context. In this case, context is to be understood as events and conditions which obtain within the timeframe covered by the study. Events and conditions however are always subject to interpretation, often by competing discourses and therefore can never be entirely separated from their construal by actors. Hence context cannot be disassociated from discourse and so both are presented here together.

4.2 Discourses on the Nature of Contemporary Society

4.2.1 Capitalism Now

The term globalisation, though often contested, is now in common usage to describe the well-documented changes which have occurred in capitalist economies over the last two to three decades. Indeed it is generally believed that capitalism has assumed ascendancy over nearly all other social and economic arrangements worldwide, its defining property being market relations (Kennedy 1998).

This study accepts as a general proposition the Marxist expose of capitalism as the expropriation of surplus from the labour of the worker, which the huge disparities in wealth worldwide make clear. However, whilst still broadly relevant, some changes should be noted. Firstly, analysis must be extended to the developing countries, where the bulk of manufacturing now occurs. Secondly, there is now a diffusion of ownership through the issue of shares that is not limited exclusively to the bourgeoisie. Dahrendorf's (1959, p. 47 in Grabb 1997, p. 117) argument that a consideration of authority relations must be added to ownership of the means of production in addressing the nature of class relations within contemporary capitalism is persuasive, particularly in the light of the revelations of the activities of CEOs of failed companies such as One.Tel and HIH Insurance. Though one may counter this by pointing to the lack of power of the ordinary shareholder to influence corporate decisions, it is important to remember that the *relationship* to the means of production is still of central significance in capitalist society.

Thirdly - and perhaps the most distinctive transformation that has taken place since Marx's analysis - is a question of scale: the compression of space and time made possible by the "Information Revolution" has led, not only to greater cultural interchange, new forms of interaction and the rearrangement of labour markets, but also to the almost unrestricted movement of capital across national boundaries such that local economies are vulnerable to the international vagaries of these capital flows (Harvey 1990). In addition to contributing to increasing cultural homogenisation - some would say cultural imperialism - is the unabated global polarisation of wealth. Those most badly affected live mainly in developing countries, but there is recognition that some groups resident in wealthy nations do not share in the affluence (Kennedy 1998). One can arguably include welfare recipients and the working poor amongst this group alongside the more obvious candidates such as indigenous peoples. A final alteration that should be noted is the changed status of women in Western democracies, though it is easy to argue that this has not demonstrably altered the relations of production in any meaningful way.

4.2.2 Reflexive Modernisation vs Post-modernism

Giddens (1994) has argued that such social changes which have been experienced globally since the latter half of the twentieth century can be understood as "reflexive modernisation", that is the "disembedding" of a traditional, fixed social order, resulting in greater freedom of choice for individuals to refashion self identity. That this should be so is both a function of capitalist economies' need to create new markets through encroaching commodification of previously non-market areas of life, as well as the outcome of the liberal ideological commitment to freedom and individuality. Giddens believes that an

increasing focus on individual identity is dissolving understandings of the world based on rigid social structures and replacing them with an emphasis on modes of subjectivity (though I would argue this does not mean the structures themselves have dissolved). Thus, for example, it is the quality of the relationship and the degree of intimacy, rather than the institution of marriage itself which may determine the length of a conjugal relationship in post-traditional society; evidence of this may be found by referring to the self-help and self-actualisation categories that abound in popular literature as Giddens (1994, 1991) has pointed out. Another example of the increasing fluidity and diversity of contemporary social life is a conviction that individuals are now free to redefine the concept of family (Giddens 1992) - and, as shall be seen, they do so with alacrity. However, the agency which the new array of choices confers upon individuals carries with it also a degree of responsibility and uncertainty about the future which can be experienced as burdensome rather than liberating (Hartman 2002, pp. 3-4).

Beck (1992) has depicted such changes as a new social order or risk society. In the past, human intervention (particularly in regard to the natural environment) often was executed without a consideration of the possible impacts. In the last century, however, scientific and technological discoveries have been able to determine the negative results of past actions, of which environmental pollution is a prime example. Thus, as individuals and as social groupings, we now have the capacity to apprehend to at least some degree the risks inherent in technological innovation. The debate over the cloning of humans and animals provides an excellent example. Scientific knowledge makes such things possible but does not address the possible environmental consequences or the ethical, social and legal

implications arising from the deployment of such technologies. Therefore, there is no such thing as intervention without risk, and risk assessment and management has become an integral part of government and business apparatus. This mindset extends to the formulation and execution of welfare policy as Wearing (2000) has shown. The preoccupation with risk and the awareness that actions may have unintended consequence serves to further Giddens' (1994) argument that late modernity is characterised by reflexivity.

Beck (1998) has argued further that at the end of the second millennium, individuals increasingly are opting out of traditional politics and turning to other methods of securing social change and a sense of connectedness in an increasingly individualised society. His contention is that the absence of external threat to European states since the collapse of communism in the USSR has decreased the sense of nationalism which once facilitated the willing subordination of individuals to their states. However Beck's arguments do not address the growing number of adherents of the far right in Western nations, for whom nationalism is an article of faith, or divided societies, where ethnic, cultural, religious or linguistic allegiance is tied to national identity. Moreover, the events of September 11 (2001) appear to have provoked a resurgence of nationalism at least in the US. However the main point that both Beck and Giddens are concerned to demonstrate is that even though our lives are in many respects much safer than in the past, all possible actions are now tinged with uncertainty, and decisions must be made in the (reflexive) knowledge that not only can we not necessarily control outcomes, but also that we cannot "opt out" of risks

that have become global - the nuclear industry for example. This holds true for social as well as environmental issues.

In their analysis of reflexive modernisation, Beck and Giddens are responding to arguments about the nature of post-modernity, which is said to reflect a rupture between society and history in the second half of the twentieth century. The old certainties of the Enlightenment which characterised modernity, such as belief in reason and a sanguine view of society as evolving along a continuum towards “a better world” (as evidenced by the use of the words “advances” and “progress” to describe certain developments or scientific findings) were displaced by philosophical and artistic challenges which emphasised fragmentation - of language, time, the human subject and society itself. Such challenges arose in the first place as a response to what can be interpreted as the self-induced catastrophes of modernity, including two world wars.

Thus the grand narratives of history and society are rejected by many not only as simplistic and reductionist but as positively dangerous. A paradox arises however as a consequence of this line of argument, since it amounts to a metanarrative itself. Furthermore, the post-modernist emphasis on the subjectivity of meaning leads to a kind of moral relativism. In an environment where meaning becomes undecidable, style - or aesthetic sensibility - comes to replace content. The conviction that “no-one can grasp what is going on in society as a whole” (to quote Lyotard (1984) in Sarup 1993, p. 145) creates a climate which may be used to justify a rejection of moral and political judgements. Artist Robert Rauschenberg’s (Fleming 1980, p. 453) comment that he merely wished to live in the

world, not reform it, provides a perfect illustration of where post-modernism may lead. Sarup (1993, p. 155) has commented that post-modernists “take away the dynamic upon which liberal social thought has traditionally relied” offering “no theoretical reason to move in one social direction rather than another”. It is worth noting in passing that aesthetic sensibilities no doubt would languish in settings characterised by poverty and destitution - a point which reinforces Jameson’s (1993) argument that not only is post-modernism the cultural manifestation of what he terms late capitalism, but is actually part of the dynamic which helps to fuel it. Hence the playful veneer that typifies post-modernist artistic endeavour masks a refusal to deal with philosophical and ethical questions of which it cannot make any sense, such as those inherited from the Enlightenment.

Giddens and Beck are among those who wish to retain a place for Enlightenment values in any analysis of recent social changes. Thus Giddens (1991) argues that, rather than inhabiting a post-modern world, the essential features of modernity still obtain but the observed changes signal a break with traditionalisation, something which capitalism itself encourages through disembedding mechanisms and institutional reflexivity. Giddens (1994) further argues that this post-traditional society coexists simultaneously with significant vestiges of a more traditional order which is defended fiercely by conservative groups and that fundamentalist movements of all kinds are a response to the uncertainties unleashed by post-traditional society. Certainly this argument has some force after the September 11 terrorist attack on the United States.

4.2.3 Neoliberal Discourse and the State

Globalisation is contemporaneous with other phenomena which have contributed to a changing social order. Among those relevant to our discussion are the predominance of neoliberal rationalities which have prevailed for at least the last twenty years in English-speaking democracies even where the government is nominally from the left of the political spectrum, as a consideration of the activities of the Hawke and Keating governments will attest (Stillwell 2000, pp. 40-53; Beeson and Firth 1998). The term rationality is used here in the Foucauldian sense, and denotes specific manifestations of governmentality, as outlined in Chapter two. Although Beeson and Firth (1998, p. 217) argue that political rationalities do not represent “the realisations of political or economic philosophies (but) are more accurately viewed as amalgams” of a variety of things such as common sense, response to public opinion and political expedience, there are nevertheless distinct ideological features which distinguish one political rationality from another.

In the case of neoliberalism the expression covers a range of political and social values. Winter (2000) argues these are arbitrary signifiers since they do not all apply equally within different states. However several core values generally are attributed to most varieties of liberalism. These include the privileging of the individual over the collectivity and the concomitant division of life into public and private realms; freedom understood as choice; and, in the case of the recent English-speaking neoliberal states, moral conservatism combined with a *laissez-faire* economy (Hartman, Jennings and Gilmour 2000). Historically, liberalism was based upon a moderately optimistic view of human nature, and while in their purest ideological form neoliberal ideals encompass tolerance (Sally 2001), in practice neoliberalism takes a more Hobbesian perspective, emphasising the less generous

aspects of humanity which must be regulated by law. Neoliberalism thus represents a blend of conservatism and libertarianism.

Much of the recent literature dealing with neoliberalism treats it as largely synonymous with globalisation and chiefly concentrates on developing countries. In this literature, neoliberalism is understood as an economic doctrine which gives supremacy to free markets as a method of handling not only the economic affairs of nations, but also as a political ideology which can be applied to all manner of governance issues. The primary guiding principle in terms of the role of the state is the classic liberalist tenet that it should be limited to “securing private property rights and contracts” (Albo 2002, p. 46). As a political ideology, neoliberalism is understood widely to have had its genesis in the 1970s and early 1980s when Thatcher and Raegan came to power in the UK and the US, instituting policies based on the monetarist ideas of Friedman and Hayek’s (1986) critique of the interventionist state (Hartman 2005).

Consequently, adherence to a neoliberal agenda has entailed a systematic programme of deregulation and privatisation in line with the two main planks in its ideology - that of minimalist government and the philosophy of individual responsibility. Such an ethic legitimises changes like labour market deregulation which has a deleterious impact on individuals (and families), while simultaneously diminishing government and corporate responsibility. Applied to welfare policy, it can justify spending less and adopting a punitive approach to the unemployed. Both Tomlinson (2001a) and R. Watts (2000) point to the hypocrisy of simultaneously condemning the regulation of the market whilst at the

same time prescribing more regulation for those (income support recipients) dependent upon the state.

Through policy changes which reflect the main elements of their ideology, neoliberal governments have contributed to the transformation of welfare states. Building on Foucault's conception of governmentality, Dean (1999) argues that neoliberalism can be distinguished from neoconservatism not so much by its core values as by the *means* it employs to achieve its ends, namely the facilitation of an alignment between individuals' desires and the aims of government (Beeson and Firth 1998, p. 218). This occurs in two ways. Firstly, reforms are instituted which require the practice of the desired virtues, for example the creation of quasi-markets such as the Job Network which effectively transforms the unemployed into consumers of employment services. Secondly, the deployment of pastoral power "assists" individuals to construct subjectivities which will be in alignment with social norms, for example, through the provision of self-esteem training, job search skills and health promotion. But there is something of a conflation of neoliberal practices with communitarian discourse around welfare reform as shall be seen below.

4.2.4 The Communitarian Discourse

The neoliberal focus on privatisation and deregulation has helped to contribute to a state of perpetual uncertainty for individuals which earlier was characterised as a feature of a post-traditional society. It is easy to understand the new craving for belonging that this state of affairs engenders. The terms social capital, mutualism and Third Way often appear in association with communitarianism, and while each has a different emphasis, all share the

conviction that answers to current social and political dilemmas can be resolved by an appeal to a romanticised notion of what constitutes community. The development of the discourse of communitarianism is attributed in the first instance to Etzioni who published *The Active Society* in 1968. Etzioni has spearheaded the social movement of communitarianism in the US, whilst Coleman (1990, 1988) has developed the concept of social capital. Also in the US, Putnam (2000, 1993) has taken up the theme of civil society which has been influential in the UK, with one source depicting him as “Tony Blair’s guru” (Hill 2001). At the same time, Giddens (1998) has articulated a political programme called the Third Way, an attempt to forge a compromise between capitalism and socialism by seizing upon the concept of community as the key to reconciling mutually contradictory ideals (Hartman, Jennings and Gilmour 2000). Although Giddens does not identify his programme as a communitarian one, his recourse to the notion of community does impart such a flavour.

Before embarking upon a critique, it is acknowledged that communitarianism has not until recently generally been understood as a coherent political ideology in its own right, and that it is not a unitary body of ideas. However, Frazer and Lacey (1993) point out there are a number of positive themes which underpin the various strands of communitarian thought, such as the emphasis on the centrality of the community and communal values, rather than the individual and individual rights, and a recognition that individuals are embodied, embedded subjects. These ideas recognise the value of civil society and help to reinforce the notion of citizen participation as valuable and necessary. The communitarianism which

have identified as connected to the work of Etzioni, Coleman, Putnam and Giddens is the variety which I specifically wish to examine.

Communitarianism is a response to the extension of market relations by neoliberal rationalities to all types of social relations and institutions. Social democrat and neoliberal alike are perceived as being unable to provide solutions to social, economic and environmental problems because of their monolithic, centralised nature although as Gwythyr (2000) notes, communitarianism as it is practiced in liberal states has more in common with the right than the left, particularly the insistence on small government and moral conservatism. It is therefore ironic that it has been adopted by labour parties in the UK and Australia. An example of how this new paradigm is conceptualised is expressed by Mark Latham, an enthusiastic advocate of the Third Way who believes that:

public policy needs to build a virtuous circle in public life - striking the right balance between the market economy, the role of the state and the strength of civil society...for some time this balance has been moving against society...market forces have thrived and the size of government has grown (and) networks of community and the *trust* between people have been lost (Latham 2000, emphasis added).

Such rhetoric is coloured with irreproachable sentiments which are not supported in practice: in his 2004 election platform, Latham expressly supported mutual obligation and devised a family tax and payment policy which “rewarded” working families on middle incomes to a far greater degree than citizens reliant on income support, particularly low-income sole parents and singles (Latham, Crean and Swan 2004). This would not appear to build trust between those excluded from the labour market and policy makers.

Giddens (1994) also has dealt with the issue of trust in relation to his argument on the detraditionalisation of society. According to him, as the tradition and ritual which formerly bound communities together is increasingly displaced by the new emphasis on individual lifestyle, trust is destroyed. The erosion of trust - or of faith that one is able to “go on” - leads to a decrease in ontological security and ensuing anxiety which individuals may seek to alleviate by resorting to compulsive, repetitive behaviour as manifested in the proliferation of addictions. This behaviour, Giddens (1994) argues, is a kind of “frozen trust” indicative of the anxiety-provoking freedom which the disembedding of tradition, and with it, communal solidarity entails. The Third Way is Giddens’ proffered solution to his diagnosis of the ills of post-traditional society.

This form of communitarianism thus appeals to a kind of “social glue” which binds individuals in a community together, providing a sense of security and belonging as well as tangible solutions to problems through devolution and grassroots action. However, while the focus is on restoring trust, this is unproven empirically; the social glue may turn out to be nothing more than a variant of the much older “shame game”, where compliance to community norms was enforced by public humiliation or social exclusion for infringements. In fact, Etzioni advocates this as a “surprisingly effective and low-cost way of deterring criminals and expressing the moral order of a community” (cited in Gwyther 2000). Gwyther (2000) cites several cases where this has already occurred. Seen in this light, communitarianism potentially has a much uglier face than the one usually presented in Third Way manifestos, something acknowledged by Putnam, (2000, p. 22 in Wilkinson & Bittman 2002, pp. 3-4) who has conceded social capital’s “dark side”. Wilkinson and

Bittman (2002) maintain that Putnam recognises the possibilities for exploitation of social capital for malevolent purposes, but theorises that this was far more likely to occur in “vertical” social networks where unequal power relations exist rather than in “horizontally” organised networks where power relations are democratic. In light of this distinction, it is interesting to note that Putnam has advocated the return of national service for youth in the UK “as a way of helping build up the capacity of the voluntary sector to address social problems” (Hill 2001), paradoxically resorting to what Hartman, Jennings and Gilmour (2000) have called “compulsory voluntarism”, or, to use Putnam’s own terms, a vertical social network - characterised by unequal power relations.

An apposite illustration of these less desirable possibilities of communitarianism is the concept of mutual obligation espoused by enthusiasts. Although the Howard government has pursued a neoliberal agenda in its economic policy, it implicitly has adopted Third Way discourses in its handling of welfare policy as Hartman, Jennings and Gilmour (2000) have shown. As currently applied by the Howard government, mutual obligation elaborates the responsibilities of the unemployed and other jobless welfare recipients and renders them accountable for their activities in a way that is not reciprocated by the other so-called stakeholders in society, government and business.

This approach led to greater stringency in enforcing new rules, resulting in more than 250,000 welfare recipients having payments reduced or cancelled during the 12 months to November 2000 (Stavropoulos 2000), more than double the figure for 1997-98 (Head 2000) and a saving for the government of \$17.4 million a week (Stavropoulos 2000). In total for

the 2001/2002 period, Centrelink cut or axed a total of 835,000 payments, resulting in a saving for the government of \$102 million a fortnight (*Centrelink Annual Report 2001-2002*). Pearce, Disney and Ridout (2002) reported that between 1998 and 2001 there was a 300 per cent increase in the incidence of breaching. It has been calculated that the average penalty imposed for a first breach is in the order of approximately \$863 for a single person on Newstart which represents more than one month's income (Ziguras and Flowers 2002). The magnitude of the discrimination this entails can be imagined by drawing the comparison of an employee being fined one month's income for not coming to work for a day. The penalty for a second breach is \$1151 and for a third breach \$1476. There can be no doubt that this resulted in increased hardship for many welfare recipients. An Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS 2000a) report found that 67 per cent of relief agencies reported an increase in demand for services in the previous six months, with 33 per cent of agencies citing the government's income support policies as the reason for the increased demand. There is also some direct evidence from welfare recipients themselves that in some cases, the severity of the breaching regime was enough to render them homeless (*7:30 Report 2002; 7:30 Report 2001*). This severity drew criticism and negative publicity for the government, which subsequently "softened"⁵ its approach to breaching after the release of the *Report of the Independent Review of Breaches and Penalties in the Social Security System* (Pearce, Disney and Ridout 2002). However the most recent welfare reform measures announced in the 2005 Federal Budget suggest a return to a more punitive approach, as evidence in the emphasis on "compliance measures" in the budget documents (*Australian Government Budget 2005-06*). In addition, evidence has emerged that in rural

⁵ This was reported by participants in my study who worked for Centrelink.

communities, often much-vaunted for their social cohesion, resentment against welfare recipients from the vulnerable “working poor” has filtered down to children in schools who frequently marginalise and stigmatise children from families on income support (Kenway 2002). Hence the application of communitarian ideas can obtain effects which are the reverse of their stated aims.

A further issue which is relevant to the communitarian discourse is to be found in the changes that are being wrought in the voluntary sector. Communitarians articulate rising concern about the decline in social capital, marked by the fact that “modern society is no longer constituted by a dense network of association, clubs, fraternities, chapels and communal associations” (Turner 2001, p. 199) which Turner claims also constitutes an erosion of citizenship. Hence the focus has turned to the voluntary sector as an index of social capital. But it has been noted repeatedly (Turner 2001; Clegg 2000; de Carvalho 1997) that, because many voluntary and non-profit organisations are heavily dependent upon state funding which is granted within tight guidelines and strict accountability, these organisations are becoming nothing more than the executors of the will of the state. Thus communitarian support for the concept of voluntarism and its potential benefits is not reflected in current practice.

4.2.5 Socialist Discourse?

The dominant discourses which have contributed to the shaping of contemporary globalised society have been outlined above. Notable perhaps by its absence is the socialist voice, which largely has been drowned out by the victorious trumpeting of those louder ones,

which proclaim the death of the socialist left. Nevertheless it exists, as Foucault might say, at the margins, in its most extreme form. It should also be remembered that moderate versions in the shape of democratic socialist governments still obtain in some European states, for example Germany. These more moderate versions traditionally have insisted on a mixed economy in order to soften the inequalities fostered by capitalist economies and often are combined with welfare policies underwritten by social insurance measures (Goodin et. al 1999).

There has also been a renewed interest in socialism and anarchism in recent years by those who feel alienated by the worst excesses of globalisation. Websites such as the World Socialist Website⁶ and publications such as the Communist Party of Australia's *Guardian* are accessible via the internet. Leftist journals such as *Monthly Review* in Canada, *Dissent* in America, *New Left Review* in the UK, *New Internationalist* and *Arena* in Australia all indicate the voice has not been completely silenced. At the grassroots level, there has also been the spate of protests at meetings of organisations such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) which has attracted publicity, though these constitute a fragmented and shifting alliance of various groups, some of which are not overtly socialist. Indeed, friction between anarchists and socialists is ongoing in the anti-globalisation movement (Trocchi 2004). Although the protests abated somewhat after the September 11 terrorist attacks in the US, they appear to be resuming; for example the protest at the 2003 Miami FTAA (Free Trade Area of the Americas) meeting which was

⁶ www.wsws.org

brutally repressed, and the protests at the 2004 Republican National Convention in New York.

In the publications cited above, socialist discourse currently devotes itself to a diagnosis and expose of the ills of capitalism and largely adheres to standard Marxist interpretations. The critique of socialism that declared it dead with the failure of communist regimes has enjoyed public support in wealthy capitalist countries and leftist interpretations have failed to make any inroads into popular consciousness. That may be because in the public mind, socialism is associated with the USSR and the widely reported atrocities inflicted upon the populace in its name and that continue in many Russian Republics. Once again, an attractive theory failed to translate into a beneficent reality, although it must be noted that market reforms appear to have led to an even worse immiseration of the Russian people.

One can perhaps better gauge the influence of socialist discourse by the reforms which have been won in wealthy countries over the last century. The very existence of the welfare state which attempts to protect the vulnerable is a tribute to the power of socialist ideas, though the left is in disagreement with itself over whether the welfare state represents a device which reinforces capitalism or an example of the power of the proletariat. Similarly, trade unions have been instrumental in fighting for and winning concessions for working people which were unimaginable in Marx's time. Even today, when socialism appears to have been silenced in wealthy nations, the welfare state shows no signs of withering, in spite of predictions to that effect (Hartman 2005). It is notable that socialism is strongest when exploitation becomes unendurable, as for example during the Great Depression, and

neoliberal governments are cognisant of this fact. In Australia at the time of writing, the seemingly inexorable decline in trade union membership has in fact started to reverse, probably as a consequence of the increasing casualisation of the labour market, discussed in section 4.4.3 below.

4.2.6 Summing Up the Contesting Visions

It will be seen that both the post-traditional and the post-modern accounts of the nature of contemporary society de-emphasise the importance of social structures such as class. In the case of post-traditional interpretations it is asserted that such structures are dissolving as the individualisation of society proceeds apace. However, there is no real attempt to support these assertions with empirical analysis. Even the most cursory investigation of this assumption will show that large-scale structures are still powerful social forces, as a consideration of gender and race shows. The concept of class is also making a reappearance; Turner (2001, p. 195) theorises that the class structure in Britain now consists of an underclass, a disappearing middle and the working poor (though he neglects to mention an elite class). Even smaller-scale structures like the family are arguably not dissolving: they may well be taking on new forms and the meanings attached to them may be changing, as in the specific case of the family (discussed below), but this does not constitute their dissolution. Therefore, whilst useful in helping to delineate the changes occurring in society today, this writer accepts post-traditional and post-modern conceptions of the world with the qualification that they leave untouched the question of the influence of structural issues, which have been ignored at the expense of the focus on subjectivity. Recognition of systemic issues is apparent in social democrat and socialist-inspired

discourses, but these are voices which do not resonate as loudly in the majority of English-speaking countries.

We have seen that neoliberals and communitarians have shown disquiet about this apparent loss of tradition and/or structure, even though neoliberal rationalities may help to hasten detraditionalising processes by promoting individualism and the extension of market relations through deregulation, privatisation and economic laissez-faire policies. At the same time, neoliberals are embracing communitarian concepts and solutions to perceived social ills such as “welfare dependency”.

The above has provided a brief outline of selected conceptualisations of the overarching discourses and social trends which have manifested in the latter half of the twentieth century. It is now necessary to consider the changes which have occurred in specific areas which have direct relevance to this study.

4.3 The Family: Discourses and Context

Study of the family as an institution is perhaps more difficult than the study of work, or politics, or religion, simply because it is so taken for granted and apparently ‘natural’ that more may be made of the internal reality construction process (between husband and wife, parents and children as they construct and validate a shared reality through everyday inter-action) than of the socio-political processes at work in a particular place and time which restrict the *language* sustaining that reality” (Edgar 1995, p. 3) (emphasis in original).

This quotation signals the socially constructed nature of normative concepts of the family, indicating that any attempted definition of the term is likely to be problematic. Hence, although acknowledging the plurality of definitions of the family and family formations

both historically and in contemporary society, this study proposes to accept the definition provided by Edgar (1995, p. 10) as “the organisation of parent-child relations” so as to further the practical purposes of the research. This definition is however extended by an acceptance of Gilding’s (1991, p. 5) notion of the family as “patterns of obligation and dependence” and Cass’s (1994, p. 21) definition of “generations of caring”, in order to sustain an inquiry which acknowledges a multiplicity of family forms, including childless couples. It should be argued that the commonly accepted image of the family as consisting of parent-child relations has played such an integral role in the development of industrialised capitalist societies that it must necessarily be the main focus of the study. Furthermore, social policies and welfare provisions are geared towards this interpretation of the family. However as shall be seen, the participants in this study did not always accept definitions of the family which related only to parent-child relations, prompting a revision of what constitutes family, which will be dealt with in Chapter six.

This points to the importance of affective bonds, which are popularly thought to be the mortar which cements families together, now that kinship roles and family structures are negotiable, and their significance should not be minimised. Rather it should be asked how these affective bonds are constituted and maintained and what discourses/practices and modes of power influence their formation, maintenance and possible dissolution within families. Layder (1997) contends that relationships embody expression and exchange of affect, which formulates the basis of such relationships. Such a view comes close to Giddens’ (1992) conceptualisation of intimacy and its role in contemporary relationships and so is of direct relevance to the study of family relationships. The role of emotion has,

until recently, been traditionally ignored in sociological theory but is of crucial significance to this study. Researchers such as Hochschild (1997, 1983) have highlighted the central role emotion plays in social relationships. Moreover, it is not merely emotion which needs to be considered in attempting to understand what a family is. As Connell (1987, p. 121) so eloquently expresses it,

the interior of the family is a scene of multilayered relationships folded over on each other like geological strata. In no other institution are relationships so extended in time, so intensive in contact, so dense in their interweaving of economics, emotion, power and resistance.

This study attempts to take account of this interweaving and multilayeredness in considering the impact of joblessness upon families.

4.3.1 The Family in Modernity

The family has not always been so narrowly understood as the definition adopted above implies. Scholars of the history of the family have encountered the problem of whether the family should be regarded in terms of the household or as kin, since these are not mutually inclusive (van Krieken et. al 2000, p. 327). Similarly, there have been varying interpretations of family structure and arguments regarding the nature of the so-called extended family and its predominance in pre-industrial societies (Laslett 1984, 1983, 1972; Zimmerman and Frampton 1966). Although it is necessary to take note of these debates, our main concern is with contemporary families. There are several perspectives on the role of the family in capitalist society.

The family as the primary agent of socialisation is at the heart of functionalist and politically conservative discourse. As Parsons (1955) famously argued, the continuing

devolution of functions such as the provision of health and education services to the state allowed the modern (nuclear) family to specialise in this role. According to Parsons (1955, pp. 9-10), “the family is more specialized than before, but not in any general sense less important, because society is dependent more exclusively on it for the performance of certain of its vital functions”.

A second role according to this view is the stabilisation of adult personalities (van Krieken et. al 2000, p. 328). The family is said to provide emotional and material support to withstand the pressures of the external world. It can readily be seen that this perspective contributes to the creation of the notion of a public and private realm, where the family is cast as a “haven in a heartless world” and provides a normative notion of the family which casts it as an ideal type. As Hutson and Jenkins (1989, p. 19) remark, “that, at any rate, is the model, the way things are supposed to be: the ‘happy family’ is the ‘normal family’”.

However from a critical viewpoint, the modern family has been a key structure in maintaining and reproducing the capitalist state both culturally and materially, through biological reproduction and socialisation, which reproduces class and gender relations, and through its contribution to the material base of production and consumption (Summers 1994, p. 210). This view flows from the early work of the Frankfurt School and the even earlier seminal writing of Engels (1978). If one accepts Layder’s (1997, p. 163) definition of ideology as “the manner in which power relations are facilitated and stabilized through forms of rationalization and mystification”, it becomes clear that an ideology which propounds the ideas of the family as “natural” allows it to be relegated to the private sphere,

thus enabling escape from scrutiny (Bryson 1995; Watson 1995; Dallos and McLaughlin 1993; Pateman 1988; Yeatman 1986; Watson 1985). This view is consistent with a conservative or functionalist orientation which does not seek to question existing social arrangements. During (1993) notes that neoliberals give particular emphasis to the “traditional” family because it represents an enduring stability with which to counterbalance the never-ending uncertainty of a market-based society which they actively promote, a view echoed by Castells (1997). Indeed Zaretsky (1982) has argued that the state, in particular through welfare policy, has helped to preserve the nuclear family.

It should also be noted that the emphasis on individualism, which is a key tenet of neoliberalism, means that when the traditional family unit disintegrates it can be seen as the result, not of the logic of late capitalism (to borrow Jameson’s (1993) phrase), but rather as the failure of the individual - for not being a nurturing mother or a successful provider, for example.

Feminists, on the other hand, challenge the patriarchal base of the family by “recast(ing) the notions of public and private to allow them to more adequately encompass women’s position and to expose the myth of the natural, non-political and ubiquitous nuclear family” (Bryson 1995, p. 52). In attributing the source of women’s oppression to the patriarchal family (Gilding 1991, p. 48), early radical feminists drew attention to the sexual division of labour, the relations of social production, the socially constructed nature of sexuality and the power relations which shape families by means of the patriarchal ideology embedded in legal, economic and political structures (Flax 1982). Hartmann (1987, p. 117) pointed out

that, far from being a homogeneous, harmonious unit, the family was in fact the site of conflictual relations, since “mutual dependence by no means precludes the possibility of coercion”. This alerts us to the existence of conflict within families. An extreme view of the family as hostile to its members was expressed by Leach (1968) and later Laing and Esterson (1970), who pathologised family relationships from a psychodynamic perspective.

In the nineteenth century, then, the family emerged as the economic unit in society, the site of the reproduction of the work force necessary to maintain capitalist/industrial expansion (Engels 1978, p. 757) and the major means of socialisation. However it can be argued that the transition to a post-traditional society in the last four decades has produced changes in the *form* of the family which reflect the new globalised order even while it (the family) reinforces traditional norms.

4.3.2 Contemporary Families: the Demise of the Nuclear Family?

The word family is likely to evoke an image of the nuclear family in the minds of most people today despite the fact that they may themselves have grown up in other family structures, such as a sole parent or “blended” family. The rise in divorce rates creates the impression that families today are more unstable than in the past but this ignores the fact that separation and desertion was common before divorce became more easily accessible. There are a number of ways of calculating the divorce rate, but in 2000 the number of divorces equaled roughly half the number of marriages (ABS 2002b). Disney and McPherson (1999, p. 2) assert that “sole parents were just as common a century ago as they are now”, citing evidence that the average length of marriages is in fact slightly longer today than a century ago. Literary evidence, for example the novels of Charles Dickens, shows that step-parents were also a common feature of Victorian life, though usually through the death of a spouse.

The image of the nuclear family as the ubiquitous family form may actually only reflect the structure which was prevalent in the first half of the twentieth century. Much concern has been expressed over the apparent breakdown of this structure, leading to analyses of the reasons for its demise. One factor which has been seen as instrumental is the collapse of the “traditional” male breadwinner model. This model was sanctioned legislatively in Australia in 1907 in the famous Harvester case which specified a minimum wage payable to men which would allow the modest support of a family. As Rickard (1984, pp. 176-177 in Strachan 2000) has pointed out, it was not that the presiding judge, Justice Higgins, “disapproved of women working, but he assumed that within the marriage relationship it was desirable, from both male and female points of view, for the man to work and the woman to care for home and children”. The breadwinner model began to disintegrate in the 1970s after women won the right to equal pay for equal work in 1967, reflecting the feminist challenges to patriarchy noted above. Carnoy (1999, p. 2) believes that women “rejected bearing sole responsibility for social cohesion” firstly by appropriating the control of fertility which led to smaller families, then by “rejecting the homemaker identity”, entering the workforce in large numbers. He argues these changes left the traditional family unit vulnerable to the restructuring of the workplace that accompanies globalisation.

It is true that sweeping changes in the labour market have also played a major part in the disintegration of the male breadwinner model, with consequences for contemporary families. As discussed below, labour markets have undergone a vast transformation, resulting in a drive for flexibility, which has reduced the job security of workers. Many more workers are located in peripheral or precarious employment, providing another compelling reason for married women to work in paid employment. Disney and McPherson (1999) remind us that financial difficulties account for approximately one-third of relationship difficulties.

Attitudes towards the nature of the division of labour in marriages have changed over this period as well. The Australian Family Life Course Study conducted in 1996 revealed that approximately two-thirds of both men and women felt that both partners in a marriage “should contribute to the household income” (Glezer and Wolcott 1997, p.1). But the increased participation of women with dependent children in the workforce has

not necessarily altered the discourse of the “natural” family, its relations or practices. Women are still regarded as “naturally” caring - a position also defended by some feminists such as Sherwin (1992) and Gordon (1991) (even though Sherwin warns of the dangers of assuming the reality of gender difference). Women are still performing a majority of domestic tasks whether they work outside the home or not (Baxter 2002; Dempsey 1999, pp. 7-15) and the family is still popularly seen as the refuge from a cruel world, even though domestic violence statistics belie this image (Bittman and Pixley 1997; Watson 1995, pp. 159-61; Gilding 1991, pp. 125-132). Thus the practices which occur in many families hinge on a notion of it which is often still structured around nineteenth century discourses of gender. Bittman and Pixley (1997) are in accord with this view, stressing the disparity between widely expressed values of gender equity and the actuality of a largely unchanged inegalitarian domestic division of labour (Wolcott 1997, p. 49).

Hakim (2000) has recently challenged the feminist view of marriage and the family outlined above. She believes that the “two revolutions” in wealthy countries – women acquiring control over reproduction, and the equal opportunities revolution, has produced three distinct orders of women, who may be either totally home-centred, adaptive (choosing to balance work and family) or work-centred. Hakim (2000) proceeds on the basis that in wealthy nations, women have a real choice as to which group they wish to belong, and theorises that marriage actually delivers many benefits to women, as evidenced by the choices they make. This view is supported by research which highlights the difficulties encountered by sole mothers (Walter 2002).

Hakim argues that it is men who have less real choice, often being constrained by the breadwinner role, though at the same time conceding that their orientations largely are work-centred, making them a far more homogenous group than women. Hakim claims that feminist theory is not supported by empirical evidence. Instead, she contends that the three

groups of women she identifies are in conflict with one another in terms of their needs and wishes (Hakim 2000, p. 190), and thus have less power to achieve their aims. This also means that a “one size fits all” approach to social policy making is likely to have mixed results.

However a study by Dempsey (2002) contradicts some of Hakim’s (2000) assumptions. His study set out to test the views of structuralist and post-structuralist feminists regarding inequality within marriage, finding that his research sample corroborates their theory: “four out of five (women) gave reasons for saying men got the best deal from marriage that were tantamount to saying men used the physical, emotional and psychological labour of wives without adequate reciprocity” (Dempsey 2002, p. 104).

The social changes described above - in divorce laws, lower birthrates, increased job insecurity and a rise in the number of women with children in the labour market - have combined to produce a trend towards later marriage, delayed childbearing, higher numbers of sole parents and more blended families. However there is another factor that also is attributed to the changes in family structure today. This is the increasing culture of individualisation discussed above in connection with reflexive modernisation. McDonald (1996) points to the replacement of adherence to norms with a “culture of autonomy”, believing the family is actually bifurcating into two forms, a dysfunctional and a functional, “negotiating” family. At face value, this appears to be too simple an interpretation of what is actually happening to contemporary families and runs the risk of stigmatising families whose problems may be the most visible. Ian Winter (2000 [online]) has also pointed to the detraditionalising effect of individualisation, which means that trust has to be earned and relationships negotiated. In commenting on the diversity of contemporary household arrangements, he contends that “over time any one individual is likely to find their biography littered with an array of living arrangements”. That this is true does not seem to have diminished the power of the mythology of the nuclear family.

4.4 Work and Employment: Discourses and Context

Though work and employment often are regarded as synonymous, it is clear that the term employment means paid work. The 1997 ABS *Time Use Survey* defines work as “employment *and* ‘committed time’ which includes domestic work, childcare, other care, voluntary work and purchasing goods and services” (cited in Keebaugh 1999, p. 9) (emphasis not in original). The Marxist notion of work as productive activity is somewhat in accord with this definition. Employment, therefore, is committed time which is remunerated, but a relationship of subordination is implied by the notion in that the employee performs work upon the direction of the employer, though this may not be invariably true.

4.4.1 Historical Overview

Historically, from the Industrial Revolution, work for the working class was dichotomised as described above - into paid or unpaid activity which contributed to survival. A rigid, patriarchal class system legitimised and effectively confined most individuals to specific roles, that of the working class being to provide the labour necessary for the emergent industrialisation. Watson’s (1995, p. 158) view is that in the middle classes, work was reserved exclusively for men whilst women were “not left at home as domestic drudges as were working-class women, but as ‘useless’ domestic decorations or bearers of male property-inheritors”. Whereas the family residence had previously been the site of both production and consumption, industrial production now relocated working to factories and mills, precipitating the growth of metropolises and hence a new urban lifestyle, characterised as one of squalid drudgery by social commentators of the time.

Unemployment accordingly spelled disaster in the absence of state support (Thompson 1980, pp. 216-232, 345-384). However, it should also be noted that a major alternative to factory-based employment during the nineteenth century- particularly for working class women - was domestic service. The increased demand was undoubtedly a response to the growing wealth of the beneficiaries of colonial and industrial expansion. Even in the early part of the nineteenth century, domestic service was the second largest occupational category after agricultural workers (Thompson 1980, p. 231). In Australia domestic service peaked around 1860, with approximately 40 private domestic servants per 1000, after which the rate declined slowly. In 1933, in a total population of 17 million, there were 129,000 domestics Higman (2002, pp. 20-21). Females consistently had higher rates of employment as domestic servants between 1850 and 2000 in Australia, representing around 40 per cent of the total female workforce in the period between 1930 and 1940 compared with less than 1 per cent of men in the same period (Higman 2002, p. 29).

4.4.2 Discourses on Work

Work has been seen as central both to individual identity and to society itself. Marx identified productive activity as constitutive of material reality which should be a creative endeavour expressive of one's humanity. However capitalism alienates men and women from the results of their labour, typically making work drudgery. Following on in the critical tradition, Hearn (1987, p. 9) contends that for Habermas, productive activity is a "self-generative process which, by contributing to the development of the forces of production, extends man's (sic) mastery over nature". However control over nature does not in itself guarantee emancipation. Habermas argues that symbolic interaction, as a

separate order, must engage with work in a dialectic if this goal is to be realised. Work therefore becomes purposive-rational action located with the context of communicative practices and as such has the potential to be alienative rather than creative. Layder, (1997, p. 99) however, believes that Habermas has overemphasised “the influence of instrumental motive in the area of work”.

An alternative discourse on work is that of the “work ethic”, famously theorised by Weber (1930) to be a response to Calvinistic notions of salvation. This discourse constructs work as a virtue as well as emphasising the qualities of thrift and austerity. Thompson (1980) also has commented extensively on the work ethic and its relationship to Methodism in England in the early nineteenth century, questioning how the same religion could be adopted both by the exploited working class and its masters. Clearly the notion of the work ethic as the way to salvation benefited the employers and was invaluable in inculcating the work discipline necessary to service the engines of production. It is still apparent in conservative and neoliberal discussions of work which tend to equate a reluctance to engage in labour with moral failing rather than a rational response to the alienation of meaningless drudgery. As a powerful discourse in the history of capitalism it contributes to the construction of identity revolving around work and employment. Merit is accrued by the number of hours worked.

Recent studies indicate that in Australia the number of hours worked per week is increasing in the core labour market. Whereas the standard working week is set at 38 hours, ABS (2002c) data shows the average number of hours worked by males in full-time employment

was 42.1 in 2000-2001. In an analysis of collective bargaining and flexibility in Australia, Wailes and Lansbury (2000) demonstrate that over the last decade there has been a “considerable growth in the level of unpaid overtime”. This is corroborated by Buchanan et al. (2001) whose research shows that 3.3 million Australians of the employed workforce work overtime. In fact by 2002, 43.6 per cent of full time workers worked more than 45 hours per week and more than half of these are wage and salary earners. Both Wailes and Lansbury (2000) and Buchanan et al (2001) have noted that these trends have become more marked since the introduction of workplace bargaining agreements. However, whether this is because of increased job insecurity or because individuals increasingly are embracing the work ethic remains unclear. Nonetheless, the work ethic has undoubtedly been co-opted by the Federal Liberal government in its discourse of welfare reform, as Abbott’s (2001) and Vanstone’s (in *Guardian* 2002) public remarks demonstrate.

When work is constructed as employment and employment is denied, the consequences may be adverse for individual identity as numerous studies have shown. Men who construct their gendered identities on the basis of their ability to hold employment (and thus incorporate elements of self-identity through culturally determined roles, such as “breadwinner” for a family) may suffer a loss of meaning in the wake of unemployment which may impact upon their marriages, or they may redefine themselves in a domestic role (*Economist* 1996, p. 25; Arndt 1994, p. 25).

The situation is less clear for women because, as Wallulis (1998) among others argues, identity and meaning continually are being reformulated in post-traditional society, leading

to individualised biographies rather than the standardised lives of former times. The role of women and the meanings they attach to employment cannot be generalised, particularly at present. However it could be asserted with reasonable certainty that the loss of employment for men and women alike would usually have some distressing features. These consequences have been the subject of innumerable studies and it is not proposed to canvass them here. It is, however, important to acknowledge a dimension of human suffering to which these studies point.

Thus post-traditional society has provoked anxiety because of the fear of an end to work itself (Rifkin 1995). Work in the sense of employment has had a profound impact on the institution of the family, helping to structure its temporal rhythms, division of labour and economic arrangements, and shape its interaction processes as it attempted to accommodate the industrial employment model. As nations have moved into a post-industrial phase of capitalism and the nature of employment changes, changes have also been noted in family structures. The interweaving of work and family life is considered by some authors (Wallulis 1998) to reflect the changes documented above; neither work nor the family are now considered permanent. It is also instructive to note that for some individuals, work now fulfils functions formerly held to be the preserve of the family, such as the maintenance of nurturing and affective relationships, while the family can become merely a workplace (Hochschild 1997).

This interpretation of the linkages between employment and family again point to the changes which are occurring in a post-traditional order. It is especially relevant to this

study because it implies there will be a qualitative difference between the lived experiences of families who are in secure employment and those who are either jobless or in precarious employment. This point brings the discussion to a consideration of recent changes to the labour market.

4.4.3 The Changing Labour Market

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, unemployment levels increased during cyclical depressions, producing absolute poverty for those affected until the introduction of the comprehensive welfare state. In Australia until at least the 1960s, employment was generally understood as full-time work. However since the changes which have occurred (partly as a result of the revolution in information technology) in the last three decades, a dual labour market has evolved, as elsewhere in the world, with a core of full-time workers in organisations and a periphery of sub-contractors, part-time workers and casuals (Castells 1996, pp. 264-279), leading to chronic job insecurity and bouts of unemployment for many workers. Beck (1998, p. 56) believes that

We have long since moved from redistributing work to redistributing unemployment - this, too, disguised in the new forms of temporary, unskilled, part-time work. This holds true even for those so-called employment paradises, the United States and Great Britain, where growing numbers subsist in the twilight zone between work and no work, often making do with starvation wages.

During this period the presence of structural unemployment made its appearance with unemployment rates above 6 per cent persisting in Australia since the 1980s, meaning that a proportion of the unemployed will experience it as a long-term state. In 1999, the official unemployment rate descended to a nine-year low of 6.7 per cent (Henderson 1999), however by 2005 it has descended to around 5 per cent. In 2001 various events - most

notably the terrorist attack on the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington - but also economic recession in the US, Europe and Japan and the spate of corporate failures in Australia (HIH, One-Tel, Ansett) - contributed to further uncertainty and global economic instability as stock markets took a downward turn. It is unclear what effect the ongoing developments in Iraq and the US-led “war on terrorism” will have on the world economy and hence the rate of unemployment.

It should be noted at this point that the official unemployment rate in Australia is arrived at by calculating the number of people registered for Newstart who had no paid work during a two-week period . Hence, if a person had one hour of paid work in the period, they do not figure in the unemployment rate. Further, all work-for-the-dole participants are excluded from the calculation as well. The ABS (2002a) has noted that redefining the way duration of unemployment is calculated has had the effect of lowering the unemployment rate. In addition, evidence is emerging that there are many persons receiving income support types other than Newstart because unemployment is intractable, particularly in regional economies (Argyrous and Neale 2000; Gregory 1999). A discussion of hidden unemployment or joblessness is elaborated upon in Chapter six – where it is contended that the true rate of joblessness in regional New South Wales is far higher than the official figures would have us believe.

At the same time that full-time employment has been shrinking due to changes associated with technological innovation and globalisation, neoliberal governments have been eager to deregulate the labour market in line with the belief that wealth creation involves the freeing

up of capital for new investments, and the ideological commitment to individual freedom to pursue one's best interests at the expense of communal solidarity. This policy has also contributed to the attenuation of trade union power, attrition of full-time work and the creation of a dual labour market.

Casual work increased by 60 per cent between 1988 and 1998 and at least 27 per cent of the labour force is now comprised of casual employees, most of them part-time (ABS 1999). Precarious employment has entered the lexicon of social scientists, defined by Burgess and Campbell (1998) as any non-standard employment, or employment which is irregular, casual or temporary, is low paying and excludes employees from internal input in the employing organisation. In Australia between 1982 and 1994, 85 per cent of employment growth comprised non-standard employment and this rate was only marginally bettered in the period 1994-1997, when 80 per cent of employment growth was contributed by non-standard jobs. The true rate of precarious work is difficult to estimate when one considers these official figures do not take into account self-employment, sub-contracting, outwork, home working and the informal labour market. It is clear that many peripheral workers must rely on top-ups from income support payments to meet regular disbursements, for example rent and utilities.

Understandings of the work/unemployment divide thus become nebulous and contingent in such a context and government initiatives in welfare policy such as Work-for-the-Dole and other mutual obligation requirements accentuate the tenuousness of definitions of unemployment as Gilmour, Hartman and Jennings (2000) have noted. In fact it could be

argued that one of the unintended consequences of the development of welfare policy is that in an environment of downsizing and mass redundancies it contributes to the persistence of precarious employment by acting as a financial buttress to those who would normally require full time wages. The following chapter will develop this argument further, being devoted to a consideration of welfare policy in order to provide the necessary contextualisation for the research.

4.5 Regionalism and Regionality

It is necessary to say something about the regional context within which this study is located. Regions are distinctly different entities from capital cities – though, as we shall see, it is important to avoid sweeping generalisations – and as such call for some examination. In particular, they have experienced different effects than major cities as a result of late capitalism and economic globalisation. At this point, I need to clarify my usage of the term ‘region’.

According to Gleeson and Carmichael (2001, p. 6) there is “no universally valid definition of region”, although they report Stillwell’s (1992 in Gleeson and Carmichael, p. 6) suggestion of a region as “a contiguous set of places which have something in common”. Gleeson and Carmichael (2001) distinguish between subnational, inter-state, sub-state, rural, regional urban, regional metropolitan, metropolitan and sub-metropolitan regions as defined according to a geographic scale. However, for many, regions are either simply those places outside capital cities (eg McManus and Pritchard 2000), or they accept the regions defined by governing bodies. For example, Local Government Areas (LGAs) are

often used by researchers, because they provide convenient parcels of statistical information. This study has made use of this information (see Chapter 8), but has divided one LGA into two separate areas because although there are broad similarities, there are also some distinct cultural differences between the two areas.

There are a number of discourses surrounding regionality, or the essence of regional life. Lockie (2000) surveys a number of these. In the period between 1890-1920 he identifies the emergence of “countrymindedness” as a discourse which signifies “the bush” as synonymous with agriculture. Countrymindedness connotes virtuous, hardworking people who engage in an unrelenting struggle to tame a hostile environment in order to provide sustenance for city dwellers. Country folk were portrayed as the backbone of the nation. Lockie notes that this discourse was predominantly founded upon a masculinist image of the white farmer and points to cultural products as diverse as Banjo Patterson’s *The Man from Snowy River* to Drizabone advertisements as evidence of this discursive construction. McManus and Pritchard (2000, p. 9) also indicate how films such as *Crocodile Dundee*, *Wake in Fright* and *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert* have reinforced masculine mythologies and the idea of a hostile environment. More recently the notion of regional crisis has been a key discourse. Lockie (2000, p. 26) shows how the Landcare movement has contributed to this discourse by means of renegotiating the way landscape is seen. Rather than having to tame it, it becomes a fragile ecosystem which its stewards must help to regenerate.

Such constructions encourage the idea that regional Australia is essentially homogeneous, but scholars in the field all stress that regions are characterised by great diversity and

unique configurations of social, economic and geographic circumstances (Gleeson and Carmichael 2001; Gray and Lawrence 2001; Lloyd, Harding and Hellwig 2001; Argent and Rolley 2000). Nevertheless, some commonalities are in evidence. The “rural crisis” discourse I identified earlier was partly consequent upon the decline of small country towns, which suffered as services and infrastructure were withdrawn when populations were deemed insufficient to justify them in the 1980s and 1990s. Railways, health services and financial services were among those withdrawn with devastating results. This was the impact of global economic restructuring. As McManus and Pritchard (2000, p.2) state, “study after study has shown that, in general, rural and regional Australia has been most adversely affected” by these changed circumstances.

Regional employment was of course one of the casualties. In 2004, 80 per cent of new jobs were in metropolitan areas, even though 40 per cent of the unemployed lived outside capital cities (Australian Democrats 2004). This has directly fed into regional disadvantage. Lloyd, Harding and Hellwig (2001), whilst noting that regional Australia is not uniformly disadvantaged nevertheless conclude that the income of city populations was around 30 per cent higher than in the regions in 1996. Of particular interest to this study is the finding that New South Wales regional towns experienced a decrease in real income in this period as compared to strong growth in metropolitan household income (Lloyd, Harding and Hellwig 2001, p. 20).

Gray and Lawrence (2001) attribute this decline to a colonial legacy, which left rural and regional Australia dependent upon the metropolis. In addition, fuel costs, poor services,

low employment, labour market deregulation and National Competition Policy are all contributing factors. Some authors have pointed to the fact that some analyses are class and race blind. Jamrozik and Nocella (1998) go so far as to suggest that the spatial determination of disadvantage actually constitutes a class division. We also know that more indigenous persons live in rural and remote communities than in metropolitan areas. They suffer two and a half times more unemployment than white people in addition to well-documented inequalities in regard to health and education (Jonas 2001).

Gleeson and Carmichael (2001, p. 10) conclude that regional disadvantage demonstrates a “highly variegated pattern of regional well-being” with pockets of entrenched disadvantage. They identify variables that affect this variegation as telecommunications, the restructure of social and financial services, reforms to public institutions, demographic change and deindustrialisation – again the consequence of the uneven processes of globalisation.

On this basis, they recommend a policy response which takes regional variability into account. They argue there is a need for a targeted, multiscaled, integrated policy approach which will not exacerbate inter-regional inequalities. In their view, current policy is largely a matter of “cheering from the sidelines” because it relies upon encouraging self-help, entrepreneurialism and local leadership without adequate resourcing (Gleeson and Carmichael 2001, p. 20). Although successive federal budgets have recognised many of these issues, Garlick (2001, pp. 68-71) asserts the response from the conservative Howard government has been inconsistent, top-down policy which consists of a wide range of unconnected initiatives. Similarly, Beer (2000) has suggested that the “inappropriate

implementation of underfunded policy initiatives” (McManus and Pritchard 2000, p. 12) has led to ineffective outcomes, while Gray and Lawrence (2001) believe neoliberalism has rendered regional people vulnerable because it destabilises collective action. They argue for regional autonomy soundly resourced by central government.

Rainnie and Grant (2005) have surveyed a new policy approach emanating from Europe and North America known as New Regionalism. It is painted as a paradigm shift in regional development that focuses upon physical place and holistic, integrated planning whilst acknowledging the transition to a knowledge economy. Rainnie and Grant point out that the New Regionalism rhetoric of empowerment and self activity fits neatly with neoliberalism and like Third Way discourses, although it promises inclusivity and democracy, it is too vague to address issues of race, gender and class.

They also question whether it can be easily transplanted to the Australian setting, which is notably different than regions in the northern hemisphere. They conclude that there is a fundamental conflict between the economic aims and those targeted at tackling social exclusion in New Regionalism. This means that this approach will not succeed in imposing consensus “when regions themselves are contradictory and conflictual social constructs” (Rainnie and Grant 2005, p. 18). Overall, then, it would seem that there is a broad consensus by regional policy analysts that current approaches are under-resourced, insufficient to address the issues facing regions and unlikely to change in the short term.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the various political and ideological discourses which have helped to shape the post-traditional society of the wealthy western nations, in particular countries whose heritage is predominantly Anglo-Saxon. In addition, it has provided a broad overview of the various discourses surrounding work and the family, briefly tracing their trajectory over time. It has been shown that life in these countries has become increasingly individualised and uncertain, as people attempt to negotiate relationships and identity in the absence of traditional steering mechanisms. The following chapter separately examines the role of the state as it is articulated in welfare policy in Australia since federation as a final component of the context in which jobless families live.

Chapter Five: Welfare Policy: Discourses and Context

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is intended to provide the policy-specific context within which my study is situated. Policy literature is often somewhat divorced from the life world of those it so profoundly affects.⁷ Conversely, accounts of the lived experience of income support recipients need to take into consideration the system elements and standing conditions in which they negotiate meaning and conduct. Further, to understand the present, some outline of antecedents must be provided.

To this end, this chapter has three aims: firstly, to provide a brief overview of the history and general features of welfare states, in particular those designated as embodying *liberal welfare regimes* by Epsing-Andersen (1990) and more specifically in Australia. Concurrently with the first aim, the chapter provides an analysis of the major features and underlying rationalities of welfare policy settings. This includes specific consideration of the articulation between the Third Way and neoliberalism as it is expressed in current policies such as mutual obligation and discourses such as the anti-dependency rhetoric. As such, I extend the debate commenced in the preceding chapter regarding the uses of certain ideological prescriptions, but some of the literature I use here is more specifically oriented to a social policy approach. The third aim is to

⁷ For example Williams (1999) notes a consideration of agency is often neglected in the policy literature.

provide a “microview” of how policy is played out in material reality, for example in the level and type of welfare payments and the structure of the Job Network system. This will lead into a discussion of how such arrangements position income support recipients in relation to the community.

This chapter proceeds, therefore, from a generalised and historicised view of the policy context to a more specific one, progressively narrowing the focus. In this way, I hope to equip the reader with a more nuanced comprehension of the world as it is inhabited by jobless families. It does not, however, pretend to do justice to social welfare policy in its totality – such a scope is not possible here, nor is it particularly necessary. Therefore it is not an exhaustive account of the welfare state, and current policies deemed not to be of key relevance to my thesis topic have for the large part been excluded from the following account.

5.2 The Rise of the Welfare State

Modern welfare states in England and Australia grew out of a direct response to the catastrophic consequences of the Great Depression and the subsequent world war.⁸ It is conventional wisdom that Keynes (1997) argued that the negative aspects of capitalism must be modified by direct state intervention to support those individuals who were unable to compete in the labour market and thus consume goods and services, since capitalist economies rely to a significant degree upon mass consumption in order to thrive. In his seminal work *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*,

⁸ Though Kerbo (2003) argues that – at least in America – the introduction of social security was more a result of popular agitation than the actual misery or its scale.

the emphasis on scarcity and distribution, which characterised neo-classical economics, was replaced by a focus on employment and demand (Harris 2001, p. 12). However other factors also contributed to the development of welfare states. This chapter does not attempt to examine these historical antecedents in any depth, but brief mention should be made of the Bretton Woods Agreement and the respective papers for Britain and Australia which subsequently set the course of welfare policy, that is, the Beveridge Report of 1942 (Britain) and the 1945 *Full Employment in Australia* White Paper (Commonwealth of Australia 1945).

The Bretton Woods Agreement was signed in 1944 in order to safeguard international liquidity, one of its measures being the regulation of exchange rates, which helped to stabilise currencies and the international movement of capital. The Agreement arguably contributed to the long post-war period of economic prosperity for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries and its demise coincided with a number of other international events, such as stagflation and the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil crisis, which ushered in a new period of economic instability in the 1970s (Battin 1997). The Bretton Woods Agreement was therefore a significant factor in enabling the development of welfare states by means of its contribution to international economic stability in this period. Also influential in shaping the evolution of welfare policies in England and Australia were the papers mentioned above, both of which emphasised the responsibility of governments to their citizens to provide full employment and endorsed Keynesian methods to achieve this goal.

The resulting modern welfare state undertook as one of its key responsibilities the material security of all its citizens. According to Harris (2001, p. 13) this represented a shift from a preoccupation with the provision of relief to that of providing security. Whether or not the subsequent prosperity was a direct result of the adoption of Keynesian economics, this period did enjoy full employment, which was defined as approximately 2 per cent frictional unemployment (Battin 1997). It is worth noting, however, that the definition of full employment at this time only referred to males of workforce age, excluding married women, women with children and persons of retirement age. It was not until the oil shocks of the 1970s that significantly higher government expenditure on welfare was necessary. Turner (2001) following Marshall (1950) has argued that after World War II, the legal and political rights conferred by citizenship were augmented by the addition of social rights. Entitlement to social rights such as welfare was predicated on active citizenship through involvement in work, war and reproduction. This may have implications when involvement in work and war cease to be relevant for a certain proportion of the population, as the nexus between active citizenship and social rights becomes attenuated. This may in turn provide the justification for an erosion of certain citizenship rights, a line of argument followed by Shaver (2002, 2001) in analysing recent welfare reforms. I will return to this below.

Epsing-Andersen (1996) contends that in general, post-war welfare states helped to promote social integration and provided a bulwark against the threats posed by ideologies with totalitarian implications, such as communism. However, since the demise of Keynesian economics, the viability of welfare states has been eroded by the collapse of full employment, and the male breadwinner model, as well as the advent of

non-standard life trajectories.⁹ As such, “the contemporary welfare state addresses a past social order” (Esping-Andersen 1996, p. 9).

5.3 Types of Welfare Regimes

The main features of welfare policy are the provision of a social wage for all citizens coupled with direct financial support for those unable to provide for themselves, funded by the taxation system.¹⁰ However, it is a truism to say that this can be achieved in innumerable ways. Esping-Anderson, whose 1990 work is considered by many to be seminal in this field, has famously argued that welfare regimes may be classified according to three broad categories, liberal, corporatist and social-democratic.

According to this typology, a liberal welfare state involves means tested assistance (or social assistance), modest universal transfers and/or social insurance. Goodin et al. (1999) argue these arrangements are the logical outcome of the liberal ideology of individual responsibility and a minimalist state. Aid is granted only to those deemed to be genuinely in need, through no fault of their own (creating a distinction between the deserving and the undeserving), and is seen as a form of largesse rather than a matter of rights (the “relief mentality”). These underlying attitudes, in combination with the strict entitlements rules and meagerness of benefits, mean that receipt of welfare is usually a stigmatising experience for recipients. States commonly associated with this type of

⁹ Henman and Perry (2002) reach similar conclusions in analysing the increase in the number of income support recipients in Australia.

¹⁰ See, however, Deacon (2002) who argues that the term “welfare” is understood differently in the US than in Europe. He contends that in the US, welfare refers to “means-tested cash assistance” paid primarily to single mothers, whereas in Europe it is understood to mean a “broad range of benefits and transfers” (p. 2). Here it is used in the broadest sense.

regime include the US, Britain and Australia. Such arrangements conform to Titmuss's (1974) and Wilensky and Lebeaux's (1965) categorisation of a residual welfare state, which intervenes only when all else fails.

Corporatist states by contrast, emphasise mutualism, subsidiarity and social cohesion. Corporatism sees individuals as embedded within social units - particularly the family - which mediate the individual's wellbeing. There is a communitarian flavour, in the positive sense of that term, in that there is a concern to ensure mutual co-operation and benefit for all groups. This leads to the strategy of social insurance, or pooling of risk within social groups. According to Goodin et. al (1999) this means that the state has a twofold role: firstly to co-ordinate and underwrite these insurance schemes, and secondly, to provide "residual risk pools for those who are...attached to no other" (1999, pp. 54-55). This response, combined with the desire to stabilise and perpetuate the existing order of social relations, makes corporatist regimes consistent with a politically conservative outlook, because they have the effect of preserving status differentials. There is a strong emphasis on preserving the traditional family, reflecting the Catholic Church's legacy in continental European nations such as France, Germany, Italy and Austria, where the model is found. Therefore the emphasis in European systems is on workfare-type welfare reforms which are distinguished by "*integrating* people into a social order through participation in work" as opposed to the "anti-dependency ideology which has been part of Anglo-Saxon systems at least since the 1834 New Poor Law" (Byrne 2003, p. 198) (emphasis added).

In social-democratic regimes, the underlying social ideal is equality, and the goal is redistribution of unequal concentrations of wealth, which are the result of a capitalist system. This is done through decommodification, that is, taking certain goods or services (for example health care) out of the realm of commodity trading. Redistribution usually is achieved by the twin strategies of progressive taxation and universal benefits. Epsing-Andersen (1990) argues that this extends the welfare state to the middle class and entrenches middle class interests in preserving the system. However, full employment is an important factor in such a system's success, since there must be an adequate taxation base as well as a relatively small proportion of people who need substantial assistance. These kinds of states are prominent in Scandinavia.

The regimes described above, however, are ideal types, and commentators stress that in reality there are no pure types. Family payments are an example of this: originally the logical extension of Catholic thought on the sanctity of the patriarchal family and hence a feature of corporatism, family payments are in fact found in varying permutations in all three types of regime.¹¹

5.3.1 Liberal Welfare Regimes in Britain and the US

I have noted that according to the above typology, Britain, the US and Australia would all be categorised as "liberal". In Britain, the welfare state was comprehensively developed after World War II though the provision of health, education and housing services as well as providing guaranteed minimum incomes for those unable to

¹¹ Though not in *all* countries in a particular regime. For example, in the liberal regimes, Australia makes family payments though Perry (2000) states the US does not.

participate in the labour market (Lowe 1999). Something of a return to the Poor Law mentality occurred as a result of the ascendancy of neoliberalism in Britain. The Thatcher years were marked by a dramatic rise in unemployment, partly as a result of the reintroduction of libertarian economic policies. Programmes were cut, eligibility conditions tightened and some sections of the welfare project were privatised, for example the sale of public housing stocks to former tenants. When New Labour came to power, aspects of these trends were reversed. Following the Hawke government's policy initiatives in the area of welfare in Australia, British New Labour reconceptualised the anti-dependency agenda by framing it in terms of the active – as opposed to passive - subject. Hence, “work for those who can, security for those who can't” became the policy slogan, and with it, a new emphasis upon citizen obligations, as opposed to rights. This reflects Third Way discourse, which seeks to redress what it sees as an excessive stress on individualism with an appeal to a moral order predicated upon the work ethic. In line with this policy environment, labour market programmes were extended and incentives to engage in low-paid work, such as the Working Tax Credit¹² scheme introduced. The language surrounding the new policy agenda was now couched in terms of social exclusion, an expression which Martin (2004, p. 86) claims acknowledges the multidimensional nature of poverty whilst possibly avoiding pejorative connotations of moral inferiority.¹³

The US, in contrast to Britain, has been sometimes characterised as an “incomplete and

¹² A separate payment specifically for families with dependent children, Working Families Tax Credit, was replaced in 2003 with Child Tax Credit (Walker and Wiseman 2003).

¹³ Though Rose (2000 p. 1406) disagrees, believing that exclusion codes a way of thinking that merely describes, and fails to grasp the political and economic processes that generate social fragmentation.

reluctant” welfare state (Chambre 2003, p. 468). Perry (2000, p. 43) notes there has never been a general guarantee of poverty protection in the US. Nevertheless it features a combination of social insurance with publicly funded social assistance. President Roosevelt was initially responsible for the introduction of a range of programmes to assist the unemployed, many of which were scaled back before full employment was achieved. Nevertheless, these programmes formed the rump of the later welfare arrangements. The Social Security Act, passed in 1935, established a contributory scheme as well as a non-contributory scheme for the so-called deserving poor. These were considered to be children, the aged, the blind and the disabled. There were a number of changes between 1935 and 1996, such as the introduction of the Food Stamp programme in the early 1970s and modifications to Aid for Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) in some states which, for the first time, allowed the benefit to be paid to families with unemployed fathers under certain conditions (Kerbo 2003).

The system remained relatively intact until 1996, when the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was passed. This reflected an ideological shift towards conservatism. Mead (1997a) was the principal exponent of the increasingly influential view that welfare payments promoted passivity and dependence in its recipients, building upon Murray’s (1984) attack on the welfare state. This dependency was to be countered by a “new paternalism” (Mead 1997b) whose policies would actively encourage the move from welfare to work by forcing individuals to take responsibility for themselves. Essentially, the federal government ceded responsibility for welfare, by providing funding to states, which were effectively able to design their

own welfare systems, with very few conditions imposed by the federal legislature. However, the fact that funding is in the form of a block grant which does not vary irrespective of variations in caseloads, and the requirements that states balance their budgets creates incentives to spend less on welfare (Cowling 2004). Temporary Aid for Needy Families (TANF) replaced AFDC (whose recipients were usually single mothers), instituting a two-year limit and a number of compulsory elements aimed at returning sole mothers to the paid workforce. This eventually resulted in a dramatic reduction in welfare rolls (Cowling 2004, p. 4; Kerbo 2003, pp. 283-286), loudly hailed by Mead (2000) as an unadulterated success in reducing welfare dependence. Whilst this may well be true, the problem of poverty in the US may now also have shifted to a new class of working poor, many of whom have experienced an intensification of misery (see Kerbo 2003, pp. 259, 286; Ehrenreich 2002). Cowling (2004) analysed the impact of PRWORA on single mothers, finding that the most highly disadvantaged women remained in poverty in spite of being in employment. UN Annual Census Bureau figures appear to support this finding. Their 2004 report found that poverty in the US had risen for the third successive year (to 2003), with 36 million people in poverty, bringing the poverty rate to approximately 12.5 per cent (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2004).

Welfare arrangements in the US have been of keen interest to policy analysts in Australia, both as a source of comparison as well as speculation on whether this is a desirable policy option. Gray and Stanton (2002), for example, compared US with Australian policies on sole parents. They found many similarities between Australia

and the US. However Australia has a more generous system which allows for a modicum of decency in terms of living standards, particularly when sole mothers engage in part-time work. By contrast in the US, although “the *number* of single-parent families below the US Federal poverty line has fallen” since the passing of the PRWORA, “the disposable income of the poorest single-parent families has fallen, indicating the level of ‘*deep poverty*’ has increased” (Gray and Stanton 2002, p. 12, emphasis added).

I have argued above that Britain, the US and Australia are all liberal welfare states. In the last two decades these states have experienced major policy shifts away from notions of social security and citizenship entitlements that characterised the post-war approach. These changes have occurred as neoliberalism became dominant. And though their discourse castigates welfare as a scourge producing economic inefficiencies and dependency in its recipients, neoliberal rationalities have in fact pursued a strategy of reshaping but not abolishing welfare regimes. This begs the question of what functions welfare serves in neoliberal states.

5.4 The Role of Welfare in Neoliberal States

In this section I argue that within neoliberal states, welfare regimes have a twofold function; to produce “docile bodies” through the discourses of individual responsibility and obligation, and to maintain the capitalist dynamic.

Harris (2001) characterises the shifts in notions about the proper role of the state in regard to welfare policy from “relief” in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century, to “security” in the post-war welfare state, and more recently to “obligation” in the last two decades:

...under mutual obligation the economy is understood as a complex set of market interactions...the role of government is to maximize national chances in international competition...The social priority is ensuring that the unemployed are active participants who repay their debts to society and governments; moral-behavioural concerns, with their focus on personal attributes, come increasingly to the fore (Harris 2001, p. 22).

In fact, the new welfare rationality of obligation bears some similarities to the old one of relief. For example, recipients have to prove their eligibility and deservingness (through various means testing and the filling in of fortnightly forms to declare any income or earnings) and reciprocate in return for their payment. And Bessant (2000) has noted that the mandatory aspects of programmes such as Work for the Dole effectively strip some individuals of certain citizenship rights by acting as a form of civil conscription. These new arrangements recall those in place during the Great Depression. The discourse of entitlement and citizenship rights is thus giving way to one of obligation, since two of the routes to citizenship Turner (2001) described - participation in work and warfare - are now no longer possible for many individuals. Shaver (2002; 2001) has developed a convincing argument along these lines, showing how the state now plays a supervisory and disciplinary role in respect of income support recipients, whereas social rights were once seen as partially constitutive of citizenship.

In his later work on governmentality, Foucault (in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982) pointed to the way in which the pastoral activities of government (such as health promotion) operated upon individuals so that they would work upon and monitor themselves – for example eating the right diet and gaining the requisite amount of exercise in order to keep healthy – to produce “docile bodies”. For Foucault this represented a departure from older methods of disciplining populations. Pastoral power is diffused throughout the social body through a multitude of institutions such as philanthropic organisations, the medical establishment, the police and so on, but they all come under state control (Smart 1985, pp. 131-2). In the case of neoliberal welfare rationalities, the new welfare arrangements, in combination with the discourse of anti-welfarism, operate to legitimise an increased level of control over income support recipients’ lives whilst simultaneously ensuring that expectations regarding citizen entitlements will be dampened.¹⁴

There have been attempts to build alternative frameworks which will provide an ethical basis for the provision of state welfare, for example Doyal and Gough’s *Theory of Human Need* (1991) and Dean’s (2004a, 2004b) human rights approach. Dean (2004a) argues that Third Way ideology is preoccupied with dependency, which is seen as a failure to be independent. This obscures the fact that we are all *interdependent*, and that in the current environment caring (for those who are dependent) at the individual level is either devalued or invisible (and largely gendered). Dean (2004b, p. 207) argues that social rights need to be incorporated into the discourse of human rights in order to

¹⁴ Piven and Cloward (1971) argued that welfare is an instrument of social control in 1971 before the New Right’s ascendancy had become hegemonic. Recipients are also stigmatised in the media, eg. see Vanstone’s (2002) statements about clamping down on “dole bludgers” and “welfare cheats”.

“foster a solidaristic, rather than a contractarian, understanding of human rights, an understanding that connects personal dependency with shared responsibility through a commitment to human welfare”.

A related approach is the application of a feminist ethic of care. Porter (1999) is amongst those who argue that an ethic of care must be integrated with one of justice in order to achieve an ethical framework which will allow both care givers and receivers to flourish. Four elements are proposed as comprising an ethic of “just care” - attentiveness, responsibility, competence and responsiveness (Tronto 1993 in Porter 1999, p. 18) Ellis (2004, p. 44) has used this framework to interrogate British welfare policy, finding that:

an overarching emphasis on the obligation to engage in paid work obscures the extent to which citizenship rights may be reciprocated in other ways, such as care giving or providing insights into the experience of managing age and impairment which most of us face at some point in our lives. An appreciation that we act in response to our responsibilities towards others within the context of given relationships rather than in response to ascribed obligations highlights the injustice of making caregivers' rights to support conditional upon individualistic obligations to continue caring.

She argues that a political ethic of care should support universal yet differentiated rights so as to value all citizens equally, but in a way that takes account of difference – for example, disability.

Frameworks such as these would be compatible with Tomlinson's (2001a, 2001b) calls for a universal wage (Basic Income), which would help to erase social distances by recognizing social contributions other than economic participation as valid, as well as alleviating poverty. However these suggestions are unlikely to receive proper

consideration in the current policy climate in Australia, a conclusion also reached by Ellis (2004) in relation to British welfare policy.

The discourse of obligation is concurrent with ongoing calls for the dismantling of the welfare state from the libertarian right (for example, Ashford 1993). However, this is somewhat misleading. Writers such as Offe (1984) and Gough (2000) have noted that welfare states are in fact an integral part of a late capitalist economy. Offe (1984, p. 153) remarked that “the embarrassing secret of the welfare state is that...its abolition would be plainly disruptive”. Research by many welfare state theorists - of whom Pierson (1998, 1996) is probably the most prominent example - confirms that significant cutbacks to welfare have been over-emphasised, though these authors do argue that welfare states are prone to crisis tendencies. In addition, they appear to believe that neoliberals are themselves unaware – at least at an ideological level - of the uncomfortable fact of the indispensibility of welfare provision. Such critiques tend to frame the neoliberal attitude towards welfare in terms of “retrenchment”, “permanent austerity” or “attacks on welfare”. Pierson (1996) for example implies neoliberal states would like to further wind back welfare provision but are constrained by lack of electoral support.

In contradistinction to this position, I argue that the anti-welfare rhetoric is often employed purposefully as a mechanism of social control by stigmatising welfare recipients. Furthermore, this combination of discourse and practice has secured some approximation to the ideal conditions for capitalism to flourish, rather than creating the

self-paralysing tendencies earlier theorists attributed to the inherent contradiction between market forces and de-commodification via welfare. To illustrate this point I will discuss how the changing nature of employment is related to current welfare provisions.

As we saw in the previous chapter, the deregulation of the labour market has created a periphery of workers who engage in what may be called precarious employment. This form of employment constitutes a growing phenomenon, particularly in Anglophone countries. But stable employment has traditionally formed the basis around which national economies are organised. Loans, for example, cannot be taken out if one is not in regular, long-term employment; rents, mortgages and insurance premiums must be paid on a regular basis, whether a person earns a regular income or not. In the case of peripheral workers in Australia, this means they usually cannot survive on what they earn from work alone and rely on top-ups from income support payments. The stereotypical image of long-term jobless persons as passive dependents with no labour market attachments is false for many, as Henman's (2002) and Landt and Pech's (2000) work shows and this study confirms. Welfare provision has in fact allowed the peripheral labour market to flourish as Figures 5.1 and 5.2 illustrate.

Henman and Perry (2002, p. 329) are in partial agreement. They maintain that "the proportion of people receiving income support has grown because of the decline in full-time jobs, because of many couples in which neither partner has work or because of the many who are single and out of work". A similar situation appears to exist in Britain,

where 1 in 6 households receives income support (Walker and Wiseman, 2003) despite an official unemployment rate of 5 per cent in 2003. The Office for National Statistics data show that for the period July to September 2003 there were 20.91 million full-time workers compared to 7.24 million part-time workers; part-time work therefore accounts for around 25 per cent of the total work force. Further, in the same three-month period, there was a rise of 4,000 full-time workers as compared to a rise of 24,000 part-time workers, representing a sixfold increase in part-time work for that period (Office for National Statistics, 2003 [online]). In terms of all non-standard work in Britain, Booth and Francesconi (2003) have calculated that non-standard employment accounted for 60 per cent of the employed population between 1991-1997.

The maintenance of low-waged workers is another instance where neoliberal rationalities act in quite contrary ways to their own public discourse. Wage support has a long history in classic liberalism of being denounced as inimical to the healthy working of the market, because it discourages worker motivation and encourages those

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 5.1: Growth of Casual and Other Employees, August 1988-1998 (ABS 1999)

Figure removed due to copyright restrictions

Figure 5.2: Proportion of population of workforce age receiving income support (Henman 2002)

on what is effectively guaranteed minimum incomes to have children who must then also be supported by the state. As we have already seen, the US is a forceful proponent of the “perversity thesis”, which propounds that “well-intentioned policies that provide assistance to the poor by means of state intervention will inevitably harm recipients by substituting perverse incentives in place of market mechanisms that teach the poor to work hard and exercise sexual restraint” (Block and Somers 2003, p. 3).

As Block and Somers (2003) note, this is a debate that dates back to the Speenhamland magistrates’ decision of 1795 when poor workers (as opposed to non-workers like the aged and infirm) were granted assistance for the first time. I have noted that Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead are two of the foremost advocates of the dependency

argument in the US and that the passage of the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunities Reconciliation Act reflects their thinking. Yet government assistance to maintain low-waged workers has proceeded apace in the US (where according to OECD data, 24.5 per cent of workers are in low paid jobs) (Jackson 2002), the UK, and to a lesser extent in Australia. The Earned Income Tax Credit Scheme in the US and the Working Tax Credit in the UK essentially encourage low-waged workers through “making work pay” while a number of other mechanisms in Britain and Australia, such as employer subsidies and rental assistance (and in Australia Parenting Payment Partnered) are also deployed to achieve the same end. Thus, whilst we are treated to the discourse of welfare dependency, we see governments actively engaged in propping up the working poor (Hartman 2005).

The Marxist argument regarding the Speenhamland decision was that income support (or aid-in-wages) contributed to the further immiseration of the poor since it effectively drove down wages. However Block and Somers (2003) disagree; they maintain aid-in-wages provided a much-needed source of assistance without which impoverished workers, caught in the cross-currents of the Industrial Revolution, would not otherwise have survived. In respect of the contemporary debate, there is some truth in both arguments. Income support – whether to those not in the labour market, precarious workers or low-waged workers - allows those regular disbursements to be made which ward off the worst effects of poverty. It even allows a modest degree of consumer spending which would be impossible solely on precarious part-wages. As Bauman (1998) has noted, poverty makes no contribution to the health of the economy.

However, whilst the maintenance of consumption is useful, more useful still is the propping up of the flexible labour market to the direct benefit of employers' profit margins. Burgess and Campbell (1998 [electronic]) agree this is a feature of neoliberal policy regimes, noting that "the State can directly manipulate the condition of the labour market...and establish rules for benefit access that force the unemployed into low paid, temporary and often unskilled employment". In the US, Kerbo (2003, p. 286) has similarly argued that the 1996 welfare reforms, in particular the time limited provision, have driven down wages for the working poor (whose incomes must then be propped up by the state). A further possibility is that the labour of income support recipients could be used to displace "real" jobs, for example through the Work for the Dole scheme and the voluntary work undertaken by some recipients under mutual obligation requirements (Hartman 2005).

This type of welfare rationality therefore enhances the smooth operation of the capitalist dynamic; it has been observed elsewhere that there is a positive correlation between welfare provision and international economic activity in advanced nations (Perraton, 2000, p. 125). One could almost dare to assert that the price to be paid for the new globalised arrangements in wealthy countries such as Australia is welfare. Held and McGrew (2000, p. 250) agree that economic globalisation invites the reform of welfare regimes rather than their extinction. Interestingly, in the US, whose workfare schemes appear to have forced a substantial reduction in the number of those receiving welfare, the economy has not been performing well (though undoubtedly this is due to a multitude of other factors as well). The trick may be to find a balance between the minimum amount that can be paid and the maximum governance that can be imposed

on recipients (Hartman 2005). In the light of these arguments, I now turn to a more detailed consideration of Australian welfare policy.

5.5 Welfare Policy in Australia: 1900-1996

In Australia Kewley (1973) has traced the development of welfare policy over the first three-quarters of the twentieth century, noting that the very first provisions appeared at the turn of the century, with the introduction of a non-contributory age pension in New South Wales. In earlier periods, cash assistance was thought to lead to a loss of self-reliance and to be “as contagious as smallpox” (Select Committee of NSW Legislative Assembly on Old-age and Invalidity Pensions 1896 cited in Kewley 1973, p. 5) and voluntary organisations played a major role in the provision of relief. During the Great Depression this relief was overseen by the various state governments, giving rise to a maze of policies, none of which were consistent with each other.

Thus the early motions towards welfare in Australia reflected attitudes consistent with the English Poor Laws. Age and invalidity pensions introduced by various state governments in the early twentieth century had to be “earned”: the two main grounds of eligibility were the inability to work and long-term residence (signifying a contribution to the community). Pensions could be denied on grounds of character, deservingness, desertion or failure to maintain dependants (Daniels 2004a, 2004b). This configuration of characteristics shows a strong similarity to “outdoor relief”, and the strong deterrent for the able-bodied which were embedded in the earlier Poor Laws (Carnley and Hanks 1994).

A variety of factors, including State-Commonwealth wrangling, successive governments' ideological commitment to war and economic circumstances, prevented the introduction of a federal system of social security until the 1940s, when the welfare system was comprehensively reformed with the introduction of a non-contributory social assistance model funded from general taxation. This provided widows pensions (for selected groups classified as deserving), increases in maternity allowances, sickness and unemployment benefits and hospital benefits.

From the outset, employment was a central plank in the new welfare policy. The goal was full employment, which was to be achieved by wage fixing and compensation schemes, buttressed by the overarching general policies of protectionism and White Australia. Those outside the labour market like the aged and invalids were the deserving poor, to be the objects of a residual welfare system. This has been characterised (Castles 1996; Gibson (1990) in Carnley and Hanks 1994, p. 45) as a wage earners' welfare state. Carnley and Hanks (1994) argue that economic forces thus drove the development of social policy. However it is equally arguable that a cultural play of forces was also at work, most notably in those that led to the widespread acceptability of the White Australia policy.

In the early 1950s the Menzies government devised a two-tier health system consisting of subsidised health insurance and funded care for the deserving poor who were not insured. Carnley and Hanks (1994, p. 41) contend the hallmark of the Menzies-Page policies with regard to health services was "a privatised, strongly needs-oriented system

with overtones of begrudging public charity". Successive governments continued to consolidate and add piecemeal reforms through to the early 1970s. These included the introduction of a tapered means tests for pensions in 1969, more services for the aged and the introduction of further allowances for children in residential care and the disabled.

The welfare state underwent expansion in Australia in the 1970s, partly as a result of an incoming Labor government for the first time in 22 years. Whereas previously pensions were largely limited to retirement and disability, the scope of entitlement for disability pension was expanded. In addition, the Supporting Mothers' Benefit, a precursor of the Parenting Payment (Single), was introduced by the Whitlam government in 1973, reflecting a recognition of a particular type of family structure which became much more common after the liberalisation of divorce laws with the passage of the Family Law Act in 1975. Benefit rates were upgraded, the means test on the Aged Pension was abolished and a number of new entitlements created (Handicapped Child's Allowance and Double Orphan's pension). The major achievement of the Whitlam government, however, was the universal health insurance scheme, Medibank, abolished by the Fraser government and reintroduced by the Hawke administration in 1983. The Whitlam years were marked by an inclination towards universalist policies, as the example of the abolition of fees for tertiary education illustrates. The welfare system of this time therefore contained a mixture of needs-based and universal elements. The Fraser government which succeeded Whitlam pursued a more minimalist agenda. It introduced incremental changes and a tighter management and administration structure

for the delivery of welfare services. Eligibility for unemployment benefit was tightened, family allowances were boosted for children of beneficiaries and fringe benefits were extended to supporting parents and sickness beneficiaries (Carnley and Hanks 1994).

The successive Hawke administrations further intertwined economic and social policy through the mechanism of the Prices and Income Accord. This pact between the government and the trade unions ensured industrial peace in return for benefits for low income families and a social wage. Accordingly, the Family Allowance Supplement was introduced and the universal health insurance scheme now called Medicare was reinstated. However fiscal rigour was a priority, and austerity continued to be a feature of welfare policy.

During this time, there was a return to a selective, or targeted approach as opposed to the universalist tendencies of the Whitlam era. For example, an assets test on pensions was reintroduced in 1985. The focus was on improving the conditions of those most in need. Therefore there was an increase in the real value of pensions and benefits, and the disadvantages of renters, sole parents and children of the poor were addressed. At the same time, outlays were targeted for tighter control: the introduction of tax file numbers, data matching between agencies, and the tightening of assets tests were the most notable examples of this approach. In 1990 the general entitlement to payment for dependent children over 16 years was abolished, various income thresholds varied, and programmes rationalised, including the withdrawal of Sole Parent Pension when the

youngest child turned 16 (Carnley and Hanks 1994). These changes reflect the general trend I noted earlier in the US, Britain and Australia towards economic rationalism consistent with a neoliberal agenda, which returns to the notion of the self-provisioning individual, characteristic of classic economic liberalism.

Unemployment, which had been rising since the early 1970s, continued its upward trajectory. The *Cass Report* (Cass 1988) was a harbinger of these changes, introducing the concept of the Active Society. Recipients were no longer to be treated as passive dependents but encouraged to become active participants in ending their reliance on the state. In accordance with this new emphasis, income support was integrated with services like labour market programmes and child care. This coincided with the economic recession which deepened in the early years of the 1990s, producing an unemployment rate of over 11 per cent by 1992 (Carnley and Hanks 1994, p. 150). During this period, there was also a realignment of the relationship between public provision and private support, for example the insistence on the collection of child maintenance from absent fathers and deferral of payment to recipients of compensation (Carney and Hanks 1994, pp. 44-49).

5.5.1 Welfare Policy in Australia: The Last Decade

We have seen that the underlying rationale of post World War II welfare policy was the prevention of exploitation of the weakest members of an unequal society (Goodin et al. 1999). This was coupled with an attempt to redress gross inequality through full employment, following the Keynesian formula for a prosperous economy (Gleeson and

Low 1999/2000; Burgess and Campbell 1998). The apparent failure of this approach in the 1970s led to the rise of neoliberalism but did not see the abandonment of welfare regimes. Instead, welfare provision came to be governed by a new rationality, that of obligation.

Prior to the election of the first Howard Liberal government in 1996, the largest major policy programme undertaken by the Keating Labor government was *Working Nation*. This comprised a comprehensive set of initiatives designed to alleviate the steep rise in unemployment which was largely a result of the recession. This had been preceded by a package entitled *One Nation* in 1992, which had promised an extra 800,000 jobs to be achieved over the next three years largely through the delivery of labour market programmes. According to Jarvie (in Finn 1997) monitoring of outcomes from these programmes suggested that they were highly successful in increasing participants' chances of obtaining employment (Graham 1999, p. 101).

According to Graham (1999, p. 107) the aims of the *Working Nation* package were "increased international competitiveness based on private sector expansion and greater labour market flexibility....(and) managing the social fallout of long term unemployment through the expansion of labour market programs, the introduction of the training wage, and income security reforms". Graham (1999, p. 109) goes on to identify three significant features of *Working Nation* in terms of a departure from previous approaches as; personalised case management, the expansion of labour market programmes and the Job Compact, which consisted of a promise of paid employment

for a duration of six months for a highly targeted group of long term unemployed individuals.

Though the *Cass Report* (Cass 1988) had initiated the notion of the active subject, these policy prescriptions represent the first comprehensive attempt in Australia towards the provision of assistance in which the construction of “active” unemployed subjects became more than rhetoric. The growing emphasis upon activity arose out of the debate about welfare dependency to which I have already alluded, fuelled by neoliberal and communitarian discourses. According to Deacon (2002), communitarianism¹⁵ emphasises obligations because individuals are embedded in communities. It approves of a conscious moral judgmentalism and adheres to the conviction that the behaviour of those found to be morally deficient must be changed. However, it differs from conservatism in terms of *how* welfare should be used to enforce norms, believing in a voluntary moral order whose foundation is consensus, rather than the overtly coercive sanctions favoured by conservatives. In support of this stance, Rose (2000) argues that communitarians prescribe social capital as the remedy whilst neoconservatives prescribe “strong government”.

Here it is timely to review the discussion of neoliberalism and communitarianism developed in the previous chapter. Though it would appear that the key emphases of the two sets of ideas appear to conflict – that is, individualism and freedom as opposed to community and morally normative behaviour – we saw that in fact the type of

¹⁵ As it is articulated by neoliberal governments and their mentors rather than communitarian philosophers in the vein of Frazer and Lacey (1993).

communitarianism appropriated by Third Way thinkers such as Giddens has more in common with neoliberalism than may appear at first glance. In particular, they both centralise the individual as the locus of moral and economic action rather than the state. There are therefore some important synergies, which are explored below.

Smyth (2002) contends that whilst in the 1980s and 1990s the Labor Government in Australia was “doing the Third Way”, Britain and the US were “doing the New Right”. But from the late 1990s the roles were reversed, with Britain now following a Third Way policy programme whereas Australia had turned to the right. However, I would argue there is a degree of what I would call “discourse slippage” between the two sets of ideas. The logic and the language of the Third Way has become the underpinning rhetoric that justifies a neoliberal agenda, both because of its anti-statist tendencies as well as its injunctions regarding personal responsibility. Spies-Butcher (2002) makes a similar point in contending that the notion of social capital is a “Trojan horse” for neoliberalism. Paradoxically, this means that communitarianism as it is understood in the policy environment comes much closer to authoritarianism than it would like to admit, because ultimately sanctions must be applied, irrespective of whether they are devolved or centralised.

The incoming Howard government adopted this language of communitarianism whilst pursuing the neoliberal programme of deregulation and privatisation begun by the Hawke and Keating governments. This resulted in three major changes in social policy of relevance to this study. First, the abolition of the old Commonwealth Employment

Service and its replacement with the Job Network was driven by neoliberal ideas surrounding the superiority of market-like relations. Second, the *Australians Working Together* (AWT) package which reformed the welfare system was premised on the communitarian concept of mutual obligation, and third, family policy, for example the *Stronger Families and Communities* statement, reflected the element of moral conservatism I have previously argued is found both in neoliberalism and communitarianism. In each case the government either made deep funding cuts before embarking upon a new programme, or used cost as a reason for reform, effectively fusing neoliberal economic principles with Third Way social policies. I shall briefly outline these three policy changes in the following three sections.

5.5.1.1 Job Network

Prior to the introduction of the Job Network system, the old Commonwealth Employment Service (CES) had provided job referral services to all citizens irrespective of whether they were in receipt of income support since 1946 (Eardley, Abello and Macdonald 2001). Social security claimants were obliged to do two things when they made a claim for unemployment benefit; register with the Department of Social Security (DSS) and the CES. In 1998, the Howard government replaced the DSS with Centrelink. This new “one-stop shop” combines two main functions. Essentially, it is responsible for assessing, administering and policing most types of income support payments as well as acting as a gateway to job seeking. In terms of the latter, it provides some job search facilities and eligibility for labour market assistance using an assessment tool named the Jobseeker Classification Instrument (JSCI). The results of

the JSCI determine the level of case management a client can receive, and the client is then referred to a Job Network provider for job matching, job search training and case management (Webster and Harding 2000, p. 22). The JSCI has been interpreted by McDonald et al. (2003) as problematic. Using governmentality theory, they assert it is a “technology of risk” which “both assumes and imposes particular subject identities on unemployed people” (McDonald, Marston and Buckley 2003, p. 498). Effectively, then, the JSCI is one of the technologies by which “docile bodies” are constructed.

In tandem with this restructure of the DSS, the Howard government also introduced a quasimarket of job providers (usually private or non-government funded) called Job Network in the same year (1998) who compete with each other in tendering for the provision of services to job seekers. Of the 306 initially successful tenderers, around one third of the market was awarded to non-profit organisations and private providers each (DETYA 1998). The government’s rationale was that jobseekers would now be given more choice of services. Additionally, the services would be more effective because of the competitive element and would provide a range of more personalised services tailored to the individual’s needs rather than the “one size fits all” CES. The Job Network system hence reflects the neoliberal values of individualism and faith in the market mechanism. This is clearly articulated in the media release announcing the replacement of the CES where the cited benefits of the new system include more sites for employment services, enhanced service due to competition between Job Network members, more choice for job seekers and employers and individualised tailoring of

service (DETYA 1998). The new arrangements were funded at \$1.8 billion less over four years than the abolished *Working Nation* programmes (ACOSS 1999).

The new Job Network members provided three types of service: Job Matching, Job Search Assistance and Intensive Assistance. The employment services offered are at the discretion of the provider. Job Network providers also have the authority to recommend that Centrelink breach income support recipients whom they deem to be in violation of their mutual obligations. They therefore play a disciplinary role on behalf of the government, which is consistent both with the neoliberal prescription of dispersing the sites of government (Dean 1999) as well as the communitarian principle of devolution.

The introduction of what the Productivity Commission (2002) calls a purchaser-provider model aroused international interest, as it was considered to be the most radical change in the provision of human services since the inception of the modern welfare state, one commentator going so far as to dub it the commodification of unemployment by selling it to the lowest bidder (Goodman 1997 in Burgess 2003, p. 227). Evaluations have been carried out domestically by a number of bodies such as ACOSS (2000b) and the Productivity Commission (2002), independent researchers (Eardley, Abello and Macdonald 2001; Dockery and Stromback 2001) as well as the Department of Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business (www.workplace.gov.au n.d.). The OECD also reviewed the Job Network in 2001.

Eardley (2003) reports a number of findings that consistently are echoed in the reviews cited above. Firstly, the Job Network is not a genuine market because the government is both the sole purchaser of services and the sole supplier of clients (through Centrelink). Indeed, Eardley (2003, p. 7) finds that government control has increased since the inception of Job Network and that the “market” has become more concentrated: by July 2003, there were only 109 providers as compared to the initial 306. Secondly, the Job Network’s main success is to provide the same services at a much lower cost. Eardley (2003) speculates the money has been saved not only by efficiencies in the delivery of services, but also by taking advantage of the altruism of workers who might, for example, perform unpaid overtime in order to provide or maintain quality of service. In terms of employment outcomes for clients, the evaluations are all agreed that Job Network outcomes are broadly similar to those achieved by *Working Nation*.

A number of negative impacts have been found. The payment structure encourages agencies to assist those clients who are the most job-ready, a practice known as “creaming” (Considine 2003). Further, the most disadvantaged clients often received little assistance even though they were supposed to be on the Intensive Assistance programme – this is called “parking” in the literature. Considine (2003) also found higher caseloads meant clients received less individual attention, whilst Eardley (2003) found that the effect of introducing market-like relations in the not-for-profit sector has resulted in a loss of trust and co-operation between community providers, with obvious implications for social capital. I now turn to the *Australians Working Together* policy.

5.5.1.2 *Australians Working Together*

In 1999, the Howard government commissioned the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (2000a, 2000b) to review the welfare system. It should be noted that one of the main “drivers” for welfare reform was its cost (FACS 1999, p. 2.). A further justification offered was that the exponential growth in numbers of people receiving income support payments had resulted in some 60 per cent of recipients not being “required to look for work or contribute to their communities in any way” (FACS 2003a, p. 3). The resulting report outlined a set of reforms consistent with the new discourses of dependency, participation and mutual obligation. It outlined a need for change in five key areas. They were:

- individualised service delivery
- a simple and responsive income support structure
- incentives and financial assistance
- mutual obligations, and
- social partnerships (FACS 2003b).

This resulted in a new policy package, *Australians Working Together*, which according to its own publicity, offers “a balanced package of incentives, obligations and assistance to help Australians take charge of their own future, while still supporting those in greatest need” (FACS 2003a). The main elements of the package include streamlining and simplifying the payment structure, a new Language, Literacy and Numeracy Supplement, the introduction of Work for the Dole, a working credit scheme to address the disincentives of the effective marginal tax rate, compulsory annual interviews for sole parents whose youngest child is six and the extension of mutual obligation to sole parents (including the ability to breach) whose children are aged 13 to 15 years (Daniels

and Hancock 2002), the introduction of personal advisors in Centrelink and the opening of Indigenous Employment Centres (FACS 2003a). These elements have been introduced progressively over a two-year period. Additional changes were made in the 2005 *Australian Government Budget 2005-06*, which will shorten by ten years the period sole parents may claim Parenting Payment (Single) and tighten eligibility criteria for Disability Support Pension.

5.5.1.3 Family Policy

The third noted area of policy change, family policy, has a tortuous history; McDonald (2003, p. 3) notes that “the existing family support system is a mish-mash of new and amended policies bolted together over five decades (resulting in) an illogical, inefficient, complex jumble of conflicting principles or, in short, a mess”. However Whiteford, Stanton and Gray (2001, pp. 24-25) identify three types of family assistance: supplements to family income like the current Family Tax Benefit (A and B), income support for families with no other income, and assistance for various costs associated with raising children, such as child care costs.

Family policy has been relatively generous but tightly targeted towards low income families (Bradshaw, Finch and Eardley 2003), partly as a result of the attempt to fulfil the Hawke government’s pledge to “abolish child poverty by 1990” (Whiteford, Stanton and Gray 2001, p. 28). The implementation of this system was largely achieved at the expense of middle income families (McDonald 2003). However, there is some evidence that the Howard administration is beginning to reverse this trend in response to electoral pressure.

For example, it effectively reintroduced a two-tiered health system with the introduction of a 30 per cent rebate for private health insurance in 1998. In terms of targeting, this is a measure which could be accused of failure, because all private health insurance holders, even the very rich, are granted the rebate whilst those who cannot afford it are left with Medicare. Further examples are the Baby bonus (now defunct) which favoured mothers with higher incomes and the reworking of the Family Tax Benefit in the 2004 Budget.

Currently, the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FACS) is responsible for policies relating to families. Before the introduction of a new policy framework, however, the Howard government cut \$500 million from child care spending in 1997 and further reduced funding for outside school hours care in 1998 (Millward 1998). The Department (FACS) has three stated strategic aims. The first is to maximise the engagement of all Australians in society through labour market assistance, provision of income support and services for the aged, disabled and carers. Secondly, it aims to build capabilities of communities for which the *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy* provides the policy framework. The third strategic objective is to strengthen families as the fundamental unit of society through family services and financial assistance, through child, youth and student support and through the provision of child care services (FACS 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2004d). The thrust of the objective of strengthening families is underpinned by an emphasis on marriage promotion flowing from the 1998 *To Have and to Hold* report by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs (in McInnes 2003).

The structure of the Family Tax Benefit appears to act as a deterrent against women combining work and family by creating incentives for women in two-parent families not to work. Simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically, sole parents are to be returned to the workforce through the AWT package. In the 2005 Commonwealth Budget, the discriminatory treatment of sole parents further escalated. They will now be required to find work when their children reach school age. This suggests the present government condones a return to a breadwinner, nuclear family model with possible negative consequences for replacement fertility rates (Castles 2004). Parker and Patterson (2003) noted this trend in relation to the treatment of sole parents in New Zealand and Australia, whilst McInness (2003, p. 1) warns that promoting the traditional nuclear family may even contribute to the incidence of “unsatisfactory or dangerous relationships”, effectively achieving the reverse of policy objectives. Apps (2004 [online]) concludes that the \$37 billion spent on tax cuts, increased family assistance and superannuation measures in the 2004 budget is meant to reinforce normative notions of the nuclear family, by rewarding families where one parent (usually female) withdraws from the work force. She notes that although this has helped fund increased family benefits “to alleviate child poverty caused by more unequal labour market outcomes”, low and middle income earners bear a disproportionate share of the tax burden for this. This represents the redistributive mechanism noted by McDonald (2003).

The welfare system with which Australia finds itself today, therefore, is a disparate mix of universalist and targeted policy, inherited from successive political regimes. Apart

from a much weakened health insurance system (Medicare), almost all of the legacy of the Whitlam years has been dismantled or changed beyond recognition. And in the last decade, a blend of neoliberal ideology, electoral motivation and Third Way concepts have influenced the development of Australia's welfare policy. I will now examine how these arrangements manifest in the income support structure.

5.6 Current Income Support Provision and its Effects

While the Department of Family and Community Services is responsible for all policy and payments relating to families, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations jointly administers programmes and payments associated with unemployment. It oversees the quasimarket Job Network, whose members must tender competitively to provide employment services for Centrelink clients, and is responsible for mutual obligation policy.

It was shown that in comparison with the United States, Australia has a more generous system of direct payments to income support recipients, particularly since they are not time-limited as in the US. However this is changing: the most recent Commonwealth Budget (*Australian Government Budget 2005-06*) changes means that the Howard government has taken another step towards a US-style system by introducing a time limit of five years for receipt of Parenting Payment Single, after which sole parents will be treated as unemployed and placed on Newstart. Further, in terms of alleviating poverty through welfare payments, Australia (together with England and Canada) ranks second-worst after the US in a sample of twelve developed nations (Kerbo 2003, p.

261). ACOSS (2004a) have recently shown that in 1998, Australia's spending on social security ranked 13 of 16 OECD countries at 10 per cent of GDP. Only Japan, the US and Ireland spent less. Finally, Australia's payments to recipients are on average lower than most of the other 18 countries surveyed, due to the flat rate payment regime, although measures targeting families have a somewhat countervailing effect.

There are many types of payment categories, some of which have been streamlined and simplified since the McClure reports (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000a, 2000b). The main payments for people of working age are listed in Table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Schedule of Major Payment Types (constructed from data in Centrelink 2004, *A Guide to Australian Government Payments 1 July – 19 September 2004*).

	Eligibility	Basic Independent Rate/fortnight	Other Allowances/ Supplements	Mutual Obligation	Income or Assets Tested
Disability Support Payment	Persons deemed to be impaired at 20 points or more*	\$408.60	Telephone Allowance Pensioner Concession Card Pharmaceutical Allowance Rent Assistance Health Care Card	No	No for the blind. Other groups tested on both income and assets
Parenting Payment Single	Sole Parents with child under 16**	\$464.20	\$16.90 Supplement Pensioner Concession Card Rent Assistance Health Care Card	Yearly interview at Centrelink	Income and Assets Tested
Parenting Payment Partner	Partnered Parents with child under 16	Up to \$351.10 depending on partner's income	Rent Assistance May be eligible for Pharmaceutical Allowance Health Care Card	No	Income and Assets Tested
Newstart	Unemployed persons	\$389.20	Rent Assistance Health Care Card	Yes	Income and Assets Tested
Austudy	Undertaking qualifying study	Ranges from \$318.50 - \$386.90 depending on circumstances	Health Care Card (if receiving FTB Part A fortnightly)	No	Income and Assets Tested

Carer Payment	Persons providing constant care to an income support recipient or person who meets income and assets test	\$464.20	Pensioner Concession Card Pharmaceutical Allowance Rent Assistance Health Care Card (subject to circumstances)	No	Income and Assets Tested
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*Changes announced in the 2005 Federal Budget will restrict eligibility for future applicants to those assessed as incapable of 30 hours work per week (*Australian Government Budget 2005-06*).

** Changes announced in above Budget will restrict eligibility for Parenting Payment for new applicants to sole parents with children under school age.

In addition to the payments listed in Table 5.1, Family Tax Benefit Part A is an income tested payment payable to parents of dependent children and Family Tax Benefit Part B is an income tested payment available to sole parents and two parent families with one main income (Centrelink 2004). These payments are available to low income families, irrespective of the source of their income.

Whilst the main categories of payment are listed above, there are a number of other income support payments applying to other groups of people with similar payment rates. They include Sickness Benefit, a temporary payment for people who are unable to work owing to short term health problems; Widow B Pension,¹⁶ Youth Allowance, Mature Age Allowance, Special Benefit, Abstudy and Crisis Payment. The 2004 Commonwealth Budget also introduced an additional \$600 per child per year payment for families, as well as scrapping the inequitable Baby Bonus and replacing it with a \$3000 birth payment which is not assets or income tested (Centrelink 2004).

¹⁶ Widow B Pension and the Mature Age Allowance are in the process of being phased out.

5.6.1 A Hierarchy of Benefit

An examination of the payment system shows that a kind of “hierarchy of benefit” exists in the Australian welfare system, not only in terms of payment rates, benefits and conditions, but also in the perceived degree of deservingness attached to the type of benefit a person receives.¹⁷ In-work payments such as Family Tax Benefit are not perceived as stigmatising. Of the income support payments, the most generous in monetary terms are the Sole Parenting Payment and the Carer Payment, closely followed by the Disability Support Pension (DSP). DSP has a number of fringe benefits attached, in particular the Pensioner Concession Card, which entitles the holder to a range of concessions on public transport, car registration and rates among other things. Currently it does not have mutual obligation provisions. It is possible to argue that DSP and Carer Payment are the most socially acceptable forms of benefit involving the least loss of “social honour” in terms of deservingness. Taken together, this makes DSP ranks at the top of the hierarchy of benefits. However, the relative attractiveness of DSP and the high numbers of recipients have gained the Howard government’s attention; the recent Commonwealth Budget (*Australian Government Budget 2005-06*) has begun a process which will restrict eligibility for the payment based on the inability to work 30 hours rather than the current 15. Those deemed able to work 15 hours a week will be forced onto Newstart.

Although it could be said that Austudy ranks lowest because of its payment rate and relative lack of fringe benefits, it nevertheless does not attract mutual obligation activities

¹⁷ This was validated by my field work.

and furthermore allows the recipient to earn \$6136 per annum before benefit begins to be reduced. More importantly, it is less stigmatising to be a student than to be unemployed. Accordingly, Newstart ranks at the bottom of the hierarchy, with smaller payment rates than DSP, Carer Payment and PPS, less allowances, a means test, mutual obligation conditions, and the frequent perception in the popular mind of being a “dole bludger”. These inherent unfairnesses have also been noted by ACOSS (2003a).

This hierarchy is explicable in terms of the history of the Australian welfare state. Recall that the first benefits were introduced for those debarred from the labour market through old age or disability. These recipients were constructed as deserving subjects, in contrast to the able-bodied, who were seen as undeserving. As pointed out earlier, this dichotomy has a long history dating back to the original Poor Laws.

5.6.2 Entrenchment of Disadvantage

One of the pernicious effects of the targeted system is that assets must be run down before one is eligible for a payment, effectively ensuring that there is no route out of poverty once one has arrived at that less than salubrious destination. The effective marginal tax rate also acts as a disincentive for recipients to move from welfare to work because of the penalties involved (FACS 2004e). Depending on a number of factors, such as the number of dependent children, it is possible to be working for little more than a benefit payment, when the loss of rent assistance, Health Care Card and Family Tax Benefit is taken into account. This probably accounts for much of the so-called “downward envy” researchers have documented, and the incandescent rage Pusey (2003) alleges middle Australians are

experiencing. In this way, attention is diverted from the massive disparities in wealth between the top 50 per cent of Australians who own 90 per cent of the wealth and the 50 per cent who own the remaining 10 per cent (Kelly 2001, p. 17). The effect is divisive and media stories of “dole bludgers” help to fuel anger and solidify prejudicial stereotypes.

In speculating on how similar social policy settings affect British clients, Walker and Wiseman (2003) have nicely encapsulated the tensions between an “activation” policy centred on participation in paid work and the needs of clients. Firstly, any successes the system has initially will result in a residue of intractable cases (such as the severely disabled or those with a mental illness); secondly, the coercive aspects of the system undermine the trust personal advisors endeavour to build as a prerequisite to successful outcomes; thirdly, equity demands that the compulsion built into the system be extended to all clients which, fourthly, may result in sanctions which exacerbate the initial goal of reducing poverty and/or social exclusion. Finally, there is potential for transition from income support poverty to working poverty in a flexible labour market environment. Both Walker and Wiseman (2003) and Gray and Stanton (2002) comment on the fact that the “successes” achieved in welfare reform in Britain and America have to date taken place in the context of very favourable economic conditions. A serious economic downturn has the potential to reverse these apparent successes with unforeseeable implications for those thrown onto the mercy of the neoliberal welfare state. Cowling (2004) convincingly argues that the redirection of income support and cash assistance from non-workers to low-paid workers (in the US case) means that the most vulnerable will lose a significant proportion of their income support if unemployment rises.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to both contextualise and analyse the current policy environment. I have explored how the current arrangements grew out of earlier phases in the history of the welfare state in combination with a neoliberal ascendancy in the last decades. In addition, I have outlined how this environment translates in material reality and investigated the implications for income support recipients. The new regime centralises work, as did earlier ones. However, what is different is that it attempts to do this for those in receipt of welfare in contrast to the earlier dichotomy between workers and the residual deserving poor. Now the disabled and sole parents are also being drawn into the mutual obligation net, probably in an attempt to reduce the numbers of recipients at the top of the “hierarchy of benefit” (*Australian Federal Budget 2005-06*). Hence welfare policy has the effect of both controlling the population of income support recipients as well as underpinning the new capitalist economy which relies to a significant degree on a peripheral labour market. What is entirely missing from all policy is the acknowledgement that there are more individuals who want work than the number of jobs available, even in an environment of low official unemployment rates. Those who are reliant on precarious work are now often also dependent on income support, a dual regime from which it is often difficult to escape due to the nature of the system, which contains disincentives as well as barriers to full participation as citizens. Having delineated the discourse and comparative international policies that influence the structural context of Australia’s welfare provisions, I will now turn to a consideration of the life world of jobless families.

Chapter Six: A Portrait of Jobless Families

We forget how long abuses can continue ‘unknown’ until they are articulated: how people can look at misery and not notice it, until misery itself rebels (Thompson 1980, p. 377).

6.1 Introduction

This study explores some jobless families in regional New South Wales within the limits set by the nature of the project. It has been stated that this exploration aims to discover how structures (system) interact with subjectivity and intersubjectivity (life world) in families who depend on income support in order to show “what is going on” for this group of people. As has been noted in the methodology chapter, various limitations, such as the ability to obtain a wide sample, have restricted the scope of this project. Furthermore, the available methods of data collection - though they involved extensive fieldwork - mean that investigating family processes is particularly difficult and the findings in this respect must be regarded as open to further refinement or revision. Nevertheless, the data did yield a rich source of new information about the

impact of long-term joblessness on families in regions, and since it appears that a project of this nature has never been attempted in Australia, it must be considered as having considerable value despite the difficulties involved in researching such a set of questions. A further problem has been the organisation and interpretation of the data so that it can be presented in a meaningful and coherent manner. With these difficulties in mind, the findings have been divided into three chapters.

Following Layder's methodological approach, I began with a prior set of assumptions about the nature of social reality. This theoretical framework was influenced by critical structuralism but was modified to incorporate Layder's stratified ontology in order to take account of the intersubjective (situated activity) and psychobiographical features of the social world. This chapter will deal with these features and may be regarded as attempting to address the first two research questions outlined in the introductory chapter; that is, how do jobless families live, and how do they differ from working families?

Some contextualisation is necessary in order to present a meaningful portrait, so a summary of other studies which have specifically linked joblessness with families in Australia, Britain and the US dating back to the Great Depression is provided. This is followed by a broad overview of the hidden nature of contemporary joblessness as well as an examination of the variety of family structures and participants' understandings of the concept of family. Such an exploration is consistent with the attempt to arrive at an understanding of the settings (in Layder's (1997) use of the term) in which situated

activity occurs. Finally, a more intimate view of families' lives - including the geographical regions in which they live - is presented so that the reader can gain a sense of the life world of the participants. For as Goodin et al. (1999) have observed:

while providing us with many good head counts...social statisticians still provide us with far too little by way of connected stories...much of the appeal of qualitative methods in the social sciences derives from their promise to recapture the sequencing and patterning that constitutes the real lives of real people (p. 1).

A separate chapter will present the common themes that emerge from the data and the role that long-term dependence on income support plays in the lives of jobless families. A further chapter explicitly considers the intersection of system and life world as it relates to jobless families. Power, discourses and practices and social relations (Layder 1997) are interwoven elements of all three chapters. Relevant literature is surveyed and integrated as the findings are discussed in the order described above.

6.2 Other Studies

There is nothing in Australia to parallel the ethnographic studies carried out during (and shortly after) the Great Depression in Europe and America. In fact, as noted in Chapter one, only a small body of work exists which specifically examines the effects of unemployment on the family; there is a far greater body of research on the effects of unemployment or poverty upon the individual both psychologically and socially, but its impact on the family is only a peripheral concern in most studies. Innumerable studies have been conducted since the "oil shocks" of the 1970s ended the long postwar period of economic prosperity in Western nations, most of them dealing with the consequences of unemployment - both short-term and long-term - upon individuals. However as

Chapter two outlines, a number of other changes which have occurred in the three decades since this time has brought about a reappraisal of modernity and the significance of the developments of this period, leading to reformulations of this era as “late capitalism” (Jameson 1993), “late modernity” and “post-modernity” (Lyotard 1984), “reflexive modernization” (Giddens 1994), “network society” (Castells 1996), “risk society” (Beck 1992) and so on. These changes - for example in the nature of work, the family, gender relations and the role of the state - and the cultural shifts which underpin them, have contributed to the development of a social order which is qualitatively different from that which was extant in the first part of the twentieth century.

Thus the exhaustive studies of the 1930s and 1940s on unemployment and the family cannot be accepted as depicting an accurate representation of the lived reality of jobless families in regional Australia today. Nevertheless, it would be foolish to disregard them for several reasons. Firstly, apart from some research in the late 1970s and early 1980s (which will also be taken into account), these are the only major studies which specifically consider how families are affected by long-term unemployment. Secondly, notwithstanding the historically specific conditions of the Depression years, these studies are still relevant in various respects and provide a useful point of comparison. Finally, the scope of these studies is so comprehensive that they cover ground not able to be addressed in this research. Some projects span a period of years; the researchers were able to pursue methods which now would be circumscribed by any ethics committee, and to devote resources - both human, intellectual and financial - that could

only be dreamed of by this researcher. It should thus be clear that the studies are a valuable and relevant resource which merit attention.

6.2.1 Studies from the Depression Years

Three major projects which consider the effects of unemployment on the family were carried out in the 1930s and 1940s by Komarovsky (1973) and Bakke (1940) in the US and Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel (1972) in Austria. Komarovsky's main concern was the effect that unemployment had on the authority of the breadwinner, who was invariably the father of the family. His study gained access to the sample group by obtaining names and addresses of a group of families in receipt of welfare payments from the relevant authorities. This is a practice which is impossible today because of privacy legislation. His researchers then visited the prospective participants to secure interviews, for which they were paid - again not possible in the present study. From the account given of methods in *The Unemployed Man and his Family* (1973), the research assistants were less than candid in their description of the aims of the research to the possible participants. Once again, such a process is no longer tolerated by research ethics committees, even though it clearly facilitated access to the sample and furthered the aims of the project. Chapter three has outlined the difficulties encountered in attempting to obtain a sample for this project. Komarovsky found that long periods of unemployment generated a variety of changes in the authority status of the father of the family but in general, wives were accorded greater authority by family members over time. Men responded to these changes either by resisting or accepting their reduced role, with consequent repercussions for relationships within the family.

Bakke carried out two major projects relating to unemployment, one in England (an ethnography of unemployed men) and the other in the US, which considered the effects of unemployment on workers' social relations and practices, as part of its title suggests (1940). This exhaustive study was carried out over eight years during the 1930s and describes the lives of unemployed workers in great detail. Several chapters are devoted to a description of the processes that occur in families as they attempt to adjust to unemployment. Findings which are congruent with my own study are the social isolation that unemployed families voluntarily initiate, the time and stress involved in attempting to survive in financial hardship, and the loss of social relationships which economic constraint causes. Bakke also found that families tended towards some kind of relational equilibrium after a process of massive adjustment. They did not fracture or disintegrate and, given the opportunity to become self-reliant, did so with competence. Even though he adopts a working class perspective congruent with a critical approach in this study, Bakke (1940) appears at times to argue for the family from a functionalist viewpoint. However, this must be placed in the context of a time of worldwide economic depression, dominated by the male breadwinner model of the family.

Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel (1972) carried out ethnographic work in Marienthal, an unemployed Austrian community in the early 1930s, spending several years in the process. They followed exhaustive procedures and carried out extensive data collection to supplement and cross-check their findings; 478 family files, life histories, time sheets, reports of various kinds, school essays, meals records, statistical data and housekeeping statistics were all used in the study. One researcher lived in the

community for twelve months whilst others obtained access under the guise of various aid projects. From their description of their method, the subjects of the study did not know they were being investigated. This has obvious advantages from the point of view of the validity of the results, but raises ethical questions which today would mean the project would be disallowed.

This was a study whose orientation basically was social-psychological, relying upon a comprehensive description of the community to arrive at the principal conclusion that “prolonged unemployment leads to a state of apathy in which the victims do not utilize any longer even the few opportunities left to them” (Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel 1972, p. vii). The researchers found that individuals could be divided into three groups as regards their response to their predicament. There were those who were resigned to their fate, had no expectations regarding the future, but still maintained some sense of order in their lives and were capable of experiencing small pleasures when these came their way. This group was by far the largest majority. A small minority was classified as unbroken; these were individuals who still maintained an active life, - through voluntary work such as serving on committees for example - maintained hope for the future and were generally optimistic. There was a minority who were classified as broken and these were further subdivided into two groups. Some were broken in spirit but still maintained order in their homes and cared for their children. However they were in absolute despair and were totally without hope for better times. The second group classified as broken was those families in total chaos; order had broken down and

they lacked the will to do anything whatsoever.

The researchers make interesting observations on the personal attributes they felt contributed to how individuals responded to their situation, and conclude that those with a combination of material and spiritual resources fared best. Because relief was finite in the Austrian welfare system of the time, the study included families in various stages of receiving relief. Some had no income whatever, having either exhausted their eligibility over time or having been cut off for not declaring minor sources of income, such as keeping rabbits. Thus some families had more resources than others. This explanation of how individuals and families responded shows how psychobiographical and system factors intertwine to produce the outcomes described above.

In the sense that the study deals with an entire community which had relied on a factory for its prosperity it is not commensurate with the current research, yet there are echoes of many similar themes, as will be shown later. One finding of interest was that family relationships were not generally affected by unemployment. Rather, unemployment served to magnify whatever quality relationships were marked by before the unemployment began. For instance, a quarrelsome couple became even more so, whereas normally happy relationships were marked by tension and small conflicts but their underlying strength remained.

6.2.2 Later Studies

There is a dearth of research on jobless families in the postwar period. As discussed in

chapter five the adoption of Keynesian economics had as one of its major goals the achievement of full employment. In Australia during this period, the unemployment rate was approximately 2 per cent (Battin 1997) and similar trends were observable in the US, UK and Europe until the late 1970s, when high rates of unemployment again surfaced, though not to the degree of the Depression years. This prompted renewed interest in the topic, for example, Sinfield's (1981) study of the meaning of unemployment in a Britain where it was speculated that two million unemployed was to be an enduring feature, reflecting the sharp chilling of the economic climate of the 1980s. Seabrook (1982) compared the unemployment of the late 1970s and early 1980s to that experienced during the Great Depression, finding that a loss of solidarity and thus alienation was a feature with distressing consequences in the unemployment experience of the latter period. Fineman (1987) edited a volume which examined personal and social consequences of unemployment and underemployment. However in the UK only three major studies were located which were conducted specifically in relation to the effect of unemployment on families (Hutson and Jenkins 1989; Fagin and Little 1984; Marsden & Duff 1975).

Hutson and Jenkins (1989) carried out qualitative research which considered the impact of unemployment on young people and their parents in three towns in South Wales. The research focus was primarily on the young people themselves and the unemployment was experienced mainly by the young adults, though some households did rely entirely on state assistance. The researchers' key findings asserted the "centrality of financial resources" in people's lives, whilst in the home, it was the mother who was the key

figure in relation to the management of family life. Hutson and Jenkins conclude that the young unemployed and their immediate families had absorbed the strain which is a consequence of unemployment, which they view as a structural problem. Thus the private domain shielded the public domain from accountability.

Fagin and Little (1984) used a family life cycle approach to study the effects of unemployment on individuals and their families. Although the study contains useful data from interviews with the unemployed and their immediate family members, the main focus is on how unemployment affects physical and psychological health, with limited focus on the interplay of family relationship and dynamics. Again, this study's sample of unemployed consisted exclusively of male breadwinners, reflecting a now outmoded definition of the nuclear family. This study is divided into three parts. Part One deals with the psychological meaning of work and the psychological phases in unemployment. The authors conceptualise the experience of unemployment as a process somewhat akin to the stages of grief first theorised by Kübler-Ross (1969). Part two presents the data for unemployed families in particular phases of the family life cycle, whilst part three deals with unemployment and health in family life, the main concern of the research. In the sense that the researchers arrive at the view that dealing with long-term unemployment is a *process* of adaptation undergone by the whole family, they are echoing the findings of Bakke (1940), though with a somewhat different emphasis and theoretical background.

Marsden and Duff carried out descriptive research in the 1970s in Britain. Their aim

was “to communicate the quality of the (unemployed) men’s lives and needs through the use of a combination of words and pictures” (Marsden and Duff 1975, p. 15). The guiding concept is the notion of the social contract between individuals and society, where people work to contribute to society, which in turn owes them the opportunity to work (a theme taken up by Kinnear (2000) in response to mutual obligation policy). The data is presented as participants’ recollections of their work, how they lost it and the search for new jobs. The study records standards of living and the reactions of family, friends and neighbours to the unemployed man. The authors concluded that the men in their sample had a need to work which went beyond merely economic considerations. This was so because of the strength of the “pressures and informal sanctions supporting work in our society” (Marsden and Duff 1975, p. 264).

Similarly, in the US there was little research conducted on the topic until the late 1970s. Whilst its methodology is psychological, Liem and Liem’s (1988) study does investigate the effect of unemployment on the family as a secondary issue. They review “the emotional impacts of job dislocation on workers and their spouses...family responses to job dislocation, and...the role of interpersonal relationships in buffering the stress of unemployment”, arguing that unemployed workers “actively contest their displacements and the conditions it creates” (Liem and Liem 1988, p. 87). These findings arose from a one-year study of 82 families where the husband had been involuntarily unemployed. The men and their wives were interviewed four times in the course of the year using a combination of structured, semi-structured and open-ended questions as well as being required to complete questionnaires. The areas of inquiry

covered work history, family finances, family functioning in the domains of child care, household maintenance, breadwinning, the marital relationship and social relations outside the family, the job-hunt, working conditions, the meaning of unemployment and psychological well-being (Liem and Liem 1988, pp. 89-90).

The researchers concluded the “involuntary unemployment created significant increases in emotional strain...these costs were borne both by workers and their spouses, suggesting that unemployment cannot be treated only as a personal event” whilst acknowledging that this had received little attention in other investigations (Liem and Liem 1988, pp. 95-96). The marital relationship was affected by the experience of unemployment but itself was found to moderate the effects of unemployment. Other findings suggested that the division of labour in unemployed families was more egalitarian than in the past but that husbands appeared to retain financial authority. The authors note that “these aspects of family life involve a broad sociological question concerning the role of economic change in altering the basic structural and normative character of the family” (Liem and Liem 1988, p. 98), signalling the social changes that had occurred since the Depression studies.

The psychological literature contains several other studies where unemployment is connected with the family. Broman, Hamilton and William (1990) studied the effect on families after a plant closure, finding that stress develops as a result of financial hardship. Plant closure studies are relatively abundant but not particularly relevant to this research, because whole communities are affected by the single event of closure

and thus obtain singular effects that cannot be generalised to jobless families in Australia today. As will be seen below, this is because the nature of joblessness has changed. Firstly, it includes substantial numbers who are dependent on benefits other than unemployment benefit, constituting a “hidden jobless” population. Secondly, the jobless are more often dispersed throughout society rather than being affected en-masse through plant closures, though this does occur (for example, the closure of the steel works at Newcastle in 2000). This dispersal also ensures the jobless are also largely hidden from public view and do not enjoy the benefit of a sense of solidarity and relative freedom from guilt, shame and self-blame which may be the consequence of plant closure.

Brand and Pullen (1991) studied work-related self-concept and family relations in unemployed married men, finding that the men in their sample did not suffer the adverse consequences - including negative family relations - listed by Jahoda (1982) and others. They warn that their findings should be treated with caution, however, because none of the subjects had been unemployed for longer than six months and over half the sample were unemployed due to voluntary resignation.

More recently in the US, Hanisch (1999) has reviewed job loss and unemployment research from 1994 to 1998 and includes a review of family effects. Of the four relevant studies found, Hanish reports that two conclude that the marital relationship deteriorates as a result of depression caused by financial strain (Vinokur, Price & Caplan 1996; Grant and Barling 1994), whilst the third lists adverse outcomes such as

family tensions, lowered living standards and poor health (Lobo and Watkins 1995). The fourth study concentrates on the standpoint of the helping professional (Dunlop 1997). Hanisch concludes that research in the family/unemployment domain is sparse.

One relatively recent relevant study is by Straussner and Phillips (1999), who studied the impact of job loss on professional and managerial employees and their families. The study was an exploratory one, using open-ended discussions with ten unemployed persons and adult family members every four months for a two and a half year period. The sample included five unemployed females in various family formations, including a lesbian relationship. It found the reaction to job loss was a process, conceptualised as comprising seven stages, again somewhat analogous to Kübler-Ross's stages of grief.

The proposed stages are identified as:

1. Shock, anger and betrayal
2. Hopeful expectancy
3. Role changes
4. Compensatory employment
5. Increasing social isolation and resentment
6. Emotional upheaval
7. Physical and mental decompensation and breakdown of the family unit.

The conceptualisation of these stages was based on content analysis of the interviews which explored the following areas: current employment status of all family members;

previous and current psychological and social functioning; current relationship between partners; and reactions to the unemployed individual by family members (Straussner and Phillips 1999, pp. 624-3). The study is significant in that it examines previously ignored gender differences in reaction to job loss, finding that women placed less emphasis on status and salary than men, appeared to be less traumatised (as expressed by depressive behaviours) and were less subject to physical abuse than has been found in low-income families, although verbal abuse by employed wives towards their unemployed husbands was reported, a finding which generates some pertinent questions about the power relations between partners. Whilst this study is of direct relevance, its sample size and its exclusive focus on professionals and managers limits its applicability as does its neglect of a consideration of sociopolitical factors, or what Layder would call contextual resources.

The most recent review of the empirical research on unemployment and impacts on family relations or family members was carried out by Strom (2003). Strom categorises the research into sections, reviewing research concerning fertility, the division of domestic labour, spousal well-being, coupled unemployment, children's well-being and educational attainment, and children's physical health. She specifically focuses on the social and health consequences rather than the economic consequences of unemployment and does not consider intergenerational effects. Strom finds that multiple factors play a role in determining how families are affected but concedes that, while the review suggests that unemployment does affect families and family members, "it would be desirable to know why this is so, and perhaps more importantly, how the

process works” (2003 [online]). The most recent European study of the effect of unemployment on the marital relationship was carried out in Norway (Hansen 2005). An eight-year panel data set was used to investigate the principal hypothesis that unemployment increases the probability of relational breakdown and this was supported by the findings.

A short paper by McClelland (2000) discusses the effects of unemployment on the family in the Australian context, drawing on statistical data as well as data from the Life Chances Study, a longitudinal study which followed the lives of 145 families of diverse socio-economic backgrounds in Melbourne in the 1990s. McClelland concludes that poverty and hardship associated with unemployment can lead to stress and alienation which in turn impacts detrimentally on psychological well being, marital and family relationships and health. This echoes Conger et al. (1990) who found that financial hardship - as distinct from long-term income support - has adverse consequences for families. (There is a plethora of studies examining the impact of financial hardship in the poverty literature, but which do not focus on joblessness per se.) Other harmful ramifications McClelland (2000) canvasses are a lack of purpose, unstructured time, uncertainty and lack of status and control. She agrees with other studies which find that the increased social isolation that unemployment brings means that pressures are focused on family relationships, undiluted by broader social contact. In this respect, the findings are consistent with McDonald’s (2000) study, which found that economic deprivation is coterminous with the (in)ability to form extended social networks.

A project now underway of direct relevance to this study is one conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies entitled *The Dynamics of Low Income, Welfare Reliance, and Changes in Family Structure of Parents with Dependent Children*. This project is in its preliminary stages and is being conducted in collaboration with the Department of Family and Community Services and the Australian National University. The study is a longitudinal compilation of a database from Departmental records which will analyse “the dynamics of, and interrelationships among, changes in family structure, income and welfare reliance” (AIFS [online] 2004).

6.2.3 Dissertation Literature

A search of dissertation literature found that in general, research was concentrated on specific relationships within the family, rather than treating the family as the unit of analysis. Several theses were found studying marital relationships following unemployment (Carraway 1997; Stoop 1997, Doumas 1995; Kessler 1995; Grant 1991, Dasch 1989; Marrale 1988, Madison 1987). Book (2001) has studied parenting discourses in a situation of unemployment in Finland, while in the US, Ortiz (1987) studied the effect of fathers’ unemployment on parent-adolescent relations and adolescent self-concept.

In a more holistic vein, Wauchope (1994) examined the effect of unemployment on children by comparing families with stable and unstable employment histories, and Shickell (1988) examined the coping strategies of unemployed families. Wauchope (1994) found that the first time a family experiences unemployment, negative effects on

family interactions are perceived by children, whilst among those families who experience repeated periods of joblessness, families appeared to respond by attempting to minimise negative effects and increasing positive family interactions. Shickell (1988) found that both external and internal strategies were employed in order to cope with what was experienced as a traumatic event, including acquiring social support (external) and reframing (internal).

6.3 The Current Study: An Overview of Jobless Families and their Lives

This research has encompassed 21 jobless families in three areas of regional NSW as previously outlined. Participants were of working age, and in full or partial receipt of disability pension (Disability Support Pension), sole parent payment (Parenting Payment Single) or unemployment benefit (Newstart) for twelve months or more. The following profile is an attempt to portray the major elements which constitute the lived reality of these jobless families.

6.3.1 The Hidden Nature of Contemporary Joblessness

As explained in previous chapters, the current study began as an inquiry into the effects of long-term unemployment on the family. However, policy changes and social changes - such as gender relations, and in particular the changing labour market - have rendered the meaning of the term unemployment nebulous. Joblessness was therefore selected as a more appropriate term. Yet this suggests connotations of inactivity and a total absence of paid work which are not accurate, as we shall see.

Since the study commenced, there has been a steady decline in the official rate of unemployment. After peaking at 10.9 per cent in 1993, by 1999 the national unemployment rate was recorded as 7.2 per cent (ABS 2002d) and by February 2005 was at 5.1 per cent (ABS 2005a). In such an environment, it is difficult to resist the idea that unemployment has receded in importance as a social problem. Hence it has attracted little attention in the media. Instead, as we have seen, both the government and the media have become preoccupied with the problem of so-called welfare dependency, which was the initial rationale for the commissioning of the McClure Reports (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000, 2000a). The net effect is to consign to oblivion those without jobs and to reconstruct them as “welfare dependants”.

It must be remembered, as noted in 3.4.3, that the official rate of unemployment does not in any way reflect the true rate of unemployment, particularly when the range of income support payments and precarious employment are taken into account. Indeed, based on official statistics, the Reference Group on Welfare Reform (2000) estimated that almost one in five children was growing up in a jobless household at the turn of the millennium. Although official statistics on unemployment have been declining steadily over the last five years, they can be considered as flawed for several reasons: firstly, the way the unemployment rate is calculated, where part-time work is conflated with full-time employment; secondly the fact that these figures do not reflect the large number of jobless families subsisting on other types of income support; and thirdly, the invisibility to statistical scrutiny of certain classes of persons, such as the homeless and the

incarcerated. Finally, national unemployment figures ignore concentrations of joblessness in the regions.

The unemployment rate is calculated by the ABS by counting as employed any individual who “undertook at least one hour of paid work in the survey week or at least one hour of unpaid work on a family farm or family business” (M. Watts 2000, p. 23). A compounding factor is the growth in jobs, which has been mainly in the peripheral sector. The deregulation of the labour market in Australia has created a periphery of workers who engage in precarious employment, defined in 4.4.3 as non-standard work or work which is irregular, casual or temporary, low paying and excludes employees from internal input in the employing organisation. It was also noted that a staggering 85 per cent of employment growth for the period 1982 to 1994 comprised non-standard employment, while from 1994-1997, 80 per cent of employment growth was contributed by non-standard jobs (Burgess and Campbell, 1998: [online]). Lacharite (2000, p. 246) contends that by 1998, nearly 53 per cent of the total work force was in casual or part-time employment, while a study by ACOSS in 2003 estimated that the true unemployment rate is approximately 12.9 percent (ACOSS 2003b). ACOSS (2003a), p. 13) found that “a person on Newstart Allowance continuously for 12 months has on average only a 25% chance of being in employment 12 months later”. Recently, Kryger (2004) has found that 54 per cent of all new jobs have been casual. It will be seen that this does not accord with Burgess and Campbell’s (1998) estimate, but this can be accounted for by the fact that Kryger is not including all types of non-standard employment, but only casual work. In any case, Kryger (2004, p. 4) concludes that

“casual workers probably have more in common with the unemployed than with ongoing workers” in that many would prefer to have permanent employment.

The ACOSS (2003b) study mentioned above argues for a new measure which it calls the Unemployment Plus Rate, which includes people who worked for fewer than 16 hours per week but wanted more work, discouraged jobseekers and jobseekers who could not start work within a week. Similarly, Renda (2003, [online]) has calculated that if underemployed families are included in the unemployment rate, an astonishing 25.8 per cent of families with dependent children “are either receiving no income from employment or only one part-time wage”. However in the sphere of public debate, the official, low unemployment statistics serve to hide jobless families from view.

One way of gaining some idea of the extent of hidden joblessness can be obtained by calculating the number of people receiving various benefit payments. Data was obtained from Centrelink on numbers of people receiving Youth Allowance (YA), Newstart, Parenting Payment Single (PP(S)), Carer’s Payment and Disability Support Pension for the years 2000-2003 for New South Wales and Australia. The results have been tabulated in Tables 6.1 and 6.2 below.

While the number of Newstart (unemployed) recipients has declined in New South Wales in the order of 22,798 since 2001, the combined rise in other types of payments was 24,881. For Australia, the drop in Newstart payments of 90,066 was counteracted by a rise of 83,720 in the other payment types excluding Austudy, which remained stable, declining by only 155.

Table 6.1: Numbers of income support recipients by payment type for New South Wales 2000-2003. (Source: Centrelink 2003)

	Newstart	PP(S)	DSP	Carer	YA	Austudy
2000	-	133,805	205,097	18,512	106,975	8,304
2001	177,152	140,404	213,355	22,142	106,873	7,228
2002	161,129	141,783	218,220	25,219	110,860	7,071
2003	154,354	145,014	223,713	28,411	110,129	7,616
TREND*	-22,798	+4,610	+10,358	+6,269	+3,256	+388

* Note: Trends have been calculated only from 2001 to 2003, since data for numbers receiving Newstart payment for 2000 was unavailable.

Table 6.2: Numbers of income support recipients by payment type for Australia 2000-2003. (Source: Centrelink 2003)

	Newstart	PP(S)	DSP	Carer	YA	Austudy
2000	-	410,657	614,962	52,339	347,107	29,112
2001	587,891	433,291	645,737	62,836	356,652	27,671
2002	526,996	438,164	664,753	71,367	358,255	26,796
2003	497,825	449,924	687,973	79,929	348,894	27,516
Trend	-90,066	+16,633	+42,236	+17,093	+7,758	-155

* Note: Trends have been calculated only from 2001 to 2003, since data for numbers receiving Newstart payment for 2000 was unavailable.

It will be seen that the biggest single rise is in Disability Support Payment, which has been the source of governmental concern for some time (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000, 2000a). Commentators such as Argyrous (2002; Argyrous and Neale

2000) have speculated that shifting clients onto this payment is a method of hiding the unemployed, a suggestion which was also tendered by several participants in my study.

Apart from excluding Youth Allowance, there is no way of disaggregating the figures so as to know which proportion of the above recipients are living in families as defined by this study. Parenting Payment Partnered has been excluded and it is the case that more than one person in a household can be in receipt of an income support payment. Despite these uncertainties, what can be concluded from these figures is that, though the official unemployment rate has decreased significantly, the total number of jobless or underemployed individuals receiving income support has compensated for the fall, lending further support for the argument made here, that joblessness increasingly has become hidden from public view. This is reinforced by the fact that many of the jobless families who participated in this study took pains to conceal their reliance on income support from the public domain, a theme which will be explored in more depth in the following chapter. In the two regions furthest from a metropolis, all participants specifically stated that there was an absence of paid work, by which they generally meant full time jobs capable of sustaining a family.¹⁸ It is to the participant families themselves that we will now turn.

6.3.2 The Variety of Family Formations

This study has confined itself largely to a consideration of the family as defined primarily by parent-child relations, but has noted that Gilding's (1991, p. 5) less restrictive view as "patterns of obligation and dependence" is also viable. To represent

¹⁸ Chapter eight deals with the displacement of joblessness to the regions in my study, showing that the unemployment rate is up to five per cent higher than the state unemployment rate.

this more elastic definition, the project includes two cases where the dependent was another adult who relied upon the participant for care but who was independently receiving some level of income support. Both participants emphatically identified this arrangement as a family (though most participants had at least two definitions of family as will be seen). One was an aged parent, the other an invalid spouse. A further two cases were not living with dependents at the time of the interview. One was a person aged in the mid-fifties who was residing with a spouse but whose children had left the family home, the other was a non-custodial parent. Ten of the families were single parent families whilst seven other families consisted of heterosexual couples with children. One of these families changed to a single parent family during the course of the study due to the parents separating and two of the coupled families were “blended” (bringing children from a previous relationship to the current one) at time of first interview. One of the single parents identified as a same-sex family, but the partner did not reside permanently with the parent, spending only several nights a week with the parent and resident child.

Table 6.3: Breakdown of participant sample by family type.

Coupled Parents	Sole Parents	Other
7	10	4

Though it may be argued that the sample was skewed by an unduly large proportion of sole parents, it is instructive to return to tables 5.1 and 5.2. It will be seen that between 2000 and 2003, the difference between the numbers of sole parent payments and Newstart payments has progressively narrowed so that by 2003 in New South Wales,

there was a difference of only 9,340 in favour of Newstart payments. Yet sole parents only account for 21.6 per cent of all families with children under 15 years of age, whereas of all couple families with children under 15, only 7.5 per cent had neither parent employed (ABS 2002b). This means that while around one in five of all families (employed or not) are sole parent families, they account for nearly as many payments as coupled families. The first wave of the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey paints a similar portrait, according to Scutella and Wooden (2003). They estimate that even though sole parent households with dependent children under the age of 15 only account for seven per cent of all households, they account for 18 per cent of all jobless households in Australia. Further, Scutella and Wooden (2003 p. 13) find that “the rate of joblessness among couple households with children is relatively low” at just 5.7 per cent.¹⁹ My sample therefore is not unduly unrepresentative of the actual distribution of jobless families.

Of the total sample of jobless families, exactly one third had come from sole parent families of origin themselves. However a degree of blending had occurred as well in these originating families, with sole parents remarrying or repartnering. It is clear from this breakdown that family structure frequently is characterised by complexity, with a series of transgenerational step-relations as well as half-siblings, a fact noted by other commentators. The reality for many individuals today is that they belong to a number of families with whom they do not co-reside.

¹⁹ Though it needs to be stated that Scutella and Wooden’s definition of a jobless household excludes students, retirees and any household where one member has earnings from precarious employment (2003, p. 6). This means they exclude households who still may be significantly reliant on income support. Further, they define a household as a “group of people living at the same address who share meals” (p .6), which may or may not mean a family as defined for the purposes of this study.

Household size – understood as co-resident family members - was small in almost all cases: as can be seen in Table 6.4 below, only one household contained 6 members, consisting of a sole parent who had returned to her own parents with three children. This was considered a temporary arrangement, whilst the parent looked for suitable accommodation for herself and three of her five children. Her two other children were living with their father. By far the most common household size was two or three members; of the fourteen families in this category, nine were sole parent families.

Table 6.4: Household size of participant families

Household size	Number of participant families
6	1
5	4
4	3
3	7
2	7

This configuration reflects the well-known and widely discussed trends towards the decreasing size of households. As such, it appears to be representative of a wider social phenomenon associated with changes such as the delaying of childbearing, the increase in the divorce rate, and the rise in numbers of childless couples, same-sex households and persons living alone (Bittman and Pixley 1997).

6.3.3 Participants' Concepts of Family

It may be questioned why there is a need to report participants' meanings and understandings surrounding the much-contested notion of family in a chapter purporting to paint a portrait of jobless families. The answer is that to gain an appreciation of the

participants' life worlds, it is necessary to comprehend the cognitive and emotional bases from which actions proceed. In effect, contemporary understandings are likely to underpin practices, situated activity and the settings in which situated activity occurs. Further, understandings are derived from, and constituent of, a discourse which forms a cultural resource upon which individuals may draw in deciding upon and explaining their actions.

The participants in this study evinced a range of meanings associated with the term "family". When asked, "what does a family mean to you?", a variety of responses, sometimes from the same participant was evoked:

People who love and care for you (Reece, parole officer).

Somewhere where you can come and be yourself (Sophie, sole parent).

I actually consider probably my friends more family than my family (Yvette, sole parent).

Family means sharing, the same blood, you know, bloodlines. Sometimes not, but doesn't matter. Family means together, sharing values, commitment, love (Kathy, student, wife of Newstart recipient).

The family unit – mother, father, children, aunties, uncles (Peter, disability pensioner).

My social friends have become family for me...that's what a family is all about, support, encouraging, sharing and taking an interest (Bea, sole parent).

Salim has two other families (Anna, wife of Newstart recipient).

The above quotations provide a typical selection of participants' concepts of family. They demonstrate several layers of meanings attached to families. However, they can be broken down into two broad categories: structural and ideological. In the structural category are the ideas of blood or kin. This includes the immediate unit or household as well as extended family and family of origin. Yet another structural dimension of

understandings of family includes what I have called the laterally extended family. As opposed to the horizontally extended family which spans generations, the laterally extended family consists of the families that partners belonged to prior to their current relationship. The structural dimension centres around who is considered to be a member of family and this usually is related to kinship. However in the ideological realm, participants repeatedly expressed the notion that qualities often associated with friendship define a family. Under this interpretation, friends become family when they offer various types of support and allow the person to “be themselves”.

These multiple understandings of family are nicely encapsulated by Pringle and Corrigan (1995, p. 165) when they assert that “even very broad definitions which conflate family and household are limited to bounded units which do not always capture the complexity of how people’s intimate relations and personal identities are built up and change over time”. This view is confirmed by the examination of family formations in the preceding section. A further demonstration corroborating the idea that family boundaries are fluid and overlap in terms of who is considered kin can be found in the responses of two grandmothers who, when asked to list their grandchildren, both named the (unrelated) child of their son or daughter’s spouse from a previous marriage. Pringle and Corrigan (1995) suggest that we are currently in a period where traditional notions of family are under constant challenge. The “naturalness” of the family unit and the kinship bonds this implies is being replaced by an ideal characterised by caring and intimacy. Yet the more the conventional or nuclear family changes, the more it is appealed to – whether by politicians in a nostalgic way, or by its appearance in

advertisements for an array of products. Pringle and Corrigan (1995) argue that any definition of family, to be generally acceptable, must incorporate both tradition and nature as well as reflecting the changes that are underway. They propose the notion of “kith” as a possible starting point for understanding families, because it incorporates tradition whilst at the same time broadening the dimensions of family further than does the allied idea of “kin”.

Another interpretation is offered by Bittman and Pixley (1997), who argue that popular notions of family as the site of fully realised intimacy and nurturance are simply myths, or “normative expectations” that cannot possibly be attained, given the hostility of a market-oriented economy and polity to non-commodified forms of behaviour and interaction. They argue that the reality of families is that, though their members often struggle to live up to these idealised standards, they must inevitably fail, resulting in an inequitable division of labour at best, and violence at worst. This line of argument is a descendant of feminist interpretations of the family as potential sites of conflict and exploitation of women (eg. Delphy and Leonard 1992; Hartmann 1987). Certainly, it has been suggested that the definitions provided by the participants in this study were idealised definitions, often reflecting the discourse of the ideal family rather than its actuality in practice. It is noteworthy that only one of the participants in the study alluded to the conflictual nature of family relations within the immediate unit (as opposed to extended family or family of origin, where conflict was often the catalyst for leaving), explicitly confirming her experience:

Yvonne: You’re still committed to the idea of happy families?

Lauren: Yes, but if it doesn’t work out it’s okay.

Yvonne: You're striving towards -?

Lauren: Survival.

Yvonne: What is a family? Not blood relations?

Lauren: Ah – yeah it is. You've got to survive.

Yvonne: Not about peace and love?

Lauren: Oh God, no...the house is full of conflicts, contradictions. Red's not always red, is it? It depends what colour is next to it.

It would seem, then, that the existence of familial conflict within the immediate unit is almost taboo, because it does not meet normative expectations. But Giddens (1992) has provided another reading of post-traditional relationships, which is not necessarily at odds with the above, theorising that the post-traditional order has introduced the “project of the reflexive self”. This leads logically to an emphasis on intimacy and the rise of the “pure relationship”, based on emotional equality and trust which has to be constantly negotiated, whether one is biologically related to another or not. This theme finds echoes in other literature theorising the family (Wolcott and Hughes 1999; Esmond, Dickinson and Moffat 1998; Collier, Rosaldo and Yanagisako 1982).

As Giddens expresses it:

In the separating and divorcing society, the nuclear family generates a diversity of new kin ties associated, for example, with so-called recombinant families. However, the nature of these ties changes as they are subject to greater negotiation than before. Kinship relations often used to be a taken for granted basis of trust; now trust has to be negotiated and bargained for, and commitment is as much of an issue as in sexual relationships (1992, p. 96).

This leads Giddens to the view that a democratising process, arising from the tendencies of family relationships to become more like pure relationships, is underway, leading to a

dissolution of the coercive power that exists in traditional family formations. It is unclear whether Giddens is correct. However the lack of tolerance of unsatisfying, conflictual or abusive relationships has been noted by other commentators and probably accounts for the high number of sole parent families (Wolcott and Hughes 1999; Disney and McPherson 1999; Esmond, Dickinson and Moffatt 1998). What can be asserted with reasonable certainty was that the project's sample reflected the understandings of society at large, and in this sense cannot be said to vary from the mainstream.

6.3.4 A Typology of Jobless Families

The initial phase of the research yielded a sample which comprised a distinctive type of family. The families might be said to be coping with their circumstances as well as those circumstances would allow. Though marginalised, there were still connections to mainstream society - through precarious work, voluntary work and membership of various organisations. These families articulated normative sentiments regarding a range of issues and evinced a desire for social inclusion. It is clear that at the least, income support does allow those regular disbursements to be made which ward off the worst effects of poverty, for example rent or mortgage payments. In combination with precarious employment, it can even allow for a modest degree of consumer spending which would be impossible solely on precarious part-wages. There is therefore a degree of attachment to society at an economic level, which is one of the functional benefits of welfare payments.

Fully one third of these families, though, had adopted a lifestyle which represents an

attempt to live in accordance with principles generally associated with alternative lifestyles, that is, ecological sustainability, self-sufficiency and low consumption. For the purposes of this study, this has been named voluntary simplicity, following eco-anarchist discourse. This is a significant subsection, found exclusively in the North Coast samples. The total sample of participant jobless families can be categorised as non-generational, in the sense that they all had had work in the past and wished to work again. However within that sample was the subset who had opted for voluntary simplicity and their aims were somewhat different to the other two thirds of the sample.

Overall, however, it was felt that this sample was unrepresentative of the whole population of jobless families, as many income support recipients would be disinclined to volunteer for interview for varying reasons, such as engaging in criminal or illegal activity, homelessness or extreme disengagement from society. The second round of interviews thus was undertaken in order to try to gain a sense of how such families might experience joblessness. This yielded a sample of twelve community workers as described in Chapter three. In the course of this phase of the research, another type of jobless family appeared - those families whose reliance on income support was intergenerational. This group of families were described by all the community workers in the sample and varies significantly from the non-generational group in that the joblessness can span up to three generations and the individuals in the group evince no real desire to end their reliance on income support: in fact they “*do not know what it*

means to have a job” (Jan - Centrelink social worker)²⁰. A broad typology of jobless families encountered in the course of this research might then be conceptualised as:

Table 6.5: Typology of families receiving income support

Income support types	
1. Non-generational	a. mainstream
	b. alternative (voluntary simplicity)
2. Intergenerational	

Both the non-generational and the intergenerational group can belong to any payment type, but since the non-generational group are more likely to be trying to exit income support, they are likely to suffer the strains imposed by such a project, such as loss of confidence or a sense of failure due to repeated rejections. That is not to say the intergenerational group do not suffer. It was stressed by some community workers that members of this group grow up in circumstances which do not encourage the development of self-esteem. For example, the family relationships of the intergenerational group are more likely to be characterised by what the family systems literature calls “chaotic enmeshment” (Olson 2000) whereby individuals are locked into destructive relationships which throw their lives into chaos on a more or less permanent basis. These quite distinct groups therefore have differing experiences of income support, a point which will be expanded upon in the concluding chapter where popular myths of income support recipients are interrogated.

²⁰ Though it should be noted that Goodin et al (1999), found that few people stay poor for all of a ten year period.

6.4 The Life World of Jobless Families

The above has attempted to provide a sense of the social context in which jobless families live their lives. For the remainder of this chapter, the attention is focused on the lived experience of the jobless families themselves, starting with the areas in which they live.

6.4.1 The Three Areas - Area A

The following portrayal of the three areas whence the sample was drawn is largely ethnographic in nature. The researcher has spent approximately one third of her life in each of two of the areas and has intimate knowledge of all three.

Area A is the semi-rural fringe of a large metropolis, which one might visualise as a long ribbon extending from the edge of the city through to “the bush”. The urban end of this area is one of high social disadvantage. The official rate of unemployment is 8.5 per cent, 2.4 per cent higher than the state average (ABS 2004b). Vast swathes of the countryside have been converted into what amounts to slums in recent years. Low income earners and the unemployed make up the majority of the population here, although the rural end of the area is visually pleasant and sustains moderate to high affluence pitted by pockets of poverty. The sustained boom in real estate values, however, is concentrating and compressing the “poverty pockets” ever further.

The last suburbs before the city ends and the country begins boast a large ethnic population, many of them Muslim. This is reflected in the many stores in the

commercial heart of the area which cater specifically to their needs. This part of area A has a distinctively ethnic flavour. The streets are filled with men and women of Middle Eastern appearance and garb; there seems to be a disproportionate number of middle aged men watching the world go by or talking with one or two friends. The shopping malls are always crowded and one notices a preponderance of discount stores. There is a general air of dishevelment; the discount stores are jammed with cheap and often useless goods which spill off the shelves and onto the floors, cluttering the aisles and at times trodden underfoot. There is litter on the streets, whose shopfronts present a dingy façade to the passers-by, very few of whom convey an impression of wealth by their appearance.

This is a place very few visitors would leave without some sense of vague depression or discomfort. However as one travels past this urban borderland and into the semi-rural part of the area, one is presented with villages where city dwellers who still depend on the metropolis for their income have escaped the frenzy of urban life. One might say that here one finds those who still subscribe to - and can afford - the dream of the quarter-acre block and the picket fence, although on a somewhat grander scale than when the dream was a reality in the mid twentieth century. Many of the homes are substantial. In contrast with the ghetto-like atmosphere of those peripheral city suburbs where graffitied fences and unkempt cottages with bare yards have marched over the hills once grazed by cattle, here one finds two or three-car garages and well-watered lawns with decorative metal fences which enclose pools and large four-wheel drive vehicles. There is still a scattering of more modest homes and relics of the area's rural

past; some weatherboard churches, an old homestead or cottage, a School of the Arts or a post office building from the turn of the twentieth century.

Coexisting with this affluence are the pockets of deprivation mentioned above. Next to a prosperous township one finds another filled with Housing Commission homes in poor repair. The bare yards reappear. Although the atmosphere is not as oppressive at this end of the area because it is set in a rural environment and thus is more visually attractive, this does not mean that jobless families are happier than their more urbanised counterparts, as shall be shown. A substantial proportion of residents of these areas need to travel to the city margin described above to find employment in the industrial and business areas which it sustains - and travel costs are prohibitive.

6.4.2 Area B

Area B comprises an inland regional area in northern NSW. The population of the regional city and its districts is approximately 50,000 residents. Here again the official unemployment rate is one of the highest in the state at 11.2 per cent (as at 2002), over 5 per cent above the state average, with a further estimated 19 per cent receiving other forms of income support (ABS 2004b). The area has a history of logging and settlement by free selectors who also cleared the land and began farming it. Vestiges of these former times are more numerous than in area A, ensured by its relative geographical isolation. Tiny schools, weatherboard halls and old farmsteads dot the landscape which, in conjunction with the rolling hills and agricultural activities still

practiced, make for a picturesque setting. This has been capitalised upon to some extent by the tourism industry.

A further characteristic of this area is the cultural diversity of its demographic. On the one hand there is an indigenous population, many of whom suffer from the institutionalised disadvantages so abundantly documented by copious research. At times it is possible to observe the distressing effects of severe alcohol abuse in the streets of the central business district and by the river which runs through the city.

On the other hand, a wave of “new age” settlers has migrated to the region since the counter-culture movement of the early 1970s, bringing with it an alternative set of values which eschews mainstream values and lifestyles. One can also observe this group in the business district when they come into town from their communities in the hills surrounding the city. However they are not a homogeneous group, but instead comprise successive waves and subcultures. Some of the older “migrants” have moved into town and have been absorbed into the mainstream to some extent, while newer groups such as “ferals” are distinctive by their appearance. There is considerable antipathy towards these two groups by many of the more conservative members of the community; the epithet “feral” has become a term of abuse in some circles.

The university adds an intellectual and artistic flavour, which is supplemented by many artists, writers and artisans who are attracted to the region by its natural beauty. Finally, a substantial core of conservative business and farming families combine to create an

overall mix which is chaotic, colourful and sometimes characterised by conflict due to the disparate mix of values, motives, intentions and needs. What is noticeable by its absence, in contrast to Area A, is any semblance of a substantial contemporary migrant population. Though many Italians migrated to farm bananas in the post World War II period, they are near the end of their lives and their children and grandchildren are indistinguishable from the general population.

Here, as in Area A, one can also observe great material disparity in terms of housing. One finds the same type of substantial home noted in area A. These homes often are set on acreage but can be found in the more affluent suburban areas as well. Other urban parts of area B contain large stocks of run down housing verging on dilapidation, particularly in flood prone areas on the edge of town. Additionally, one finds public housing estates where social disadvantage is rife, and which are the focus of many local newspaper items reporting petty crime, vandalism and the like.

The inhabitants of the more luxurious homes represent their counterparts of area A. This type of housing is a feature of that part of the area closest to the coast. The further one travels inland, the more it is possible to observe less conventional housing. Alternative communities are scattered over this part of area B, the homes of which reflect the use of recycled materials and at times great ingenuity. Battles have been fought between local councils of the area and persons who construct and/or live in what building inspectors condemn as substandard, to the point of demolition in one case. Thus the difference between the disparities in housing in areas A and B reflect a

conscious choice on the part of the less conventional members of area B to engage in a less materially based lifestyle. This has already been alluded to and will be discussed at greater length in the following chapter.

Overall, however, if one cares to take the time, chilling poverty and disadvantage are readily observable. Take, for instance, the following field note made in 2003:

Yesterday an old man was playing a harmonica at the entrance to Woolworths. He looked much like the images of tramps one sees from the 1930s: an old, worn suit which wears the marks of being slept in, a crumpled flannelette shirt and a battered hat. The man's eyes were filmed with age. He had a black cloth neatly laid out at his feet for donations; when passers-by dropped coins onto it, he left off his playing to say, "thank you, Ma'm. Thank you very much". Yet this is not the 1930s: it is the new millennium.

An ageing couple have been wandering the streets for days on end, apparently aimless. They are living under a bridge. Their style of dress is "hillbilly" and their clothes are the same, day after day. They don't talk to each other.

Inside the shopping plaza, a coloured man, severely ataxic, hospital identification tag still on his wrist, is attempting to negotiate the escalator. His jeans are ripped and he appears unwashed. He struggles to reach his destination.

An Aboriginal woman approaches passers-by in the park, asking if they can spare two dollars. In the nearby gazebo are some of her relatives, lost in an alcohol-fuelled slumber. At the pub, another Aboriginal woman is attempting to put a deeply inebriated woman and her toddler into a cab to go home; the young mother is resisting as much as her condition will allow. The child is wailing, a frightened look in her eyes. The shoppers avert their gazes.

6.4.3 Area C

Area C abuts area B but represents a largely coastal strip in the north of the state. Again the demographic of high unemployment is repeated with little industry apart from tourism and some agriculture to sustain employment. The rate of unemployment here is the same as for Area B, as calculated by the ABS (2004b). There are many similarities

between areas B and C, notably the disparity in wealth and the population mix noted above. Again one finds alternative communities concentrated further inland as in Area B. But New Age values frequently clash with business interests intent on property development. As a result, as one travels further inland, one finds those families displaced from the coastal area. This means that on the coastal strip, income support recipients are not so visible in the areas given over to tourism, although the local park is known as an area for drug dealing.

Parts of this region have a high profile nationally and internationally, attracting celebrities and wealthy “refugees from the metropolis” who can work at a distance or set up new enterprises. Tourism is now a major industry, with one locale in particular attracting year-long international tourists. There is therefore more economic activity than in Area B, but its history as a magnet for New Age settlers has left a legacy which is similar. However, it differs in that Indigenous disadvantage is largely hidden from view. We turn now to a description of the lives of three participant families who live in these regions.

6.5 The Families: Three Case Studies

As discussed in Chapter three, one of the interview techniques utilised was to obtain a life history of the participant whilst still making use of an interview guide to prompt discussion on relevant topics. It made sense to the participant to be asked “tell me how you came to be in this situation, starting with your early life”. This technique had several advantages: it made it possible to obtain information about family structures as

well as a chronology of life events. In addition, it was possible for comparisons to be made between pre-jobless and post-jobless lives. But most importantly, it helped to expose and separate the threads that make up the richly textured fabric of participants lives or as Layder (1997) would have it, their psychobiography.

A participant from each region has been chosen as displaying most of the themes encountered in the analysis and each of the three forms of income support payment is presented – that is, Newstart Payment, Parenting Payment (Single), and Disability Support Pension, one from each region. Where a particular or distinctive combination of features can be considered as leading to possible identification of the participant, it has been modified, as explained in Chapter three.

6.5.1 Michael and Barbara

The approach to Michael and Barbara's house is through a muddy front yard which does not boast a path. The house is a red brick veneer house, 1960s style, quite unattractive. Inside the furniture is adequate but old. Every shelf and surface contains papers, ornaments, tins of fly spray and so on. The place smells of dog - wet dog - though none lives there. It is untidy and cluttered, but not dirty. The venetian blinds are drawn, making the place dark and contributing to a depressing atmosphere. The kitchen has never been renovated. Drawers are falling to pieces and the bench is water damaged.

Barbara has a sweet face upon which the difficulties of her life have been imprinted.

Her clothing is casual and nondescript - t-shirt and trousers. She is thin, almost bony, but the prettiness is still in her face. Michael is about 40 and has a beard and curly hair. He wears khaki work-type shirt and shorts. His wedding ring is prominent, as is a marriage certificate on the buffet. They married a month before our interview, but have been together for eight years.

Barbara already had two children when she met Michael, who himself had four children from other relationships, some of whom are now adults. They have had one child together. At the time of interview, three children were living with them. "Our friends and their kids consider themselves to be part of our family" and non-blood step-siblings are family as well. Sometimes they all get together, at birthday parties for example. Though his three "exes" may all be present and the children might fight a little, Michael and Barbara agree they all cope with this complicated web of relationships reasonably amicably.

At the time of first interview, Michael was on Newstart payment, but worked part-time in a helping occupation. His last permanent job was in 1992 as a tradesman. He lost his job because of the amount of time he took off work due to illness. His chronic illness carries a stigma because it can be contracted through drug use, so it is something he hides. Most of his intimate relationships have been with alcoholics and addicts, though Michael does not identify as an addict or alcoholic himself. Barbara identifies as an alcoholic but now does not drink, though they still smoke, a big expense which puts a

hole in the budget. Michael wants to give up, not only because of the cost, but for his health.

Michael's parents divorced when he was "in a cot". His father had three marriages and his mother also had a string of relationships. At first he stayed with his mother, who then gave him to his father. He described moving around a lot - "Mum used to pinch me and then Dad would find me". He did well at primary school because his father "stood over" him to do his homework, but slid downhill at high school, spending the first year fighting other school children. He did however obtain his School Certificate and his mother found him an apprenticeship. "Everyone said it's the next best thing - and I've regretted it ever since. I wish I'd done electronics". But he has a new dream; one day he would like to buy a property and set up a workshop and recreation ground for at-risk youth. This would provide a range of activities - such as driving "paddock-bashers" under approved supervision, and the opportunity to develop practical skills, for example, using power tools.

Michael had only recently begun working more hours. He had been working one day a week, but then began working for a second employer in the last four months, meaning three to four days of work a week. But it costs money to have a job, and the amount of money earned reduces the Newstart payment: "I don't even see my Newstart" he says, "I get a packet of smokes and hand it over. I buy my own smokes and petrol out of my work money". Barbara was helping the children with a paper run, the idea being "to get the kids doing something", and was doing a small amount of cleaning which she did not

declare. She was receiving Parenting Payment, which is reduced on a sliding scale according to how much Michael earns. The full payment is around \$178 (at time of initial interview) a week.

Barbara manages the household budget, but Michael concedes that her budgeting skills can lead to problems, because “she gets sucked in by record clubs and Crisco”. In the drinking days, there was not always enough food, and the family had to approach a local charity for food vouchers on a number of occasions. Christmas is “always, always” a difficult time. Their families help out; Barbara’s parents help out and they work for them in return, though Michael finds his father-in-law hard to work for sometimes. But they would not manage without this arrangement. The biggest problem is rent. One used to be able to find cheap run-down places which were nevertheless clean. In this house they have rats and mice, and the roof leaks, but they were desperate at the time, having spent 18 months in a caravan prior to living here. The rent is \$195 a week, and rent assistance is paid in addition to the residual income support payments.

Although the children do not always understand why they cannot have things, “they’re pretty good - must have got used to it”. And though the financial restriction is stressful, Michael and Barbara try not to let it affect their relationship: “we know it’s not our fault, so we don’t blame each other”. They tend to deflect the stress of financial difficulties onto others, for example, the landlord. When issues arise, they negotiate until they can come to some agreement. They seem genuinely attached to each other. Michael says, “Barbara’s different - she’s got more motivation to do the right thing than

most people I know...I loved her a little bit at first, but it's just taken off".

There is a palpable stigma attached to living on income support. For example, his half-brothers, "when there are disagreements, they say you're a dole bludger; what rights have you got"? He has the additional stigma of living with his illness. In his old trade "you're expected to do a certain amount of overtime because the production line is the Almighty- it's the most important thing". But he doesn't tell anyone about why he is reluctant to return to his former occupation because they will think they will catch his disease - "so they think you're a bludger". However, those who know him well enough know he is not a bludger - he has been in the bush fire brigade and was its president for a period. One staff member at Centrelink advised him to try for a disability pension but he was not deemed to be disabled enough to qualify. As a boy he was always optimistic and uses optimism as a coping strategy now. "You can't please everyone and if you're doing the best you can, your conscience is clear. I try to tell myself it doesn't matter what they think - but it does". And at one low point he became depressed enough to be prescribed antidepressants.

Centrelink is a central element of Barbara and Michael's lives. Barbara admits they could not live without income support, but "we hate it - we'd rather not get money off them - but we do need their money". Michael related a series of episodes involving either humiliation or financial hardship. For example, once they sent him to a seminar for heroin addicts and alcoholics; he "hit the roof". On several occasions he was

charged with an overpayment he does not believe was justified. Sometimes he follows these up but on other occasions he does not:

When I started with X I declared it and the day after they sent me a bill for \$300. Now they're taking \$40 out of every fortnightly payment. It makes it a bit harder...But I couldn't be bothered following it up...just cop it sweet.

Similarly, the Job Network agency is a thorn in the flesh. They keep trying to get Michael to enrol in courses that mean he will have to travel long distances to attend and which will not significantly improve his prospects. Similarly, they would like him to try for full-time jobs that might not work out, when his arrangements now have some measure of stability, though they do not qualify because they are part-time. He often feels they are "riding" him.

Michael and Barbara both are of the opinion that alcoholism was much more of a problem for their family than the receipt of income support. The children suffered and Barbara felt guilty and ashamed after drinking episodes. Since sobriety, the children's behaviour has improved and though money is still a problem, they can always afford food. As Barbara commented, "lots of people problem drink because they're in a bad situation - but it makes it worse". However, since the time of the initial interview, both Michael and Barbara regularly have used marijuana. Michael is concerned that they are chronic users and no longer considers it a benign substance after he suffered a life-threatening medical emergency last year. They manage the cost of substance use mostly by growing their own supply, but at times are obliged to buy some. At these times the budget is again under stress. At last report, Michael and Barbara had swapped roles, mainly as a result of Michael's health problems. Barbara now works around 30

hours a week at a factory, and it is she who now receives the residual Newstart. Michael receives the parenting payment, but this is reduced by the amount Barbara works. In the last month he received \$17. Thus it would seem they are still in much the same position, save for a shuffling of the deck chairs.

Yet Michael feels that Barbara has gained tangible benefits from working. She is now much more confident and it has improved relationships within the family. “The kids used to drive her mad”, but they behave well enough for him. They still struggle over the budget. Barbara talked Michael into applying for a credit card and rapidly spent to the limit, so they are now trying to pay it off, and the card is no longer used. The dream of owning “a bit of dirt” - their precious dream - has faded into complete unreality in the wake of the real estate boom, and has been reduced to the status of being a “sore point” - buying lottery tickets being now the only hope.

Hence Michael and Barbara have achieved a “precarious stability” (Hartman 2002), establishing a semblance of normality by working around the various barriers to full participation they have experienced: a fragmented family in childhood, low levels of educational attainment, chronic illness, drug dependence and the stigma that goes with those barriers. That they have managed to maintain a home for their children, a stable and loving relationship and part-time work in the face of these obstacles is a significant achievement; however income support has played a crucial role in helping to maintain this nevertheless fragile equilibrium. And it would seem that they are locked into a life world of relative poverty from which, given the convergence of systemic elements - the

labour market, the real estate market and the social security system - there is little likelihood of escape.

6.5.2 Fran

Fran is in her 40s and has been a sole parent for twenty years. She lives in a townhouse off the industrial estate with her adult son and 11-year-old daughter. The unit is reasonably modern with uncompromisingly minimalist décor - dull grey or beige monochromes in the various rooms. Signs of wear and tear are in evidence - like the sagging curtain rails above the windows at the end of the living room. It is a little cluttered but clean and comfortable. A cat's bowl signals the presence of a pet, and there is much evidence of interest in music: two or three guitar and banjo cases; music books on the table.

Fran's broad Australian accent is combined with a typically Asian appearance - her parents migrated over 50 years ago, so she was born here. Her childhood was reasonably happy as she had a loving, if somewhat socially isolated family. Branches of both parents' families had been very wealthy, but Fran's immediate family lived in relative poverty in Australia, doing unskilled work. Fran's father finally obtained semi-professional status and life became easier, but it was still "extremely tough. I know they were just constantly worried about money. And he had five kids and we were living in the back couple of bedrooms - I was in the lounge room and all that sort of stuff. But that's pretty common for migrants".

Due to a family feud, Fran's extended family largely stayed away and they had few Australian friends. However, Fran's parents "wanted us to assimilate because that's just what people did then. They realised it would be easier for us and we'd encounter a lot less prejudice if we were brought up Australian. I think they were fairly careful about that". Fran's parents were aware of education as a means to upward social mobility and Fran, being highly intelligent, won a scholarship to a prestigious private school:

...it was very much stressed we had to go to uni and everything. And I was probably the prize pupil, my father's great hope, really. But I was the one who ended up dropping out, you see, and did the hippie thing...I realise now it must have been terrible for them...why, I don't know. I just started looking at the politics, it was Martin Luther King and all that sort of stuff was going on.

Fran's mother thought it was the "rich" school she went to, and indeed she was part of a radical clique there who comprised the most intelligent students. So, after dropping out of university, doing menial jobs and living on the dole at times, she moved to the country and lived an alternate lifestyle. She returned to the city to work and save and then went travelling in Asia. It was during her time abroad that she became pregnant with her first child, and returned to Australia for the birth. The father was supportive but they did not enter into a committed relationship.

She moved onto a multiple occupancy²¹ and stayed for ten years living an alternate lifestyle as a single parent. Her first child was nine or ten years old when she became involved with a second partner. She thought this relationship was to be a lasting one, but her partner left when she was six months pregnant.

3. Multiple occupancies are communities where a parcel of land is bought under one title and then divided into cheap lots.

When I was really young, I didn't think marriage was important, rubbished the nuclear family and all that, but by the time I had my own kid, after having my first child, I was starting to really change my ideas and go, no, you can't throw the baby out with the bathwater...certainly by the time I had Lulu, I was definitely - I really wanted to have a family as in a "normal" family sort of thing. That was the ideal, I suppose, for me.

While Fran lived on the community, she did not suffer deprivation, owing to her commitment to voluntary simplicity: she did not have to pay rent, grew her own vegetables and used solar power. She visited opportunity shops to buy clothing and tried to recycle as much as possible. This meant she was even able to save money, so that she could afford to eat out occasionally and take cheap holidays. However, after a decade, she felt increasingly suffocated by the lack of mental stimulation: "I really needed to use my mind and I was sort of starting to go crazy, I was feeling - - all I talk about is the vege patch".

Fran moved to X around eight years ago and began a degree. But since the move, managing on a sole parent pension has been an unrelenting struggle. Accommodation and running a car are the most expensive items; the rents in X are extremely high - she pays \$230 weekly for her unit, the cheapest available. The recent property boom has exacerbated the housing situation and the unit's owner has placed it on the market. Fran says if sold, she could be asked to pay an extra \$50 a week. Her adult son who is also a student and works part-time for a retail chain helps her with the rent, and at various times she has been obliged to sublet a room to make ends meet. The ensuing loss of privacy, she feels, is "a pretty big one to give up", however it was the only way she could manage.

In the last year (2003) Fran has continuously "gone backwards" financially. She

attributes this to the rising cost of rent and food. At times since moving to X she has had an injection of funds which has arrested this slide into debt; part-time work in a factory or cleaning here and there, and a small inheritance - though not large enough to allow the purchase of a house - helped, particularly with the high cost of owning and running a car:

Up until I got that money (the inheritance) there were many, many times when I had to borrow money, when I just didn't have - you know, Christmas Day and I wouldn't have enough to buy Christmas dinner. I remember one Christmas when I didn't have enough money to buy anything to eat on Christmas Day. You know there were times when I was so broke that I would have - you've got the rego due and all that...

Part of the financial squeeze involves saying no to children: "it's a bit horrible having to say no to the kid about things they want. And it's a constant - a constant thing". She does, however prioritise her daughter's musical education and somehow manages to find the money for music lessons. This of course involves going without. She does without new clothes and entertainment on a regular basis, and when pushed, will not buy fruit. But she is an excellent budgeter and has never had to approach a charity for help with food, though "that feels like poverty to me, when you can't go out and buy nice fruit".

Fran sees her first priority as her parenting role, but is by no means inactive in participating the social and economic life of the community. She helps out at the school, sits on committees, works when she can find it and has worked (voluntarily) as a community activist, organising events for specific topical issues. However, the constraints of parenting mean that she is obliged to come to a realistic view of what she can achieve. Any undertaking invariably means organising responsible child care and

she admits she is often too proud to ask neighbours to help out. And though she is active in the community, on a personal level, she does not have a big social circle; many of the friends she makes eventually move on. She “doesn’t really go out much at all”, partly because she cannot afford it, but also, again, because of her parenting responsibilities.

Whilst she feels she has always been “treated really well” by Centrelink staff, in the wider community she has at times felt the sting of stigma attached to sole parenting, feeling “a little bit because I’m a single parent that people are looking down on that, you know? - that you should have a husband”. She is also aware of the resentment many working people feel towards recipients of long-term income support, and experiences this on a personal level too. At junctures like this, she makes a point of emphasising one of her other roles, such as part-time cleaning, or her status as a student, “just to let people know that I’m not a total bludger”.

But escape from long-term income support is not as easy as may be supposed. Fran is over 40, and “when people say to you, what have you been doing for the last twenty years, it doesn’t sound very good to say that you’ve been a mother and you’ve been studying. They say, well what jobs have you done”? She is aware that most of the jobs she has applied for have gone to younger applicants with the same qualifications, and the continual rejection leads to a sense of demoralisation and a loss of confidence. This double stigma - of being a sole parent as well as jobless has affected Fran’s self-esteem - “it does make me feel, well, what’s wrong with me”? But this is not a pervasive

factor in her life; in fact, she is not even sure if it is simply a subjective state, or an objective reality: “most of the time I don’t even notice that, and it’s not like a general thing...but it’s just that there’s times when it creeps in”. At last report, Fran had completed a vocational diploma in the hope she will be able to find full-time work that is both accessible and makes a positive contribution to society.

In Fran’s case, the barriers she has confronted have been those of ethnicity, ageism, and sole parenthood. Her commitment to voluntary simplicity may be viewed as an ethical stance which she has not abandoned, though it has hampered her from reintegrating into the mainstream community; though she has many skills, few of them are prized in the current labour market. Again it is clear that the real estate market has impacted in a very real way on Fran, since she will probably never own her own home. Nevertheless, in her small nuclear unit, there is harmony and a sense of emotional security and Fran has demonstrated that she is far from helpless as she continues to attempt to escape her worst nightmare - the fear of permanent poverty.

6.5.3 Jarred

Jarred moved to Z from interstate “just to get away, change my life”. He has three children by his first marriage. His first wife died of cancer and his second marriage has ended. Two separate accidents have left him with sensory deficits and a mobility-related impairment. After working for 11 years in a residential care facility, he was retired as medically unfit and now receives Disability Support Pension. His eldest child remained interstate with grandparents and Jarred brought his other two children with

him, the youngest of whom suffers from an intellectual disability.

Jarred has some relatives living in X, which influenced his choice to move. He grew up in a large blended family:

Well I've got five brothers and four sisters and in our ten children I've got a brother and a sister on my Mum's side and I've got three brothers and a sister on my Dad's side and then there's four of us, but we're all brothers and sisters.

Though the management of his disabled child takes much of his energy, Jarred enrolled in a TAFE course which he hopes will lead to work. It did lead to his meeting with another sole parent and he and Jenny developed a relationship, though they do not live together.

He finds housekeeping difficult, being "quite disorganised" since the move. His various impairments also mean that chores take more time, though his daughter helped with the cooking. When he worked, he had someone come in to help with the children in the mornings and afternoons:

The work was good, I suppose, because it got you away from it. Because I could just drop everything and get back into it when I got home...yes, I prefer to work. But also the security of my kids is - if I thought my children weren't going to be looked after, I wouldn't worry about it.

Life is more stressful now, partly because of his caring responsibilities and also because of the financial constraints of living on a pension. The state he previously lived in had a more generous concession system for pensioners and he finds travel particularly expensive in X. He is forced to rely on taxis and buses, as he cannot drive due to his multiple disabilities. He has begun paying bills by instalments, having got behind with a few of them. Buying

clothes for the children is difficult too. His teenage daughter had recently begun a part-time job, so she has been buying clothes with her wages. His son received “\$20 for Christmas, so I added 30 odd dollars to that. He got some new shorts and t-shirts and pants and shoes. So they’ll last a couple of months”.

Jarred bought a house in the country but sold it and rented a house that was recently bought by investors. The paint is peeling and there are problems with “water dripping everywhere” and the hot water system, which has blown up twice, due to “shonky work”. Jarred complained about the water to the landlord who said, “I know it’s a shonky job, what do you want me to do about it? I’m up to the hilt in the mortgage, what do you want me to do”? However he believes it is more sensible to rent as having a mortgage is too draining financially. He had \$20,000 after the sale of his house, and decided to buy comfortable furniture and rent, rather than buy a home and live without adequate furnishings. But the financial constraints mean that he cannot visit his family interstate and his telephone bill always is exorbitant.

Jarred likes to socialise and considers himself a “party animal”. He plays pool, darts, snooker and bowls, but also likes to watch the cricket with a mate. However he does not party very much these days, because it takes him too long to recover, and the care of his disabled child means there is no respite. He does not feel stigmatised by receiving a pension. But he does feel upset that he cannot give his children what he thinks they deserve. And although they sometimes give him “a bit of a hounding”, they take the constant denial of requests generally in good part.

Jarred has had a number of health problems, some of which required surgery, and he feels that in New South Wales, the health system is much more expensive, leading to restricted access to services. What worries him more is how he would cope with an emergency, “because you haven’t got the ability to even put away for it”.

At follow-up, Jarred had moved and was living in a two-bedroom unit with his disabled child. His daughter had run away on several occasions and he eventually sent her back interstate to live with her grandparents. A sense of hurt permeated his account. He repeated that his daughter did not know how many people she had hurt and that she still did not understand what she had done. The unit is old but “comfortable” and much cheaper to rent than his previous accommodation, but he is not much better off, because he now does not receive family payments for his daughter. The stress caused him to give up his TAFE studies a few weeks short of completion. He had hoped to enter university, but has changed his mind, as he will not receive any credits for his TAFE course until it is complete.

Jarred’s story is also characterised by multiple barriers. He has several physical impairments, is a sole parent and is caring for a disabled child. His financial situation is precarious and the stress of his caring responsibilities is enormous. Staying in touch with his family of origin is very expensive as is providing adequately for his children. Holidays are out of the question. Free access to health services is limited. Yet Jarred is not ground down by his circumstances, retaining a wry sense of humour and betraying no sense of lowered self-esteem. Perhaps this is because of the type of payment he receives, which

does not attract the opprobrium of unemployment or sole parenting, and in his case, the nature of his impairments, which are observable.

6.6 Conclusion

This chapter has endeavoured to paint a portrait of the lives of some jobless families as they are being lived in the areas under study. It was necessary to contextualise this portrait by a short summary of the literature which has specifically connected joblessness with families. This revealed that jobless families (as opposed to poor families) have never been the subject of an extensive qualitative study in Australia, and that, save for a few projects in the 1970s and 1980s, the last major inquiries were conducted during and shortly after the Great Depression.

This finding necessitated the provision of a backdrop of the current climate against which to foreground our chosen families. It was seen that jobless families are not a readily visible phenomenon, given the reticence of the families themselves to make their circumstances public, and the unemployment statistics, which are deceptive in terms of revealing the true rate of joblessness in the community. The formations that jobless families take was examined and found to be diverse in structure, but generally consisting of small nuclear units. However, the ideas that the participants held of what constitutes a family revolved around both structure and “normative expectations” of nurturing, exchange, support and intimacy. This second definition of family led the participants to consider non-kin members as a part of their families, whilst excluding kin who were perceived not to conform to the ideal.

Finally, an intimate portrait of three families, including the areas in which they live, was painted. In each case it can be seen that multiple barriers conspired to place income support recipients in a precarious financial situation, though paradoxically, the income support payments also contributed to some stabilisation. The families experienced numerous strains, of which the principal was relative poverty, but some also reported perceptions of harassment from Centrelink and Job Network agencies, while others had health problems, or suffered from other forms of disadvantage such as ethnicity and low levels of education. However, relationships within the household units presented appeared to be harmonious, with conflict displaced onto extended family members or other individuals. The next chapter considers the main themes arising from the fieldwork in further analytic depth.

Chapter Seven: The Lives of Jobless Families: Commonalities

...in his exclusion he has become, in a sense, as deeply lost as a human being can become, because he cannot find an identity of value. Instead he must simply confront the daily misery of his position in which there is so little for him to find self-esteem. To use a religious term, these people are condemned. Denied the grace, or even the hope, that consists in acceding to valued forms of social existence and they live as sinners; walking reminders to the saved that outside of the games of respect we compete in, there is not just nothing, but the hell of being nothing (Charlesworth 2000, p. 161).

7.1 Introduction

The last chapter painted a portrait of the lived reality of a sample of jobless families.

The families were selected on two counts. Firstly, each family represented one type of income support payment and each area under study. Secondly, the families depicted embodied most of the themes found during the analysis of the data. This chapter now turns attention to the results of the analytic process.

Caution must be exercised when attempting to find common threads in qualitative data analysis. Generalisations are easy to make yet harder to sustain in a rigorous analytic process. Moreover, it is important not to reduce participants to a set of common characteristics which ignores their individual attributes and circumstances. Many of the community workers interviewed in the second round of data collection stressed the

importance of avoiding over-generalised assumptions about the very diverse group that is encompassed by the term “jobless families” and displayed great reluctance to engage in such an exercise. Yet it should be clear that imposing a certain set of conditions upon a group of people, no matter how varied, is likely to yield at least some common results (as C Wright Mills (1959) famously demonstrated), and in fact this is one of the aims of the research. With these contingencies in mind, then, I have proceeded as carefully as possible in the analytic process. What now follows will outline the five major commonalities found amongst jobless families; poverty, stigma, trauma, coping/adaptation and being in the system.

It is possible to say that these five themes constitute what most families in the study experienced in common as a result of living on income support for long periods. The results of these experiences and the processes attendant upon them in terms of relational and system dynamics will be explored in the next chapter. However, as has been noted on several occasions already, it is impossible in reality to separate experiences from impacts and responses in a clinical manner. It is acknowledged, therefore, that this is a somewhat artificial exercise undertaken in the spirit of attempting to expose some of the strands that make up the fabric of jobless families’ lives. Further, this necessarily entails involved descriptions of the minutiae of the everyday lives of the participants, loosely following the manner in which Seabrook (1987, 1982) investigated the experiences of the unemployed in Britain in the 1980s. We will start with that which is almost ubiquitous - poverty.

7.2 Poverty

Organisations affiliated with religious institutions have a long history of attempting to alleviate poverty in Australia. Their methods are usually consistent with the dominant poverty discourse of the period. For example, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, which came into existence in 1930, began as a religious order devoted to the relief of destitute men and boys (Benn 1981). By the 1970s and 1980s, in addition to providing practical assistance to the poor it was sponsoring a number of research projects which marked a generalised shift from social workers' traditional casework method to an approach more consistent with an appreciation of the structural determinants of poverty such as class (Trethewey 1989; Benn 1981; Brotherhood of St Laurence 1978). More recently, a major research focus has been the effects of unemployment and the effects of the welfare reforms set in train by the McClure Report (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000, 2000a) on individuals and families (Ziguras, Duffy, and Considine 2003; Ziguras & Flowers 2002; Johnson & Taylor 2000; Johnson 1999; McClelland 1999, 2000; Macdonald 1998). Similarly, the Society of St. Vincent de Paul have carried out research which result in reports like the *Hidden Faces of Poverty* (1999) report which investigate the lived reality of poverty. Clearly, charitable institutions are by no means the only bodies interested in poverty, with peak bodies like ACOSS and other research centres such as the Social Policy Research Centre also contributing to the literature, as well as engaging in collaborative projects with other organisations (for example, Manning 2000). ACOSS has an active research agenda relating to poverty and its relationship with various types of income support. For example, over a number of years it has run a series of community sector surveys on a state wide basis called *Australians Living on the Edge*, which investigates demand for assistance from and resourcing of

community welfare agencies (see for example ACOSS 2004b). In addition to research and policy analysis relating to social disadvantage, ACOSS also engages in media campaigns on behalf of those it represents. For example, in 2004 it drew public attention to the inadequacies of family payments for low income families with teenage children, particularly sole parents, who can lose about \$70 per week in income support payments when a child reaches the age of 16. (ACOSS 2004c).

One of the central concerns of the organisations discussed above is the definition and measurement of poverty. It is argued that this is necessary in order to formulate valid social policy with respect to poverty. In addition, it is also needed to counter arguments about the validity of poverty measures of the kind that were forwarded by Saunders and Tsumori (2002) against the recent Smith Family report which found that 13 per cent of Australians were living in poverty in 2000 (Harding, Lloyd and Greenwell 2001).

As Fincher and Saunders (2001, p. 6) note, there is an extensive research tradition in Australian poverty studies dating back to the Henderson Inquiry (1975), focusing on measurement. According to this approach, poverty is defined by quantitative methods of determining some point below which the “standard of living falls below some minimum acceptable standard” (Greenwell, Lloyd and Harding 2001, p. 10). Fincher and Saunders (2001, p. 6) argue that this strand of research, whilst producing “expert measurement and sophisticated description”, does not address underlying causes and is under-theorised. Saunders (2004) has more recently argued that Mack and Lansley’s (1985) definition of poverty as “an enforced lack of socially perceived necessities” (p. 6

in Saunders 2004) encompasses the most salient feature of other definitions of poverty - that is, an inability to meet basic needs according to community standards - whilst at the same time highlighting its involuntary nature. Despite its limitations, Saunders (2004) cautiously endorses the use of a poverty line as the most practical way to communicate research about poverty to the community in a comprehensible fashion, but argues that “direct observation of deprivation” (Saunders 2004, p.17) must also be incorporated into any meaningful methodology.²² This was accepted by the recent Senate inquiry into poverty (Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee 2004), which also accepted suggestions that accounts of the lived experience of poverty by the poor themselves should also form a valued part of any consideration of poverty. Let us therefore turn to the families themselves to tease out the impacts of and responses to the experience of involuntary financial restriction.

In the face of the experiences of the poor, theorising poverty seems a laughable absurdity. No-one can tell the poor what their lives are like; and it seems presumptuous and even insulting to poor people to reduce the privations and indignities of poverty to the status of a theory, an academic report, or simply an object of interest. Notwithstanding this disclaimer, it is important that their story be chronicled, because it is a story that continually is being submerged beneath the layers of comfort and affluence, which are celebrated interminably in the popular media. Moreover, it is difficult for the poor themselves to tell their own story. As Ehrenreich (2002) points out

²² It is interesting to note that in this paper, Saunders (2004) finds that on a range of measures, sole parents endured the highest incidence of poverty, and that there was a strong correlation between poverty and joblessness. However, Walter (2002, p. 361) finds that “increased market work may not lead to significantly higher rates of material well-being for sole mother families”, and argues that this has also been the experience of sole mothers in the US.

in relation to the working poor in America, they are so busy surviving, and so stigmatised, that they are in no position to clamour about their plight, even if they thought it should do some good. But it is the invisibility which most impedes public knowledge of their circumstances.

It was asserted in the last chapter that many jobless families attempt to hide their reliance on income support from public view. Many jobless families are, as shall be seen, active citizens by the criteria of participation in community affairs, validated by Saunders, Brown and Eardley (2003) in research commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services. There may be no outward sign of difference or distress because these families do not wish to receive such an unfavourable label. They appear for duty at the school canteen, they attend community meetings or write letters to the local newspaper; they attend TAFE or university and they may even be visible in workplaces as peripheral workers, but they do not discuss their personal circumstances or invite anyone to their homes.

7.2.1 Housing: Home is Where the Dearth Is

Home is where the dearth is because home is where the differences are revealed. A majority of the families who participated directly in this study inhabit unsuitable or unconventional accommodation. At the time of the initial interview, one lived in a shed; two sole parent families shared rented premises with unrelated persons, while another was living temporarily with relatives. A fifth occupied a housing commission dwelling whose inner walls were punctuated by large holes and cracks, while four other

families lived in dilapidated houses on the edge of regional towns. Another family built their home from recycled building materials. The son and pubescent daughter of yet another sole parent family are obliged to share a bedroom. Those with adequate housing either paid very high rents or had managed to secure affordable housing before the onset of their joblessness (Hartman 2002). For example, Jenny had left “a very wealthy marriage” and her property settlement had enabled her to take out an affordable mortgage on a reasonably comfortable home. Community workers reported that they dealt with high numbers of clients who were either in housing stress²³ or dwelt in Department of Housing (“Housing Commission”) estates, where disadvantage in many forms is rife. In Areas B and C, clients were also housed in remote areas, or on multiple occupancies.

Housing is of course one of the largest expenditures in the budget, a finding which is supported by ACOSS (2000a). Participants either pay a vast proportion of their income to live in suitable housing or resort to the devices noted above in order to reduce the cost. This was repeatedly raised as a serious problem, both by the families themselves, as well as by the community workers who participated. At the time of the initial interviews, two participant families had Housing Commission accommodation at affordable rent. Seven participant families rented in the private market and were paying disproportionately large percentages of their income. Some of this cost is offset by their eligibility for the rent assistance payment, which is calculated upon the number of dependents and the cost of the accommodation. It can be stated with certainty that

²³ Housing stress has been defined by ABS (2004c) as having both relatively high housing costs and an income that falls in the bottom 40% of the income distribution. In 2000 the ABS estimated that nearly three quarters of a million Australians were paying too much for housing (ABS 2000).

without this payment many families would be reduced to a state of absolute poverty. Some of the participants, by buying run-down housing, are able to afford small mortgages - ironically because of the security of their income support payments - but this increases their housing costs, since they then do not qualify for rent assistance and have the added burden of rates and maintenance (Hartman 2002). It is a matter of some concern to note that since the data was collected, the so-called "housing bubble" or real-estate boom, which was formerly confined to Sydney and its environs has spread to the regions in this study. The local free newspaper in one of the areas under study reported in 2003 that low-income tenants were being driven out of their rented accommodation by the rising rents imposed upon them by investors buying up the relatively cheaper houses in the region (Schier 2003). In moving ever further toward the periphery, the chances of obtaining employment recede further and further, though the mutual obligation requirements do not abate. This is an example of the way in which displacement (to be discussed in the following chapter) acts as a mechanism in the regional jobless phenomenon.

Community workers also repeatedly refer to poverty as an enormous problem for their clients, with all sorts of negative effects. In the realm of housing, many clients live in Housing Commission houses, often concentrated in large housing estates. Others live in caravan parks. In spite of many clients living in housing which is supposed to be affordable, a repeated theme in these interviews was eviction for non-payment of rent. Homelessness then exacerbates all the clients' other problems. This study was unable to directly access the homeless, but evidence of their existence has been described in

section 6.4.2 of the previous chapter. According to community workers, homelessness often results from two possible occurrences; the income support recipient is breached, which means a drastic loss of income as noted in Chapter four, or a family member is ejected from the home. This may be a young person, who comes into conflict with a parent or step-parent, or a separating parent.

7.2.2 Transport: The Low Road

The cost of running a car comes a close second to the cost of housing, which together combine to consume a large proportion of a low-income family's budget. In regional Australia, the lack of public transport makes a car a necessity and jobless families face a never-ending struggle to keep a car, however decrepit, on the road. Newstart recipients are the worst off in this respect, since they do not qualify for free car registration, as do sole parent and disability pensioners. If circumstances force the loss of the car, the consequences can be devastating, depending on the family's total situation, since this can mean isolation, inability to seek or maintain work and the aggravated stigma of obvious poverty. One story told to the researcher can illustrate the disastrous consequences of a chain of circumstances in which transport plays a vital role. An income support recipient living outside the nearest urban centre had run out of funds to register his car. He was required to attend an interview with his Job Network provider and was reportedly so afraid of being breached that he drove his unregistered vehicle into town to attend the meeting. Unfortunately he was apprehended by police on his way, who then charged him for driving an unregistered vehicle. Such an example provides evidence of the compounding effect of disadvantage, which also includes the

emotional impacts of such an experience, and the possible flow-on effects to other family members.

7.2.3 Stasis: Treading Water, Going Nowhere

The combination of housing and car costs results in relative poverty, unless the family has substantial resources to call upon, such as personal savings or financial assistance from relatives (and these resources dwindle over time). The term relative poverty, though, does not do justice to the lived experience of constant privation and the anxiety generated by the never-ending difficulty of attempting to meet basic needs. This finding resonates with Bakke's (1940) descriptions of Depression families' efforts to survive. More or less permanent poverty has a substantial impact upon families' way of life. These families frequent opportunity shops and discount stores for their clothing, footwear and manchester needs; they eat the cheapest food, sometimes going without; they rarely go out and their social events usually consist of family gatherings; Christmas and birthdays usually cannot be financed without borrowing money; furnishings and whitegoods are generally sparse and decidedly shabby. A child's sporting activity stretches the family budget to the limit or is foregone. One family had no telephone, another had a phone bar which only allowed incoming calls at the initial interview. Recurrent bills are an endless cycle of payments by instalments. Ed, an unemployed blue collar worker explains his economic strategy:

I've got a book. All of them wanna get paid...so I pay a bit to him, a bit to him, a bit to him and a bit to him - I just keep doing that. I sit there and work out how much I got comin' in each week, so - work out the milko...(and so on).

And Kath, a sole parent, manages thus:

Now I have a fantastic budget - every fine detail is accounted for and I just stick to it. I have \$20 a week for petrol which is never enough, so money comes from the food budget to pay for a bit more petrol. Whatever I do I have to juggle it. I can't just keep going to the bank and getting more money out because that's how I get into trouble.

Despite this, Kath somehow manages to pay \$10 week into a dedicated bank account which will assist with the costs of her daughter's education. Bea's diet consists only of toast and cereal during periods of financial stress, but she has managed to pay off a second-hand computer for her adolescent child. Adele and Rico only have one pair of well-worn shoes each but they buy quality food for their toddler (Hartman 2002). These examples illustrate the determination of parents to attempt to adequately provide for their children in spite of their circumstances. However, the result of these restrictions is a sense of being "stuck", with no prospects for ever resolving what seems to be a long, drawn-out crisis. Participants repeatedly described their circumstances as metaphorically stationary, as keeping their "nose above water", "treading water", "going nowhere".

A number of participant families in the study found that their financial problems occurred on a recurring fortnightly basis. This is because families receive their main payment once each fortnight, and a smaller family payment in the second week of the fortnight. They therefore have what Yvette calls "little weeks and big weeks". On the big week, where the main payment is received, the family is able to meet their expenses, often paying bills and buying a large quantity of food. However by the second week, the food is starting to run out and money needed for items like fuel or children's school expenses is unavailable. Then it is necessary to either go without, resort to borrowing

or approach a charitable organisation if the case is suitably severe. These three strategies entail a number of consequences, as discussed below.

7.2.3.1 Going Without

In the case of going without, sometimes the item foregone is food. Yvette subsists on noodles, Bea on cereal and toast, Anna and Salim on rice during periods of financial stress. But more often less basic items are not purchased. Things such as make-up, books, magazines, newspapers, and movies are never purchased at all. The cost of keeping in touch with distant friends and relatives can be prohibitive, leading to a loss of extended social networks.

Shoes – an item taken for granted for the general populace - can present major problems: Anna observed that her husband, Salim, had not bought shoes for years. He goes barefoot at home, and has one pair of work boots which he is obliged to wear in his part-time job as a domestic. Mulvena a sole parent, in describing the inadequacy of income support payments, stated: “It’s nowhere near enough money. The kids can’t do things. Sometimes there’s not enough food. I saved up for months for my shoes. It’s the first time I’ve had good shoes”. Jenny’s daughters walk to school, so their shoes wear out quickly:

Paula did (need shoes), desperately, so much so that she had huge blisters on her feet. But we just didn’t have the money to do it. And it was just a matter of plodding away, saving, saving until we had the money. And of course it’s no use buying her a \$30 pair of shoes because Paula walks to X (school) and back most days...and they just don’t last.

One can imagine the child on the daily walk to and from school, enduring the blisters until there is enough money for new shoes. At face value it might be thought that the “\$30 option” would be the most sensible one to take, however families often find that the short life of the shoes ultimately leads to more expense. On some occasions it is possible to obtain shoes from opportunity stores, but finding the right fit can be a time-consuming and often fruitless search. One family’s child went to school for a sustained period with holes in his shoes. The shoes were polished each day, but stones entered the shoes from underneath, so inner soles were inserted in an attempt to alleviate the discomfort until replacements could be bought. Again, one can imagine the child, in this case perhaps being careful not to sit in such a manner in the playground that the deficiencies in his footwear are revealed to his peers.

The foregoing examples show the family must make critical choices about how to allocate their meagre resources. In the above case, the family had chosen to send the child to an independent school, partly for religious reasons, but also because of a strongly held conviction that such an education was the key to the child one day escaping the poverty in which they were raising their own children. But the cost of the fees, though relatively small, led to all sorts of other privations, of which the example of the shoes was but one. Jenny, too, had attempted to send her children to an independent school, but eventually was forced by her financial situation to change to the state system. Indeed, a recurring theme in relation to the impacts of financial restriction was the inability to meet the costs associated with raising children. A frequently mentioned financial stressor was the cost of special occasions, such as birthdays, and meeting

educational requirements such as school excursions. Child care is, of course, unaffordable, so that for sole parents, the probability of being able to hold down jobs is severely curtailed, once again reinforcing the cycle of poverty.

Very often, one or more members of the family has particular health needs. For example, Mulvena, quoted above, has sustained an injury in a fall which necessitated the purchase of mobility aids. In addition, one of her daughters has an intellectual disability. These are expenses which must be afforded in one way or another, in order to be able to carry on the basic activities of daily living. The net result of such situations is that expenses exceed income. This of course is also often the case of employed families, but the expenses are less typically in the basic need category.

7.2.3.2 Borrowing

Various strategies are employed to circumvent this problem, such as trying to supplement income support payments with part-time work, enrolling in a course of study to attract a supplemented payment,²⁴ or engaging in illegal activity, such as working in the informal or “black” economy. Some of the community workers asserted that some clients resorted to crime – mainly theft. However, this is by no means ubiquitous. Many more families engage in a much more socially acceptable (though no less stressful) practice: they borrow. In the case of the “little weeks” noted above, borrowing is usually limited to small amounts from friends, which are then repaid in the “big week”. This signals the importance of a social network as a resource, which can

²⁴ This strategy is doubly attractive, because it has the added promise of a qualification which may possibly lead to paid work. However, since the field work was carried out, changes announced in the 2005 Commonwealth Budget mean that many sole parents’ eligibility for the education supplement will be voided.

buffer some of the most negative effects of subsisting on long-term income support. Yvette's friend, for example, paid the cost of a school excursion as a birthday present to the child. But when there is a large or unexpected expense, for example a death in the family, a car needs to be registered, or the fridge or washing machine breaks down, some families take the option of borrowing money from formal institutions, if they are able to do so.

Another source of debt is a Centrelink overpayment, something that appeared to be surprisingly common. This is perhaps not so surprising when, according to the *Centrelink Annual Report 2001-2002* (2003), more than 600,000 families had debts totalling more than \$500,000,000. Amanda explained this often occurred as a result of precarious work, which, because it cannot be predicted, meaning that the estimate the family has provided to Centrelink becomes incorrect. Centrelink then recovers the debt by deducting an amount from their regular payments, which then "throws those families further into disarray".

Yet another path that leads to debt as a consequence of the seemingly interminable grind of financial hardship is impulse spending. Rene, a community worker, explained:

I do see an enormous number of people in financial difficulties because they've – like everybody else, their kids want the Barbie doll and everything, so around the end of the year, they impulse buy. Yeah, it is rewarding, but it's also, it's a control thing too – that, ok, I've got some money, and I can jolly well buy beer if I want to. Or buy the bike for the kid. I mean, other people can lay-by and budget, plan, all that kind of stuff, but for a large proportion of people, it's such a hopeless situation they might as well *brighten up this minute* (emphasis added).

It is well known that poor people pay more for their debts; because they are considered high-risk, they only qualify for credit to which a very high rate of interest is attached. Amanda, another community worker, believes the poor are “conned into paying for things” which entraps them in a vicious cycle:

...a classic case was Harvey Norman, or whatever the finance company, ACG or AMG,...and I forget what the percentage was, but it was something like 26 per cent...you know it was much higher than what a personal loan would have been, for example, but the beautiful part for that person was they could have their new lounge, fridge and TV all in one package and then have a no interest free period which was great, but then when it came time to pay for it, it was like, you know, my child has been sick, I've had this medication...I've dinged my car, I need that fixed to get around...so then that actually puts them at further disadvantage and they get whacked with 20-whatever percent interest on top of that.

These findings are all validated by the recent report on financial exclusion (Chant Link and Associates 2004, pp. 95-98), which found that those on very low incomes are driven to use loan sharks, payday lenders and second tier credit cards (of which the above quote is an example) which may cost up to 900 per cent in annualised interest rates in the most extreme cases. This report also verified the strategy of going without (Chant Link and Associates 2004, pp. 8, 85, 87, 98, 203) – as does Scutella and Wooden's (2003) quantitative research - and finds that the “main drivers” of financial exclusion are long-term unemployment and precarious employment.

7.2.3.3 Asking for Charity

Approaching a charitable organisation is always a last resort. In most families, resources run down over time which, coupled with the inability to save for emergencies, results in there being no leeway for unexpected crises. But the amounts available from charities are small and usually for food in the form of vouchers, or help with paying

electricity or telephone bills when there is a likelihood of the service being cut off. This is the most demeaning of all possible strategies. As Rene explained, the process involves reprimands and humiliation, which can contribute to the eventual erosion of relationship bonds:

...initially they'll ask for an urgent payment, some money off their next payment and we have very stringent guidelines about when that's acceptable. Because of open-plan, and you're standing at a counter, I mean – small town – you hear stuff you don't *want* to know about people. So there's that embarrassment, and of course you get resentful and angry and the customer service officer bears the brunt, and that just goes with it. And then you've got to troop down the road to whatever charity and go through the process again; and 'I told you you shouldn't be spending, you shouldn't, you shouldn't, you shouldn't'...and you know, these are adults, and maybe they've made one mistake, or maybe to them it was important...

Bray's (2001) report on financial hardship in Australia and Scutella and Wooden's (2003) research using the first wave of HILDA confirm the use of this strategy by the poor during times of financial crisis.

7.2.4 The Impacts of Poverty

The "poverty experiences" described above and the impacts discussed below accord with those chronicled in other studies involving families on welfare, such as Edin and Lein's (1999) US study on single mothers. Despite certain differences, then, such as dissimilar cultural, policy and geographic settings, it would seem that the experience of poverty within a developed nation with a liberal welfare system (as typified by Esping-Andersen 1990) exhibits discernible regularities. One of these is concerned with time.

Significant reliance on income support means that many activities take up much more time: pre-prepared food is usually more expensive than buying ingredients and preparing

it oneself; broken items must be fixed oneself if at all possible, since there is no money to pay a repairer; those without a vehicle must either take public transport or be dependent on lifts; and clothes must be taken to the Laundromat or washed by hand if there is no washing machine. In addition, a certain proportion of time must be spent in obligatory job-search, if one is in receipt of Newstart, as well as attending mandatory interviews with case managers. If Centrelink has made a payment error, much time can be consumed in attempting to obtain a correction. Scouring shops for bargains is also a lengthy experience. However, those recipients who fall into the category of voluntary simplicity do not resent this and indeed use their time in attempting to be as self-sustaining as possible, growing their own food and meeting as many of their needs as possible by their own efforts. Further, their commitment to this philosophy means that many of the items the general populace would regard as necessities are not desired or sought. They may, for example, build their own homes (and furniture) out of recycled materials, bake their own bread and eschew the possibilities of technologies such as computers.

This group have chosen a simple lifestyle (having for the most part compromised in the matter of housing), but for the other groups, financial restriction associated with accommodation and transport costs nearly always means unpredictability and a lack of choice. It is impossible to plan for the future and very often, as shall be seen, families also experience social isolation. The combined effect is often stressful, meaning that limited finances spill over into every area of life, impinging on relationships, mental health and family practices.

7.3 Stigma

Goffman's (1963) seminal work on stigma defines it as "an attribute that is deeply discrediting within a particular social interaction" (1963, p. 3). He further conceptualised three categories of stigma; abominations of the body, blemishes of individual character and tribal stigma. Unemployment falls into the second category. According to Goffman (1963, p. 3), the stigmatised person is then "reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one". In this study, this is a pervasive theme, appearing in three quarters of the interviews with participant families as well as in interviews with community workers. But in addition to poverty, there are a number of other reasons for the experience of stigma; most commonly it is related to the receipt of income support. Participants reported that the various reasons for their dependence on income support – being a sole parent, disabled or unemployed – often attracted negative comment, as was seen in the case studies of Michael and Barbara and Fran. Participants also reported experiencing a subjective sense of stigma because of homosexuality, ethnicity and race, age, health status and in the case of Peter and Judy, childlessness.

Poverty is, of course, a stigma in itself, and the more visible it is, the more stigmatising. Kay, who was living in a shed with her daughter Emma when I interviewed her, described the hesitancy they felt in inviting Emma's friends for a visit. "We do feel like poor people", said Kay in relation to their living conditions. In the place she had previously lived, "they call you a dirty hippie" if living in such circumstances. When she had had a job, she had kept her living arrangements "a big secret". She used to change

from gumboots to stockings at the gate, so that she appeared to be “normal” to her work colleagues.

The stigma can be experienced as prejudice, discrimination, stereotyping and on occasion, vilification. Sally, a sole parent who is an advocate for others on a low income, found her advocacy work resulted in public vilification. She also found that when she needed to find rental accommodation, the local real estate agents and landlords refused her applications. Julia also wondered why all her applications for rental were consistently refused, until she realised sole parents were considered to be unreliable tenants. Corrine, a lesbian, does not allow her daughter to play with anyone on her Housing Commission estate after she was teased about her mother’s sexuality.

7.3.1 Responses to Stigma: Injured Dignity

Participants evinced a range of responses to the experience of stigma, which included emotions as well as strategies to manage the stigma. Shame is the emotion most commonly experienced, but also frustration, anger and guilt. Participants - even those who had chosen voluntary simplicity - expressed feelings of lowered self-esteem and self-confidence, and of being upset, and this was also confirmed by the community workers. What emerges is a sense of what I have called injured dignity, drawing upon Sennett and Cobb’s (1993) exquisitely crafted *Hidden Injuries of Class*. In this work, the authors investigated the subjective experience of working class life in the US in the 1970s, concluding that although the workers did not suffer material deprivation (indeed their living conditions had improved steadily over the course of the twentieth century),

they still experienced a sense of the indignity attendant upon their social status. They then internalised this, which resulted in a sense of personal inadequacy, and, when pressed, class anger. More recently Sennett (2003) has explored the “relation between respect and inequality” (p. xvi) and the way in which welfare clients are denied both respect from others as well as self respect. This bears some similarity to Dean’s (2004b, p. 205) concept of recognition (following Honneth 1995) of our common humanity as an imperative if we are to establish “cooperative forms of responsibility (sic)” so as to manage the welfare of others both at an intimate level as well as the impersonal level. It is this denial of respect that results in the sense of stigma. In a British study, one of the participants in receipt of income support said, “I feel a bit second class. A second class person. I really do” (Sheila in Orton 2004, p. 183) in response to receiving help from friends. In my study, the sense of woundedness that emanates from the tapes and transcripts speaks for itself:

Laura was at Y (school) and that was very hard, you know, because she just couldn’t compete with kids at Y...I often like to think that it’s a learning experience for us all – and humility – because when you’ve got to go to schools and face your principal because you can’t pay bills etcetera, etcetera, you know, that’s not pleasant, by any stretch of the imagination” (Penny, sole parent).

When Julia, formerly affluent, was forced to apply for charitable assistance with her electricity bill she said, “it’s the put-down that you feel when you have to go and do that. At times you feel like you’re grovelling”. Recall also Rene’s description of the chastisement that goes with the appeal to charitable institutions for relief.

7.3.2 Responses to Stigma: Status Justification

The emotional experience of indignity leads to a number of other responses. Some participants felt they had to justify their status, as Fran explained in the previous chapter, while still others pointed to people *they* felt were undeserving. The perception of being judged as undeserving appears to provoke a sense that, while they themselves are unable to avoid the circumstances in which they find themselves, there are others who are taking advantage of the generosity of income support payments. There is very likely some truth in the stories told of robbing, drug deals and laziness, but the fact that these anecdotes appear in conjunction with expressions of distress would seem to suggest that they serve the latent function of displacement, or in postmodernist terms, a need to create another “other” to compensate for the experience of being “othered” oneself. A further reaction to the injury sustained to dignity manifested as hiding the stigmatising status.

7.3.3 Responses to Stigma: Social Isolation

Jobless families retreat from the intrusive gaze of the public. The families in my study usually shared some of the aspirations of their more affluent fellow citizens and naturally did not wish to be stigmatised. However, as we have seen, because their lifestyle is financially constrained, they cannot avoid this if they advertise their dependence on income support. So, notwithstanding their involvement in some areas of the life of the community, their own social networks are limited, often consisting of family members and perhaps one or two friends or other jobless families. This is consistent with Goffman’s (1963) notion that the stigmatised individual who is discredited tries to manage the tension attendant upon his or her status by hiding the attribute – usually by

limiting social interaction - which then results in feelings of ambivalence and alienation. Families, as we have seen, are felt to comprise loving and supportive relationships. And this does not always mean blood relatives; often participants included non-kin as family members; and some kin were excluded because they did not provide this assistance, lending support to Giddens' (1992) views regarding the nature of intimate relationships. When asked about their networks of social support, only a few close relationships were mentioned. Phrases such as "I don't like other people", "I've always been a bit of a loner" and "I prefer my own company" occurred with great frequency, a phenomenon which validates McDonald's (2000) research on the diminishment of social ties among the socially disadvantaged.

Where the participant family had strong extended family networks, there was still evinced an antipathy towards the wider community in some form or another. Paradoxically, those participant families who engaged in community work often articulated these sentiments. They felt that they were engaged in "rescuing" society or the natural environment from the ravages wrought by their more affluent fellows. Some of these participants would be categorised as "ratbags", "greenies" or "alternates" by mainstream society and were prevalent in the North Coast sections of the sample. In fact only one of the southern members of the sample participated in voluntary community activity and this had been in the past. But on the North Coast, "there are some very serious alternative people out in the hills with a very low level income and...although they receive income support, they are very actively involved in returning to the community very worthwhile - they, you know, they work for their income support"

(Lana, community worker).

7.3.4 Responses to Stigma: Compartmentalisation

The jobless families in this study were also aware that the general community is resentful of the payments jobless families receive. Therefore, as has been explained, although they perform voluntary work, study and even work or play sport, their lives are fragmented into distinct segments in order to protect their vulnerability. Sennett and Cobb (1993, pp. 193-202) refer to this as a kind of self-protective alienation, a compartmentalisation of the real self from the social self. Goffman's (1971) work on social actors is also confirmed: the participants appear in the world in various roles, playing to the script. Bill, a Newstart recipient, describes how he keeps the different areas of his life in separate compartments:

Yvonne: Your friends are not to do with Job Network?

Bill: I keep them absolutely separate. My friends at (a sport) -I don't see them outside the (sport venue). Hanno knows (about long-term income support) but he thinks it's a joke - he never puts me down. Reg stereotypes people on the dole.

Yvonne: What about your friends at church?

Bill: Yes, I don't tell them a lot - they're very conservative.

Bea is certain it is a bad idea ever to mention dependence on income support while working at the school canteen with other parents - when asked about oneself it is sensible to place the focus on another role, such as that of student or community volunteer. Income support recipients in this situation cannot participate in the standard conversations which take place among mainstream citizens in these settings - about private health insurance, holidays, superannuation or the acquisition of consumer goods -

without drawing opprobrium upon themselves or making their more affluent co-volunteers feel uncomfortable. In these face-to-face interactions lies the key to the sense of exclusion that many members of jobless families expressed and in time may mean withdrawal from activities which occasion this degree of discomfort.

The family becomes a retreat. It may experience hardship or conflict, its members may be dispersed, it may be divided or intact, conventional or alternative: but, in the words of one participant, who grounds her understanding of family firmly in spatial reality, it is a refuge from the strain of presenting the public persona: it is, she says, “a place where you can be yourself” (Hartman 2002).

7.4 Trauma

The term trauma is used here in the sense of a subjectively experienced event or situation which seriously destabilises the person’s mental and emotional equilibrium for a period of time, and which may leave a permanent vulnerability or fragility that had not previously been present. In all cases, participants experienced some degree of trauma. Carol’s child had been abducted. Abdul was a Muslim immigrant who had experienced the shame of his brother’s imprisonment. Ed had lost his home and his wife had almost died of a medical condition requiring three operations. Both Sohpie’s and Loretta’s husbands had been abusive. Bill had been involved with a fanatical religious sect from which he had experienced difficulty withdrawing; he had had brushes with the law and described himself as having battled a drinking problem. Kay’s former partner had been a drug addict. Lauren and her parents were estranged; her husband had often drunk to

excess and in addition was chronically ill. Anna had been sexually abused as a child and later suffered from depressive episodes. Peter had been a social outcast at school because of his disability. Alice's mother had been a teenage mother who neglected her and her brother, and had attempted suicide. Yvette had suffered a serious case of post-natal depression whilst with her alcoholic partner, while Kathy's husband had a breakdown, leaving her to support the family in spite of a disability. Julia's former husband was a prescription drug addict whom she described as emotionally violent. Jenny refused to speak about her former marriage at all. Gail suffered a depressive episode and considered suicide in response to the stress of her circumstances. David's first wife had died and his second wife was abusive. Lenny's partner had also been violent towards him and had neglected their child. Fran had experienced racism. Michael's childhood had been disrupted by his parents' battle over his custody. In the case of the community worker who supported Aboriginal clients, it was felt that their trauma was so massive and had spanned so many generations that it was virtually impossible to understand its enormity. Other community workers related similar stories. Crime, violence, addiction, neglect, illness and histories of abuse littered their accounts of the lives of their clients.

Of course, many persons experience trauma in their lives, and it could be objected that it is not saying much to relate such stories. But in the case of the participants, the traumas usually were multiple; for example mental illness in a family member, combined with abuse or addiction. This aspect of my research is corroborated by Butterworth's (2003) research on sole mothers, who were found to be three times as likely as partnered mothers to have experienced significant psychological trauma. Seventy per cent of Butterworth's

sample suffered from *multiple* problems, such as childhood trauma and substances use issues. Such life circumstances create major stress. We have already seen that long-term jobless families have few economic resources with which to meet any additional burdens; other resources, such as cultural capital, also are often in short supply. It is not too far-fetched to suggest that the seemingly permanent experience of poverty and stigma, added to any other ordeal such as those listed above, can easily combine to destabilise any sense of a capacity to cope with life in a society in which the dominant discourse ascribes notional equality to all persons who are deemed to be responsible for their own circumstances. Beryl, a community worker, observed that after a traumatic or stressful episode, there is eventually some resolution, but “it leaves a vulnerability and a fragility that they’d not experienced before that whole course of events took place”.

The stress or trauma is another compounding system: In Rene’s experience, “people, if they don’t have many life skills...and they’re placed under stress, will give up, they’ll do really irrational things, you know, parents who run away from their kids or just sort of dump them”. This appears to confirm Seabrook’s (1982, pp. 25-32) finding, that the loss of dignity and social bonds consequent upon long-term unemployment contributed to a sense of “broken purpose” and loss of meaning, which might then cause the sufferers to turn upon each other.

A further objection to my definition of trauma might be that if we compare these circumstances with those of, say, the low-wage Americans in Ehrenreich’s (2002) investigation, or go even further and look at the tragedies and displacements of Third

World or war-torn nations, we cannot genuinely sustain a case for trauma. On a strictly quantitative calculus, that would be true; and I have no desire to attempt to minimise the suffering people in these situations sustain. Trauma here is used in a different sense. It is used to indicate the hidden, ongoing intensity of the emotional injuries inflicted on lives, in a subtle and invisible way, by the sense of exclusion from the real business of the mainstream community and reinforced by an uneasy sense of personal culpability which is underlined by the discourse of personal responsibility. This, then, when combined with multiple stressful episodes, is how trauma is connected to long-term joblessness.

An example of the discourse just mentioned may be found in the sentiments of Mr Abbott (2001), Minister for Employment Services, who stated that "...we can't abolish poverty because poverty in part is a function of individual behaviour. We can't stop people drinking. We can't stop people gambling. We can't stop people having substance problems...". There is something corrosive about this combination of long-term exclusion and the internalisation of blame. It is but a short step to travel from injured dignity to shame, one of the primary social emotions according to Scheff (1990) who argues it also one of the most damaging. This process appears in studies going back to the Great Depression where, it could be argued, a jobless person would be less likely to blame oneself for their tribulations. Yet even then, when extenuating circumstances seemed so obvious, individuals often located the cause of their misery within themselves as Lowenstein's (1989) oral histories show. Indeed, Lowenstein's work shows that many of her informants were left with permanent emotional scars from their Depression years.

The question which then arises is, how do jobless families deal with trauma of this nature?

7.5 Coping/Adapting

Some of the adaptive strategies have been discussed above in terms of responses to difficult situations. However, there are several ways in which the participants attempted to deal with their circumstances, as documented below.

7.5.1 Reframing

By far the most common adaptive strategy, which appeared in nearly every transcript, was an attempt to reframe circumstances in some manner. In the first instance, a number of the participants expressed the belief that they came to some kind of acceptance of their situation. Though they continue to nurture hopes and dreams, they have ceased to believe their condition is a temporary aberration. Some have reached the point of resignation and even depression while others call upon spiritual resources. “There’s some things you can’t stop worrying about but you can’t change anything. Just take things as they come – I’ve found it works”, says Ed. Whilst some had thus arrived at a form of existentialism (“being in this situation, you learn to live in the present” – Sophie), many more respondents explicitly referred to spiritual or religious beliefs to help explain the present state of affairs in terms of a divine will: “Whatever happens, happens”, says Mulvena; “I think everything is meant to happen for a reason”. Yvette is sure that without her faith, she would probably be dead by now, “because what’s gone on in the last ten years has been too much to cope with”.

In conjunction with this, reframing the situation was also achieved in many cases by the cultivation of positive attitudes – for example, to focus on the non-material blessings which had been bestowed upon one, such as health, loving relationships or appreciation of the environment, as Yvette did. Recall also Michael’s stubborn optimism in the face of a seemingly intractable situation. Further, many participants have reflected at length upon their circumstances and come to look for what virtue may be found; statements such as, “we’re not destroying the earth consuming all that junk like people with money do”, or “we spend time with our children, not like couples who are always working” are common, particularly amongst those who have opted for voluntary simplicity. In such a way, the difficulties of one’s existence are transformed into consolations.

7.5.2 Surviving

Survival is sometimes treated as an opportunity for exercising initiative, creativity and resourcefulness. Kara explained how she managed to obtain necessary health aids by “working the system”. Because she and her family were in receipt of Newstart, they did not qualify for reimbursement for these aids. (Both herself and her partner have a disability, but it is not deemed to be severe enough to be on a pension, even though their chances of obtaining employment are restricted severely both by the nature of their disability, and the public perception that they cannot do a good job). Here is how she managed:

I’ve got plenty of connections to education, to all different services and people know me well in the area. So I help families. I don’t get paid, it’s voluntary. Then I learned all these things along the way about the disability area and if it’s inaccessible, to link, how to get into services that were previously inaccessible (sic)...they cut the free aid so we must pay. It was free before. In the old system it was free all your life. And then the government cut that, the Howard government, when he came in...But when I found out my daughter (had the same disability), we had to go for a test and have an aid fitted. And I said to them at the time, there’s something wrong with my aid, and they secretly swapped and gave me a free

aid under my daughter's name (laughs). Thank God. And my husband was very jealous! (more laughter). But two years later when he was sick, he got the sick benefits pension, so he could then access the service. So he went in, so he booked us all in (laughter). So we were getting access to the services.

Hope also played its part in sustaining some participants. They often continued to try to extricate themselves from their situation by applying for jobs, undertaking courses of study, or attempting to use their creative energies to make extra income, for example, by selling handmade craft objects at local markets, or by well developed budgeting skills and becoming adept in the exercise of frugality. The game of survival also prompted some participants to engage in self-care; diet, exercise, the use of humour and emotional support were common strategies in this category.

7.5.3 Consolations

But not all found it possible to be so uncompromisingly positive; and even for those who use these strategies, there are moments of rebellion, of despair, and of need of some consolation of a less salubrious kind. Into this category falls withdrawal from the situation, sometimes because of illness, sometimes through emotional withdrawal, but more usually by the use of substances, or “chemically aided escape” as one community worker expressed it. We have seen from the material cited above that alcohol and other drugs feature prominently in many participants' lives, sometimes to the detriment of themselves and their families. In the participant family sample, nearly two thirds of the participants or their partners use, misuse or have in the past misused substances such as alcohol and marijuana, or indulge in a degree of gambling. The cost of these consolations can sometimes be managed in various ways so that they do not destroy the delicate financial juggling act, but most are aware of negative impacts of these practices, which

include health, legal and financial effects and strained relationships. Sometimes this recognition prompts the abandonment of the destructive habit, while others see it as a necessary coping mechanism without which life would become unendurable. Bea fiercely resisted the self-righteous injunctions of those living in comfortable circumstances to abstain from what she calls “self-medication”. Her only vice, she says, is cigarettes, and “they’re my best friend – they’re always there through all your moods” (Hartman 2002).

The withdrawal can cause problems when one partner is left to cope with the exigencies of daily life. Lana (community worker) commented that

“at risk of generalising, the men will be the heavier users (of cannabis)...they withdraw from their family, they withdraw from their partner and they withdraw from their children...and their wife says, look, he’s just not there, I’m doing a full-time job of raising this family – and he’s not even in work, he just sits on the back verandah and smokes dope. And that will be about his feeling of inadequacy...”

Another form of consolation takes the form of “brightening the minute”, as Rene, quoted above, calls impulse spending. The constant financial struggle and inducements to engage in consumption sometimes is overwhelming. Some degree of indulgence is needed, even if it is only a bar of chocolate. For some, it brings disaster in the form of debt, as discussed above. For others, it makes life bearable.

7.5.4 Coping with Emotional Dissonance: Drawing on Cultural Resources

One concept in particular which Layder posits in relation to how individuals are constituted is the notion of a dialectic of separateness and relatedness, whereby the individual is pulled to and fro by the internal contradiction of needing meaningful connection with others as well as aloneness. This gives rise to both altruism and egoism

which must be managed in order to maintain ontological security. Where this does not occur, self-regard suffers and may progress to the point of mental illness.

Another concept (found in the psychological literature) which deals with internal contradiction is that of cognitive dissonance (Wickland and Brehm 1976; Brehm and Cohen 1962; Festinger 1957). This refers to an individual holding mutually contradictory ideas simultaneously. This too creates a tension within a person's mental interior which must be managed. An example not related to this study might be that of a homosexual, also a committed Catholic, who simultaneously believes that sexuality is conferred by God but also that homosexuality is sinful. Several possible options are available for managing this instance of cognitive dissonance; a person may choose to live with the contradiction without feeling the need to resolve it; effectively, this amounts to a type of compartmentalisation. Alternatively, the dissonance may create such tension that the person feels obliged to choose one or the other belief and to act upon it. Whatever course the person adopts may not actually relieve the cognitive discomfort and this may affect his or her self esteem or mental health.

In accordance with Adaptive Theory, concepts which appear useful may be borrowed from other fields or disciplines and adapted to suit the needs of the research. In this case the concept of the dialectic of separateness and relatedness, which bears some similarity to the idea of cognitive dissonance (in terms of mental contradiction), has been borrowed and refashioned. It appears that jobless families suffer not so much from an internal dissonance which is related to cognition but rather that they experience contradiction in

their emotions. On the one hand, there is the experience of shame, inadequacy, humiliation and resentment, yet on the other, individuals attempt to generate resilience, a sense of humour and an appreciation of life. I argue that this has the same effect as the above two concepts in that it creates psychological stress. One way of dealing with this is to draw upon cultural resources to construct alternative subjectivities.

For the jobless families who directly took part in this study, the absence of competing claims on their loyalties such as a career creates space for the parenting or caring role to become supreme, creating meaning and giving structure to daily life. In the privileging of the parenting role in particular, the participants can be seen to be drawing upon discourses of parenthood which nourish their self-esteem. This can be seen as an example of Layder's (1997, p. 209) assertion that discourses do not only construct subjectivities, they are actively drawn upon and "edited" to suit the subject's purpose. Many participants see themselves as without material resources with which to hold their place in the world; but what they can be is "good" parents. The following poem is an example of the discourse of "good" parenting (found in a family counselling facility) which is common in popular self-help literature and reflects many of the sentiments expressed by the participants. Anyone coming to the facility could see the poem on the wall and reflect upon it whilst waiting for their appointment:

IF I HAD MY CHILD TO RAISE ALL OVER AGAIN

By Dianne Loomas

If I had my child to raise all over again,
I'd finger paint more, and point the finger less.

I'd do less correcting, and more connecting.
I'd take my eyes off my watch, and watch with my eyes,
I would care to know less, and know to care more.
I'd take more hikes and fly more kites
I'd stop playing serious, and seriously play.
I'd run through more fields, and gaze at more stars,
I'd do more hugging and less tugging.
I would be firm less often and affirm much more.
I'd build self-esteem first, and the house later.
I'd teach less about the love of power,
And more about the power of love.

In this poem, children are constructed as having non-material needs - for love, approval and fun - without which they risk becoming damaged adults, and such a statement is almost universally accepted in contemporary society. Here, then, is a cultural resource of which participants can readily avail themselves; it not only allows the creation of meaningful roles which are possible to fulfil, but also provides a kind of buttress against the judgments of the mainstream community. To be able to be a "good" parent is near to the hearts of almost all parents. Some parents see the provision of financial stability as the ultimate proof of their love, since they would be only too happy to spend "quality time" with their children, as the discourse enjoins. Where this option is impossible, as it usually is for jobless families, it is still possible to see oneself as providing for one's offspring in intangible ways.

In addition, the good parent discourse provides ammunition with which to invert negative into positive, as Layder (1997, 137-140) describes meatworkers in one study have done (Ackroyd and Crowdy 1990). In the case of the meatworkers, they drew upon the

socially perceived “dirty” nature of their work (killing animals) and turned it into a source of pride; they saw themselves as possessing special qualities needed to do this type of work. In the same way, jobless families co-opt the “good” parent discourse to counteract the perceived negatives of joblessness. Many participants expressed this at length. Yvette, a sole parent, says,

I don't believe that you have children and then let someone else bring them up...I wanted to be there for them...my kids don't get everything, but they get the best of what they need. That's why they go to what I consider the best school. They don't get Pokemons and what have you but – they're happy, they've got each other. Esme and Patience will happily tell you that we're the richest people in the country, because we love each other heaps.

Anna condemned her more affluent neighbours for paying too much attention to earning money: “Money sometimes sets up false realities. We recycle things – use what we need”. For Loretta, “my children are my number one priority”. Lenny, a sole parent believes his son needs a father upon reaching a certain age. In looking back upon his own (fatherless) childhood, he came to the conclusion that from the age of 9 or 10, a boy needs a male role model in order to become a successful, well-adjusted adult. “I'm dedicated to my son”, he says, “you've got to be there...when he goes to and comes home from school. And the child likes that, too. It's boring, you don't feel that safety when no-one's there. Mum never had a clue. I ate cakes and lollies in her absence”. These sentiments are to some extent corroborated by Craig's work on sole parents, work and time (2004, p. 20), where she concluded that her findings implied that “even in the face of considerable economic deprivation sole parents prioritise their caring function over their earning function”. And although it might be argued that not all of the participants in my study conform to the “good parent” image, this is beside the point: no

doubt all parents “fail” to live up to the ideal at times. The important point here is that the participants use the discourse to give meaning and structure to their circumstances.

7.6 Being in the System

The final theme which all recipients shared by definition, is that their lives are to a significant degree determined by their relationship with the social security system. The nature of authority relations between jobless families and those institutions with whom they come in contact is now explored. Participants fall into two groups in their attitude towards authority more generally; those who “cop it sweet“, and others whose attitudes have hardened into something like class consciousness.

7.6.1 Class Consciousness

Although class became an unfashionable notion along with the collapse of socialist ideology in the late twentieth century, it does not follow that it is an invalid concept. Structural explanations have much to offer, but because we are dealing with the lived experience of participants, Charlesworth’s (2000, p. 65) phenomenological definition of class as a subjectively experienced phenomenon has more relevance. He asserts that the experience of class means that one inhabits “a particular social realm, constituted by certain objects and certain relations on the basis of one’s embodying incorporated forms that lead one to be treated factually, as an object possessed of an essence”. The subjective experience of being treated in this manner in this study arises mostly from the nature and frequency of interactions between the members of jobless families and community workers in the welfare industry.

It has already been shown in the preceding chapter that those referred to as “generational” recipients of income support have a lifestyle that is not centred around work or an expectation of engaging in full-time, permanent employment. According to Suzette (community worker), if children are “born into families that have been dependent on income support for a long period of time, there’s an expectation when they become a certain age, that they can then claim income support as well”.

The interactions between this group and the social security system often is mediated by the culture of crisis within which they live. Multiple factors such as drug addiction, mental health issues, histories of abuse and involvement in criminal or illegal activity means that their time is often taken up negotiating with community workers ways of dealing with the various crises which befall them. For example, Colin (community worker) explained that homelessness is often a consequence of non-payment of rent due to impulse spending or obligatory debt repayments. Alcohol and other drug issues bring recipients into contact with the legal system, and those with mental health issues may spend protracted periods dealing with health institutions. According to Roy (community worker), whole Aboriginal communities live in this culture of crisis in a more or less permanent state. In this atmosphere, not only is a job the last priority, it becomes impossible to break out of this way of life. The net effect is to entrench this group of people into a distinct group, of which they evince some consciousness.

The generational group's social network consists almost entirely of other generational recipients, often because they are concentrated on Housing Commission estates. Within this tight social group, pressure is exerted on those who wish to escape this way of life in the form of "cutting down the tall poppies". Suzette believes that the low self-esteem that is a consequence of living permanently on income support creates a pressure to "be like everybody else. Otherwise you think you're too good for us. And I think that drags aspiring young people down and I think it's really difficult to break through that".

Within the group of income support recipients who participated directly in the study there were indications of class consciousness in general, and also some flashes of rebellion. Many participants either had partners whom they described as originating from a higher socio-economic status than themselves, or they themselves had families of origin who were wealthy. For example, David believed his disability meant he was better off in the working class, though "that's not what my middle class parents wanted", while Lauren expressed a sense of alienation from her mother-in-law, because she was a wealthy socialite. Class resentment was expressed by George, who was aware that rates of pay for low-paid occupations had not changed significantly in more than a decade saying "it's all shot to shit...now they want you to do twice the hours for less money and twice the work". And on the same issue Lenny had this to say: "It's the gap between the wages - the people who work hard and the people who get a lot of money; the harder you work, the less money you get...that's what makes me angry." And Bea's rage was incendiary, her resistance palpable: "we're not fucking idiots and we know we're being shafted - and we're not prepared to be". The expression of such sentiments would seem to give the lie

to the notion that class is decomposing in the post-modern era (Pakulski 2004), though it (class) may no longer be based exclusively upon the Marxist notion of expropriation of surplus from the labour of the worker.

7.6.2 “Just Cop it Sweet”

Of the total number of families who have participated in the study, all but three have expressed negative or even hostile attitudes towards government agencies. Centrelink is singled out for the most criticism, because of the apparent capriciousness of its decision making with potentially devastating impact, but participants also display distrust and suspicion towards Job Network agencies who administer job-finding activities for them. Bill says “most of the people (at a Job Network Agency) are good but you can’t trust them all”. When asked what they could do, he replied, “Breach me - report me to Centrelink - then I’d lose three quarters of my dole”. Recall also Barbara’s lament, that she and Michael “hated” their enforced dependence on Centrelink. Rene (Centrelink social worker) explained that in the past, when people applied for unemployment benefit, there were only two things to be done; apply for benefit from the Department of Social Security, and visit the Commonwealth Employment Service, the agency which helped any person – whether in receipt of benefit or not – to find employment. Now, “there’re sent off to Job Network members and it’s all electronic and people don’t know, and they don’t get their letters and they’ve got people telling them different things. It’s very complicated”.

But those who find some precarious employment and are on residual benefit often have

the greatest difficulty. Jobs involve additional expense such as transport and clothing but the net gain from precarious employment - though needed - is minimal for Newstart recipients, due to the effect of the effective marginal tax rate discussed in Chapter five. Newstart recipients who work are required to provide regular updates of their earnings, meaning adjustments in their residual payment which are difficult to monitor. Michael recounted how he repaid an alleged overpayment without demur; after previous encounters which left him the worse for wear, he felt it was better to “cop it sweet” in spite of his belief that he had not in fact been overpaid. In addition, these workers are still required to look for and be available for full-time work and feel themselves to be at the mercy of Job Network agencies who may require them to take “suitable full-time employment”. This may involve expensive travel and may not last, leaving them without even the precarious security of their former part-time work. Judy was working eighteen hours a week in her home town and caring for her husband, who had a medical condition severe enough to render him eligible for disability pension. She was asked to attend interviews for full-time employment in centres up to 45 kilometres away. When she tried to renounce her meagre residual payment to avoid this kind of “intensive harassment”, she was pursued by the Job Network case manager who persuaded her to stay registered. She assumed this was because of the financial incentive her registration provided for the agency.

Obtaining reliable information from Centrelink is felt to be fraught with difficulties, involving endless calls and visits. One participant felt so strongly that she produced a thesis-sized written analysis of her dealings with Centrelink, detailing contradictory

rulings, reversals and varying interpretations of policy as the family's income fluctuated due to the variable hours worked in casual employment.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a description of the major commonalities that affect the lives of the jobless families in this study, namely, poverty, stigma, trauma, coping/adaptation and being in the system. It will be seen from the preceding discussion that the families who participated directly in this study were usually able to maintain a standard of living which usually provided basic necessities and sometimes even allowed for a façade of apparent normality to be presented to the outside world, as long as the privacy of the home was not breached. In this respect, much of the research confirms Bauman's (1998) argument that the most worrying feature of poverty is its invisibility and the consequential social isolation that follows. Bauman believes that rendering a group invisible and undeserving leads to the possibility of removing that group from moral and ethical consciousness, leaving but a short step towards a temptation to "get rid altogether of a phenomenon reduced to sheer nuisance and unredeemed, not even mitigated, by any ethical consideration that is due to the suffering Other" (Bauman 1998a, p. 94). That this step has not yet been taken is immaterial; it is worrying enough that the conditions of possibility have been created (and not only for income support recipients; asylum seekers are a more forceful example of this process).

Notwithstanding this negative potential, for the non-generational group, a measure of stability is provided by the security of income support payments, which often is

supplemented by precarious employment and transactions in the informal economy. Thus to this extent, income support is meeting one of the primary aims of the welfare state. For the generational group, income support is the backdrop against which lives fractured by chaos and crises are conducted. Sometimes it can be manipulated to provide for varying needs, but essentially it appears to be a way of life from which there is no escape. It also seems to produce a sense of alienation from the mainstream and a perception that the administrative arms of welfare policy are coercive and punitive rather than assistive. Whether rebellious or compliant, it is clear that the cumulative effect of being “in the system” for long periods is a generalised sense of disempowerment for both groups. Further, it appears to lead to the drawing in - the implosion, almost - of families upon themselves as they attempt to deal with the poverty, stigma and trauma attendant upon their circumstances. Thus their life world has a hidden quality which means, to return to the opening quotation, that they live not just with nothing, but with the hell of being nothing.

The following chapter will proceed to investigate the mechanisms driving this interaction between the life world and the system; and the outcomes and the family processes which occur as a result. These findings will then be utilised in the final chapter to explore (and perhaps explode) some of the stereotypical images of jobless found in popular conception.

Chapter Eight: Displacement

Every action has an equal and opposite reaction (Newton's 3rd law of motion, Newton 1972 [1686]).

8.1 Introduction

The use of Adaptive Theory was noted in Chapter three to have as its purpose the generation of “theoretical models of the social reality that is the subject of the research” (Layder 1998, p. 152). Layder (1998, p. 152) states that the use of his methodology will ensure that at some point in the research, “a theoretical model of agency-system interlocks will emerge which will provide an indication of what is going on and why”. In accordance with the aims of this project and the use of Adaptive Theory, this chapter attempts to build provisional theory, based on the research undertaken, which can enhance our understanding of how long term joblessness impacts on affected families. I have previously made clear that one of the primary interests of this thesis is to expose and elaborate system/life world interconnections in the lives of jobless families. In so

doing, the relational dynamics within families which are attendant upon the long-term receipt of income support are explored. Hence the chapter addresses the research questions regarding the impact long-term joblessness has on family structure, relationships and relations between the families and wider society.

The central aim of this chapter is to theorise the data. This means applying the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter two and using it as the refractive lens through which to view the findings. Accordingly, I will be concentrating largely upon the information I have collected, which has been comprehensively situated in theoretical, methodological, historical, ideological and policy contexts in earlier chapters. However, the following is the result, not only of engagement with the data, but also of a process of dialogue between prior theory and the concepts embedded in that data, and this is acknowledged or discussed where appropriate.

These explorations are pursued in the following manner. First, the concept of displacement as an organising metaphor for the chapter is outlined. It is then applied to the data in order to examine the articulation between system and life world in the particular case of the regional jobless families in this study. The chapter concludes with a summary of how displacement can be used as a theoretical aid in understanding the processes and impacts of long-term income support on families.

8.2 Displacement as a Theoretical Device

The notion of displacement came to me during the second wave of interviews (with community workers). I was interviewing the co-ordinator of a community centre when

the co-ordinator actually used the term in relation to the effects of the housing boom on low-income families. After I had typed the transcript I began to see how the concept could be employed as an overarching framework for much of the data I had collected to date. I recalled an experiment we had performed in the science laboratory in my second year at high school, where Newton's third law of motion was demonstrated. An object was placed in a container of water and we observed that the rise in the water level was congruent with the mass of the object.

It will immediately be apparent that the principle of displacement as a scientific law belongs to a positivist paradigm, suggesting as it does a causal chain of action and reaction. It might therefore be objected that the use of such an explanatory mechanism traduces the qualitative spirit of inquiry. To this objection I would remind the reader that though Adaptive Theory is not positivist, it does embrace moderate versions of both objectivism, which registers an external reality, and realist social theory, which accepts the notion of causative mechanisms, as described in Chapter three (pp. 51-52). In addition, Adaptive Theory endorses the use or adaptation of any extant theoretical material which may seem relevant or assist in theory-building. However, I hasten to add that the use of displacement as a theoretical/metaphorical device to express possible interpretations of the material should not be understood as reification. Nevertheless, with this caveat in mind, I would argue that it has merit in terms of its explanatory power; this in turn may lead to positive consequences in policy-making processes.

Displacement is the process whereby something is moved out of an occupied space, thereby creating a change in conditions. As applied to the social world, it is a spatial metaphor most readily understood if employed in a geographical sense. To illustrate, the co-ordinator referred to above said that the number of jobless families in her area had diminished greatly, having “relocated to other parts of the shire which are more affordable and (have) more availability for housing” (Beryl, community worker). I will return to geographic displacement below.

Understood as a process, displacement is usually a result of a stronger force dislodging a weaker one. In the illustration above, it can be seen that those who enjoy more economic power displace the poor; the rickety wharves where anyone could fish, swim or play are replaced by gated communities of affluent high-rise dwellers who close off access to a previous commons. Aboriginal people were hunted down with superior firepower, then confined to missions. Displacement therefore represents the means by which power is exerted along a downward gradient.

It is my contention that we can understand many social processes in terms of displacement. Moreover, the pushing aside, as it were, that takes place, does not occur in a vacuum. When something is displaced, there is a corresponding effect, as demonstrated in the above example. Pushing jobless families further to the regions will mean increased stresses on the physical infrastructure of the affected towns. There is even less chance of gaining employment in the formal labour market because of physical isolation, and effects may spill over into family lives, manifesting as increased stress levels, with

consequences for family interactions. This recalls C Wright Mills' (1959) celebrated notion of public troubles (such as an oversupply of labour) which can be personalised and made to appear as individual failings (unwillingness to work, "bludging"). Therefore, though displacement as an organising concept can be applied both within and between the spheres of system and life world, a common process is that a system displacement will result in life world displacements of various kinds. Then, when the displacement becomes an irresolvable crisis in the life world, there may be a pendulum-like action, whereby the individual's problems eventually become the responsibility of the state. In our example, when rent becomes entirely unaffordable, policy measures such as rent assistance or provision of public housing might be introduced. This points to the nature of the system-life world nexus.

The concept of *leeway* is a useful complement to that of displacement. Leeway means having room to move. Where there is no leeway, resources are so restricted that anything that tips the balance creates a crisis. This might then lead to catastrophic displacement as in when there is not enough room in the beaker for the water, and it spills. Returning to our earlier example, not enough money for higher rent means being forced to move to cheaper accommodation. A simple formulaic representation of this process might be depicted as:

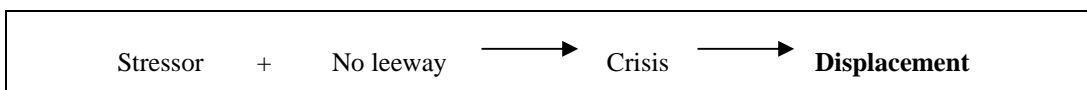


Figure 8.1: The displacement process

In addition to oscillating between system and life world, displacement can become a compounding system if a level of equilibrium cannot be achieved at some point. We saw in the preceding chapter how multiple barriers to social participation can lead to entrenchment of disadvantage or catastrophic outcomes. The data repeatedly pointed to the ways in which disadvantage compounded to become inescapable, until the life world is thrown back upon the system. This might be best conceptualised as a spiral, so that there is a somewhat circular movement in the sense of a vicious circle (as in generational welfare dependency); in the case of the disadvantaged, each turn of the circle often represents a downward movement rather than an amelioration in the general situation. The diagram below attempts to illustrate this process.

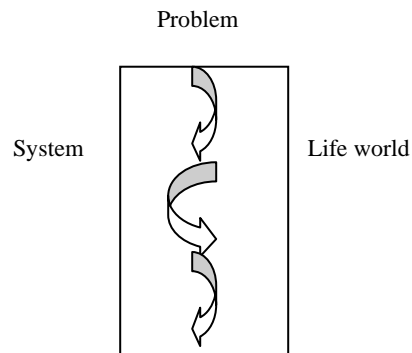


Figure 8.2: Alternation of displacement between system and life world

As we saw in Chapter two, Habermas (1987) contends that the system colonises the life world in ways that are pathological, but perhaps this is to oversimplify. Layder (1997) suggests that this colonisation is not necessarily pathological, and also acknowledges the way in which each is embedded in the other in his theory of domains. But in reality, sometimes it is almost impossible to separate them at all, even in the way in which I have attempted. The system *is* the life world, as the following example illustrates. Lisa, a

social worker with a non-government organisation, describes how sole parents might or might not declare a de facto relationship to Centrelink:

Centrelink can be another person, you know. A lot of these people don't have friends, supports, whatever, so the person behind the desk is having a bit of a chat with them and if they're feeling good about the relationship and thinking it's going to happen for a long time, then they'll say, oh yeah, well actually no, he's moved in with me and we're living as a happy family (emphasis added).

This declaration will render the mother ineligible for Parenting Payment (single) so that the cost of supporting her and her children is displaced upon the new partner (nearly always men partnering sole parent mothers). Or, if the new partner is also in receipt of income support, the partner will be placed on Newstart and the mother on Parenting Payment Partnered, which effectively reduces the income available to her. According to Lisa, this can produce new hardship, which may strain the relationship. This might then result in the partner moving out again, or a new declaration that the relationship has ended – whether it has or not - and the social security system again reinstates sole parent payments.

In the above quote, we see that the individual behind the desk at Centrelink becomes to the sole parent not an agent of the system, but in fact a friend. However, there are systemic consequences for the enactment of a friendship-like interaction, and the sole parent's life world changes in ways that might not be tolerable. In this example we can see how a factor like the material means of support is displaced back and forth between the new partner (life world) and the welfare system (system) whilst at the same time the two become almost indistinguishable, certainly to the actors involved. To cast this scenario in terms of Domain Theory, situated activity such as the encounter described above properly belongs to the life world, whilst contextual resources is a domain residing

within the system, yet here they merge. Various discourses such as the deserving/undeserving welfare recipient discourse are in operation, having varied amounts of influence on the protagonists' decision, some of whom are vested with institutional power (for example the Centrelink officer). The outcome is therefore mediated by power, social relations, discourse and practices but is not predetermined; it has an emergent quality, in this case dependent on the Centrelink officer's discretion. But there may be a cyclical process at work also, reproducing certain social relations and practices, as when the officer follows due process, cuts off the payment and reintroduces a system-like relationship with the client.

In this example, the downward spiral is not inevitable, but may go something like this: the mother will eventually be ineligible for this type of payment when her youngest child turns 16,²⁵ and she will be subject to the indignities and difficulties of the Newstart payment. She has most likely had no chance to accumulate any kind of savings and so, if she cannot find employment that is not precarious, and her family are unable to provide for her, she faces an old age of penury.²⁶ This illustration shows how displacement represents the articulating mechanism between system and the life world. I now turn to an examination of various displacements at the system level, beginning with geography and labour.

8.3 System Level Displacement and Effects: Geography and Labour

Earlier, I used the case of physical displacement to illustrate the general concept. Beryl, a

²⁵ Or six years for new claimants from July 2006 onwards (*Australian Government Budget 2005-06*).

²⁶ See (Walter 2002) for evidence relating to the poverty of sole parents and single aged women.

community worker, was describing the way that the movement of more affluent, highly skilled people to the area resulted in an immense increase in the price of real estate, forcing out the long term residents.

So often they (new arrivals) are fairly well heeled; they may have a life change, like a sea change, come to the area. Technology's allowed a lot of people to be able to work from this area and continue their working life...like, the welfare client that we see are not that sort of person, but that's what's *displacing* a lot of the welfare base that X has always been. So it's hard for the ones on the lower income end to survive here, and that's the *displacement factor* (Cheryl, community worker) (emphasis added).

So it is that Anna and Salim (Newstart recipients) can find themselves at a dead end in unsuitable and unsanitary accommodation, but "it was the last cheap rent". This is validated by Stephen Kelly's (2005) study of housing affordability on the Far North Coast of New South Wales. Stephen Kelly explains that the interaction between three factors - large numbers of real estate investors who can take advantage of negative gearing, the First Home Ownership Grant scheme which led to large numbers of new buyers, and "cashed-up sea-changers" - have driven prices so high in the recent housing boom that housing affordability is almost at its lowest point on record (*SCU News* 2005).

Those on the lowest incomes effectively become displaced persons, though not in the most traumatic sense of the word equated with refugees. However, the ramifications do bear some similarity; those who are displaced do not belong wherever they may end up and their presence may be resented. When Bea repainted her car herself because she could not afford the cost of spray painting, she finally managed to impress her neighbours. "They thought I couldn't be that bad. They don't like bombay cars lowering the tone of the neighbourhood and their spic and span houses, they think you're a ratbag. They barge into your house and accuse your kid if there's a theft" (Bea, sole parent).

These words recall the exclusionary activity documented by social geographers such as Sibley (1995), who argues that this behaviour (keeping one's territory neat, tidy and well bounded) reflects fear of the Other.

This geographic displacement is consequent upon an earlier movement of people from the metropolis to the regions; many of the jobless families in this study originated from Sydney and Melbourne and had moved to minimise living costs. In fact none of the participants interviewed in the northern regions of the sample had grown up in that area. In already fragile regional economies, such migration exacerbates regional unemployment, which is known to be much higher than in major cities. To underline this point, it is worth comparing unemployment and income support rates in the regions in this study with those for New South Wales as a whole (Table 8.1). The figures for Richmond-Tweed take in this study's two northern area samples.

Table 8.1: Unemployment rate, income support numbers and average income comparisons. Constructed from *ABS National Regional Profile (2004b)*.

	<i>New South Wales</i>	<i>Richmond- Tweed</i>	<i>Outer S-W Sydney</i>
Population	6,634,110	139,792	237,251
Unemployment rate	6.1%	11.2%	8.5%
Total selected income support customers**	1,474,412	44,931	43,334
Average individual taxable income	\$41,623	\$30,423	\$36,764

* All figures as at 30 June 2002.

** These comprise Age pension, Disability Support Pension, Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance, Parenting Payment Single and other pensions and allowances.

Immediately it can be seen that unemployment in these regions is substantially higher than average for the state as a whole. Further, the total number of income support recipients in the northern region is roughly one third of the region's total population, while in the south-western Sydney fringe it is approximately one fifth. This compares with the total for New South Wales of approximately one sixth. In case the enormity of these statistics should escape the reader, it should be pointed out that the above figures show that in 2002 (and there is no reason to suppose the proportionate differences have changed significantly), one in every three persons on the Far North Coast was in receipt of income support. The disadvantage this implies is staggering, the more so because it is hidden from view. Thus it could be said that unemployment has also been geographically displaced from the cities to the regions, and that such geographical displacement results in physical invisibility, because the movement is ever further to the margins. This also demonstrates the interrelationship between labour and geography. Of course, the original displacement of the Indigenous inhabitants produced this kind of marginalisation on a massive scale, with consequent grief and unresolved trauma.

I have already alluded to the way in which blame for unemployment can be displaced onto individuals. However, this is the end result of a series of displacements occurring at the system level over the course of history. The first great displacement in relation to labour and geography in Europe was the Enclosure of the commons prior to the Industrial Revolution. It is safe to argue that since the Industrial Revolution, as countries' economies prospered, those who were sacrificed – either by obscene working conditions and appalling pay, or by unemployment – were the least advantaged in society (Thompson 1980). This is

still occurring: The jobs that disappear first in developed economies are unskilled positions in the manufacturing sector, and they are exported to developing countries where labour is cheap and still easily exploited (Sinfield 1981). In taking this view, I concur with pessimistic globalists who believe that global economic restructuring “has actually undermined economic prospects for many millions of the world’s poorest people” (Galbraith 1999, p. 1). One only has to point to the coal mines of China or the sweat shops of Thailand for corroboration of the exploitation of labour (*China Labor Watch* 2004; Xiaohui and Xinhua 2004; Fung 2001; AMRC&HKCIC 1997). The process of shedding unskilled jobs may then be followed by a round of middle management redundancies in the wealthy economies, but the first casualties are always the least powerful. This demonstrates the “power principle” of displacement.

Within developed nations, the labour market becomes concentrated around the metropolises due to the globalised economy. Young people in rural and regional areas with limited economic opportunities migrate to the cities to pursue study and employment, and the regional economies stagnate or regress (Gabriel 2000). This makes the regions an attractive option for people on low fixed incomes, such as disability pensioners and sole parents, as housing tends to be cheaper. Parkinson (2005) has used data from the Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) project to study the connection between labour market precariousness and housing, provisionally concluding that there is an increasing polarisation between those who experience both insecure employment and housing together and those who do not. Regions thus become the receptacles for those displaced from the cities on account of being unable to

contribute to the globalised economy, with consequences for how labour is distributed, remunerated and performed.

8.3.1 The Rationing of Labour

We have seen that current policy in neoliberal states valorises paid work as the only worthy form of social participation. Thus all welfare recipients (save old-age pensioners and those suffering from extreme impairment such as quadriplegia) can be constructed as undeserving if they do not or cannot participate economically. Yet, as I argued in Chapter six, in a reputedly prospering national economy with a low official rate of unemployment, there are not enough permanent full-time jobs for all those who would like one, particularly in rural and regional Australia. Recently released data tends to confirm that this continues to be the case. The ABS (2005b) reports that in September 2004, of the nearly four million Australians aged between 15 and 69 years who are not in the labour force, just under one third - or over one million - of these wanted to work. A small subset, discouraged jobseekers, were canvassed as to why they were not actively looking for work. Over 20 per cent gave “no jobs in locality or line of work” as the reason (ABS 2005b). Further evidence of a lack of suitable employment is to be found in the most recent ABS (2005c) report of underemployed workers. Eighteen per cent reported no vacancies in their line of work as the reason for their underemployment, while another ten percent reported “no vacancies at all”. This data demonstrates that even when the economy improves, those with impediments to work, such as the care of children, a physical disability or a mental illness are unlikely to enjoy easier access to suitable work, a point made by Walker and Wiseman (2003) in relation to New Labour’s welfare policy prescriptions in the UK, but equally applicable here.

8.3.2 Free Labour

We have also seen how many of those receiving income support “work” for their payment through other forms of participation such as voluntary work or study. Yvette (sole parent) devoted many hours of the week to her duties as a wildlife carer. Anna (parenting payment, husband receiving residual Newstart) was involved with a Landcare group as well as sitting on a number of community committees. Kate volunteered at a local aged care facility before enrolling in full-time study. However in the formal labour market, the tight situation can be exploited by unscrupulous employers, who may be tempted to expropriate the labour of income support recipients. A number of participants reported anecdotes where a job seeker was asked to do unpaid work as a trial. Others expressly volunteered in the hope of obtaining paid work. In this way, a part of the cost of labour is displaced from employers to the state.

8.3.3 Informal Labour

The displacement of full employment from developed to developing nations results, as we have seen, in regional economies with proportionally large numbers of people reliant upon long-term income support. I have shown that many of these recipients hold down precarious employment, but such a state of affairs also favours the development of an informal or “black” labour market, some of which may be effectively subsidised by the welfare system. Income support payments of their own cannot admit of a reasonable standard of living in line with general community standards. Welfare recipients are caught in a double bind: if they try to live within their means, they must do without many taken-for-granted commodities and services, for example a telephone and transport.

However, to do this causes their poverty to be visible in a small community, which leads to labelling and stigmatisation. Moreover, this inability to participate socially further entrenches them in their situation – who can find work, or even like-minded others with which to socialise, if they are deprived of the means of communication and transport? So, as we saw in the preceding chapter, long-term income support recipients often try to live like others (or at least present a façade), which either results in debt (for which they can be condemned as improvident) or they must find a way to afford their way of life that does not attract social opprobrium. Of course families who participate in the formal labour market also take on debt, but in most cases they are able to service it. Recipients of long-term income support usually have run down all available resources, so the debt must be serviced out of an income which can only meet bare necessities.

If there is no work in the formal labour market, income can be supplemented by working in the informal labour market. As a situated observer of two of the regions in this study, I would argue this has become an integral feature of their economies.²⁷ Recall Barbara's cleaning work which she did not declare. If this cleaning were to be paid at award rates, it would be more expensive and the demand for it would drop. This would result in a corresponding loss to the national economy as the households who rely upon this service take less work in the formal labour market in order to meet their domestic obligations. People are able to work for very low rates of pay if they receive cash in hand and can rely on an income support payment. A self-employed concreter, for example, may not be able to afford the costs associated with employing an apprentice, but can pay cash in hand for

²⁷ Although relatively impermeable to official scrutiny: recent ATO estimates are that the informal economy only accounts for around 1.3 per cent of economic transactions (Garnaut 2005) though others (Cash Economy Task Force 2003) estimate the cash economy to be somewhere between 3 and 15 per cent of GDP. Breusch (forthcoming) has cast doubt upon the validity such estimates, arguing that they are based upon faulty assumptions.

casual (informal) labour as and when it is needed. These informal transactions are embedded in the formal economy. Teachers and retail workers, for example, buy houses and employ cleaners. And in turn, the self-employed, their informal workers and their families consume education and retail products, thereby creating employment in the formal sector. Thus the formal and informal labour markets are mutually dependent upon each other, demonstrating the meshing of life world and system. It is probably not an exaggeration to suggest that the withdrawal of informal labour would result in the collapse of large parts of regional economies.

These interactions have reverberations in the life world. Rene, a Centrelink social worker, was aware of “a huge black market” in her region. The following demonstrates how system displacements (such as those in the labour market) affect family life worlds in unforeseeable ways:

It's interesting because when that comes up quite often is when I see women, usually – not always – mothers who are trying to get Child Support and I'd like a dollar for every time they said, “oh yeah but he works, he's a builder and you get paid cash in hand”, or that kind of thing. And other women who are in very unsatisfactory relationships and the domestic abuse takes the form of financial abuse. And there the way that they're controlled, or one way – they get the family payment, the Family Tax Benefit and the Parenting Payment based on the declared earning of the partner or the no earnings - whereas he is actually getting money. So there's this control thing happening there and the women is afraid to leave because if she does, all she'll have is her Family Tax Benefit, but she's actually become used to living at a higher level – even though it's all controlled by him – and has never actually handled real money, except the little bit she gets, which goes straight out on food, kid's clothes or whatever it is.

Here we see how the nexus between labour market arrangements and the welfare system can operate to keep partners in unsatisfactory relationships. Systemic displacement of unemployment has helped to create the economic conditions described above, impacting on family economies and hence relational dynamics. If and when these relationships

end, the costs are *redisplaced* back upon the state in the form of Parenting Payment (Single).

8.3.4 Criminal Labour

A more nefarious form of involvement in the informal economy which emerged from the data is through drug dealing, but again it would be too simplistic to condemn this as an unadulterated “bad”. Reece, a parole officer, is very familiar with families whose members participate in the drug economy. He describes procurement and dealing as certain family members’ “job”. Kate, a sole parent, felt that her town’s problems of social order stemmed from an active drug economy, while most community workers displayed awareness of this factor. From an economic perspective, the drug economy serves the same function as more innocent informal labour in terms of supporting the local economy through consumption of otherwise unaffordable goods, as well as providing popular scapegoats and work for policing authorities. Amanda, a Centrelink worker, pointed to the inherent hypocrisy of criminalising some drugs and not others. Lana, a counsellor, also felt that if the parents were not heavy users themselves, the extra money it brought to some families actually benefited the children: “Now interestingly, some still manage holidays. I’ve worked with some clients I know, reasonably drug dependent and dealing in a small way and they can actually sometimes afford reasonable clothes and reasonable holidays for the children, actually...the children are often well enough looked after”.

This is not to make the case that this activity does not occur in larger centres. Nor is it an argument for or against a drug economy, but it is to say that it is more tightly woven into the fabric of the two northern regional economies in this study (see de Launey 2003). In fact, substance abuse can have devastating effects on family life. This is discussed at further length in 8.4.

8.3.5 The Displacement of Employment Costs

In Chapter five, I argued that welfare provision is indispensable in developed nations, and that in fact welfare played the role of propping up a capitalist economy. It does this in part through absorbing the costs associated with precarious employment, whether in the formal or informal labour market. It was shown that the growth in formal employment was due mainly to precarious work, which does not attract in-work benefits such as annual leave. A part-time TAFE teacher, for example, may be able to survive during semester, but may then be obliged to resort to top-up payments during semester breaks. This means that the cost of leave which would have been shouldered by the employer for a full-time, permanent employee is displaced onto the welfare system. This in turn creates problems for precarious workers, who must estimate their (unpredictable) income in order to receive payments. As Amanda, a Centrelink social worker noted, seasonal and casual work can throw families' delicate financial juggling into disarray:

I know in this area in particular we've got low socio-economic (sic), so whether they're partly on Centrelink payments, so they may have some casual work, very seasonal work in particular. What's happening there is that it just throws things out of kilter for the whole family. So they might be going along okay with some casual work and then, with the Centrelink legislation around the family, family entitlements, what happens is they're probably ending up with debts, so even if there's a small amount of work, it's actually throwing the family into further chaos...

This resultant chaos then has reverberations in the life world. The culture of crisis (mentioned in the previous chapter) created by uncertainty and debt is very likely to be experienced as stressful. This may then lead to coping strategies such as “chemically aided escape”, impulse spending and the displacement of unmanageable emotion²⁸ onto other family members, again with negative consequences for the least powerful in the family system, perhaps for example, an unemployed stepson or daughter. Repeated conflict played out in this manner may then lead to the partial disintegration of the family, often resulting in the young person being thrown out of the family home. This effectively displaces the problem back upon the system as the young person (who is usually without material or cultural resources) is obliged to seek financial assistance from Centrelink in the form of income support, as well as other services such as emergency accommodation. Centrelink social workers describe a common response to the pressures of youth joblessness when combined with other stressors such as retrenchment:

From my experience there is certainly a high percentage of blended families and I mean, to their credit, they've possibly gone through all their resources, so not just financial resources but friends and networks to try and keep things together for a particular period and then things just get too much. What I tend to see, too, is with, around 15-16 year olds, both male and female, there's this total rift....(Amanda, Centrelink social worker)

Or

It (retrenchment) can trigger off a whole lot of things, because people react differently to being retrenched; some people experience bouts of depression and that can affect their ability to parent and continue in that role effectively, and that can cause all sorts of problems, particularly with adolescents who are trying to sort of push the boundaries...we have a lot of Youth Allowance assessments on the grounds that it's unreasonable to live at home...(Suzette, Centrelink social worker)

And

²⁸ I acknowledge Freud (1959), who first used the concept of displacement in relation to emotion.

In terms of relationships...that's a big problem, particularly with young people around between 15 and 23, not much more than that, who have left school either early or after completing year 10 or year 12 who cannot find work and that creates an enormous amount of stress...I get young people come in and say, oh look, my parents have told me to leave because they can't afford to keep me (Rene, Centrelink social worker).

These scenarios demonstrate how displacement onto the least powerful is the result of a stressor combined with no leeway, as shown in Figure 8.1. They also show how large-scale displacements at system level percolate down to individual and family life worlds, often with negative consequences.

8.4 Inadequate Resourcing as Displacement

I refer now to inadequate resourcing as specifically relating to government funding. I have noted in an earlier chapter that funding cuts are part of the set of prescriptions which comprise economic rationalism, a close relative of neoliberal ideology, which has been in the ascendancy for more than two decades. The resourcing of many sectors has suffered, but public health, public education and welfare spending have been the particular objects of reductions in real levels of funding by government of all political stripes in favour of the "user pays" principle.²⁹ For example, in the health sector, the incoming Howard government withdrew funding for dental health programmes for those on low incomes in 1996, while the introduction of the 30 per cent private health insurance rebate which currently costs more than \$2.5 billion a year (Denniss 2005)

²⁹ This is not to say that the welfare state is withering (Phillips 1998); as I argued in an earlier chapter, it is being reshaped, rather than abolished. Part of this reshaping involves the cutting of some programmes and the funding of new ones with different rationales and sometimes new target groups, as in the case of private health insurance, discussed above. In a study of how the most disadvantaged Australians have fared in current "boom times", McNamara et al. (2005, p. 30) suggest that changes in family payments and tax thresholds may benefit less needy Australians more than the poorest.

redirected those funds away from publicly funded health insurance. Denniss (2005) has shown that those on higher incomes benefit disproportionately from the rebate, with only 24 per cent of households whose income is less than \$25,000 per annum holding private health insurance. Effectively, low income Australians are now unable to afford to go to the dentist. This may result in the loss of teeth through emergency extractions with concomitant cosmetic and self-image problems. Peel (2004) has shown how in earlier times, poverty was inscribed upon the bodies of the poor through the effects of poor diet, accommodation and health care. It is sobering to realise that such visible stigmatisation is now again within sight, with implications for those affected, such as the ability to gain employment in an environment where projecting an attractive image is highly valued. Similarly, in the education sector, the federal government has been pursuing policies which direct more funds to private education so as to offer consumers of education more “choice” (Gittins 2005) – if they can afford it.

In reality this amounts to the redeployment of available funds away from public facilities. This can result in a lack of services, equipment and/or cuts to staffing. In the education sector for example, it has been estimated that 70 per cent of all (NSW) TAFE teachers are now employed on a casual or part-time basis (Australian Education Union 2000). I have also drawn attention in Chapter five to how, in the welfare sector, the government implemented massive funding cuts as part of the reworking of various parts of the social security system, such as Job Network and child care subsidies. It was suggested by Eardley (2003) that in relation to the Job Network, the shortfall this created was in part made up by the altruism of workers. Hartman’s (1996, unpublished) research on graduate nurses

reinforces this suggestion, pointing to the way in which inadequate resources results in nurses themselves being overstretched, with consequent implications for the well-being of both themselves and their patients. As one nurse in Hartman's study commented, "well, you just felt tired all the time and then you felt that you didn't really want to do it and then you got depressed because you never saw your family" (unidentified participant, Hartman 1996 unpublished, pp. 81-82). Many workers in the fields of health and education report high levels of job-related stress and burnout, as their vocational and ethical commitments drive them to attempt to provide high quality service in the face of funding cuts (Blake 2004; Holmes 2004; NSW/ACT Independent Education Union 2002; Winefield et al. 2002). Thus the cost of fiscal restraint does not disappear but is passed on. In the cases quoted above, displacement at the system level (funding cuts) is passed on to the worker who operates within a certain institutional setting. It may result in a lower quality of work produced (in this case nursing care), but also becomes internalised in the person's psychobiography, for example as depression, because of the impact upon the family, who never saw their exhausted parent/partner.

The deinstitutionalisation of mental health in New South Wales following the Richmond Report is another example of a policy which was not adequately resourced, resulting among other ill effects in the loss of accommodation for the mentally ill, many of whom have been rendered homeless (Groom, Hickie and Davenport 2003; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1993). This is a dramatic displacement for those affected. Yet disability pensioners have now become the object of the mutual obligation discourse, compounding the already considerable stigma attached to mental illness and reliance on

long-term income support. The Federal Government is now attempting to curb the growing numbers of Disability Support Pension recipients by restricting its availability (to new applicants from July 2006) to those assessed as being able to work less than fifteen hours per week (*Australian Government Budget 2005*). The result of this measure is that many new applicants for Disability Support Pension will be obliged to receive the Newstart benefit, while others who currently work part-time might cease to do so, for fear of losing their pension, with its associated entitlements not available on Newstart. Such examples again serve as illustrations of how cost cutting at the system level, is displaced into life worlds, where the recipient of the displacement is always the least powerful actor. I shall now turn my attention to those life world displacements and how they are played out in family dynamics.

8.5 Displacements in the Life World: Relationship Effects and the Family Dynamic

In an earlier chapter I noted that participants' families did not so much disintegrate as implode, or draw in upon themselves, validating Sinfield's (1981) findings in a study of unemployed families in Britain. He found poverty, frugality, debt, stigma and increased marital tension which led to implosion: "the double impact wears them down and turns them in on themselves. The silent endurance of deprivation and rejection does not make headlines and is astonishingly often dismissed as apathy or lack of will" (Sinfield 1981, p. 53). The families in my study were relatively stable in terms of family formation, with only one separation occurring in the whole sample during the course of the study, and only one change in a child's living arrangements. But as we shall see below, stability does not

always equate with harmony, a point made by Heidi Hartmann in 1987 and more recently by Orton (2004).

A different picture was presented by the sample of community workers, who were dealing with cases where the family system was riven by more trauma and disadvantage, with consequent impacts. It seemed more common among this group for family breakdown to occur in terms of children being thrown out of the family home as we saw in the excerpts quoted above. It should be noted that, as with single parents, the breakdown precedes the approach to Centrelink for income support. Hence the popular perception that reliance on income support breaks up families may be somewhat misleading. However, that is not to say that the pressures of living in a family reliant on long-term income support do not contribute to relational problems between parents and children or between couples. Rather, it would seem that family breakdown, when it does occur, is the result of a cluster of difficulties, of which long-term joblessness is just one.

Yet, even where there is no breakdown, the overall quality of relationships are weakened by the experience of long-term joblessness. This means that if the relationship bonds were not strong, or the relationship was troubled to begin with, it is more likely to founder. This roughly parallels the findings in Jahoda, Lazarsfeld and Zeisel's (1972) *Marienthal* study regarding the way that unemployment tended to magnify the quality of relationships. The implication of this finding is that if the family strikes a crisis, such as mental illness, it may well be able to adapt and cope, but if the family suffers from

several intractable problems, one of which is long-term joblessness, then the pressures may well exhaust the limits of the family.

Families who participated in the first wave of interviews were the first generation to be reliant on long-term income support and were classified in Chapter six as either Non-generational Mainstream or Alternative. Though family relations were on the surface apparently harmonious, particularly in sole parent families, tensions certainly were visible between partners in couple relationships. Take the case of Peter and Judy. Peter regards himself as intense and morose. He suffers easily from frustration which leads into tension and conflict. “Judy’s been packing her bags to leave. Last time I got my parents over to break the cycle, so we have to behave”.

Peter and Judy had no children, partly because Peter, a disability pensioner, felt pessimistic about the future. He thought it would be “the straw that breaks the camel’s back here”, indicating that they were under considerable stress. Peter’s childhood disability had “created incredible torment” for him such that he felt that he would not like to inflict on a child what he had been through. Judy had had periods of wanting children but also felt they could not afford it. Even though they owned their own home, they still felt the pressure of constrained finances. If Judy’s part-time hours changed, this affected Peter’s pension, as well as her residual Newstart payment and Activity Agreement. They had just enough money to live, but rarely had any left over for extra petrol, home maintenance or the occasional takeaway meal. This, combined with the stress and cost of

Peter's illness (acquired later in life, and separate to his disability referred to above) and the perceived stigma of their situation, was a strain on their relationship:

Judy: I'd be a nervous wreck if we had to pay a mortgage or rent. I lose sleep over not being able to service debt.

Yvonne: What do you think would happen to you?

Peter: I believe we'd separate. That's what often happens.

Yvonne: You see external factors as impacting on relationships?

Peter: Oh yes!...it's just that level of pressure. If just personality pressures drove us apart, that's psychological. If we try to make our relationship work and from time to time that becomes difficult, intervention from a third party can often be the difference between that relationship surviving that period.

Judy: I get a lot of attitudes re Peter at work – “he seems healthy, why isn't he working? If you're not out there what's the matter with you, you must be a dole bludger” – I get the girl at work who's having problems herself – it affects you everywhere you go.

In this excerpt Judy mentions two factors which cause her stress, financial constraint and the stigma of her partner's non-participation in the labour market, while her partner speculates upon the impact of external factors on their relationship, which is clearly under pressure.

Kathy and Sam are Newstart recipients who nevertheless both have a disability. Kathy is resourceful and cheerful, but her husband's depressive illness (not his disability) sorely tested her at times, more so than his unemployment: “Like, he's very stubborn, you know, no motivation. He wouldn't do anything. I was doing everything, for example. Like I felt like I was his mother, not his wife. You know? I was sick of it, just sick of it. I really was sick of it”. Here, the relationship suffers from conflict due to an imbalance between work and family, where Kathy feels she has to do the lion's share of both. This is sometimes expressed in angry outbursts, though essentially she feels the relationship is solid:

Kathy: Ooo – that’s why last weekend I blew up. Felt like I was pushed into a corner. Too hard. It has impacted on me. Because I thought he would work as hard as me, but he hasn’t, he hasn’t.

Yvonne: Is that disappointing?

Kathy: Yes, yeah, a lot. I’m still here with him. I can’t see the marriage would dissolve, no, not really. Already solid, you know, fair. Nothing would crack in the bottom line. We go round, we seem to work it out. We’re never, oh, don’t want to talk to you, or anything like that. We still communicate, we still communicate. So that’s how it’s been working.

In Anna and Salim’s case, it is Salim who has the part-time work, and Anna who suffers from depression. Salim admits the relationship is under stress, partly as a result of their on-going poverty:

Yvonne: How does the friction manifest?

Salim: We save money and then it has to go. We can’t plan – uncertainty. Sometimes it divides us. The place gets into a shambles (pause) – when you’re stressed you’ve got to look after yourself so the washing up doesn’t get done – the work doesn’t get done. Anna gets cranky and smacks the kid.

Yvonne: It’s the relationship with the child that suffers?

Salim: No, it’s the family unit.

For her part, Anna feels constantly exhausted and suffers from a combination of mental and physical conditions, partly as a result of an abusive childhood. She has to “scream” at Salim to get him to help her when she is sick. Family Day Care offers respite – in fact, she considers it a surrogate family, as it helps to take the pressure off, but she can’t understand why Salim doesn’t help her, though she speculates that it may have something to do with his cultural background.

Lauren’s husband has a chronic medical condition and drinks to excess at times. It is Lauren who receives Newstart. After a series of failed ventures which “really knocked

him”, Euan has not worked for some years. She says “we stopped communicating about real things quite some time ago” when it became apparent they did not share the same values:

Lauren: Euan wanted the house tidy and I went the other way.

Yvonne: Did that cause conflict?

Lauren: Of course.

Yvonne: Has he accepted your values?

Lauren: I know he loves my core but I know he’d prefer me looking like his friends.

Yvonne: He loves you?

Lauren: He loves me. I give him the shits. He knows I’m a good person. Another conflict is I put the kids first and he’d been my child for ten years. That really threw him. Sometimes I could just leave because he behaves like a child – but then I really love him and I keep hoping that one day...I just feel like I owe him something.

This couple did in fact separate eventually.

The great majority of the couple relationships are therefore undermined by the stresses of their ongoing difficult situations. It is interesting to note that all Newstart recipients in this study reported significant difficulties with either Centrelink or Job Network, causing added tension. This was in contrast to sole parents and disability pensioners, who mostly felt they received a fair to good level of service from Centrelink. According to the community workers, many couple relationships that were extremely unsatisfactory did not result in separation because of economic considerations. The couple remain together, but they are caught in a destructive relationship.

Relationships are thus eroded by the consequences attendant upon attempts to deal with an apparently hopeless situation; for example, the resort to substance abuse as a refuge,

or the strategy of “brightening the minute” by impulse spending which results in debt and perhaps a humiliating appeal to charity. Rene believes these kinds of experiences wear down the strength of the bonds between the couple:

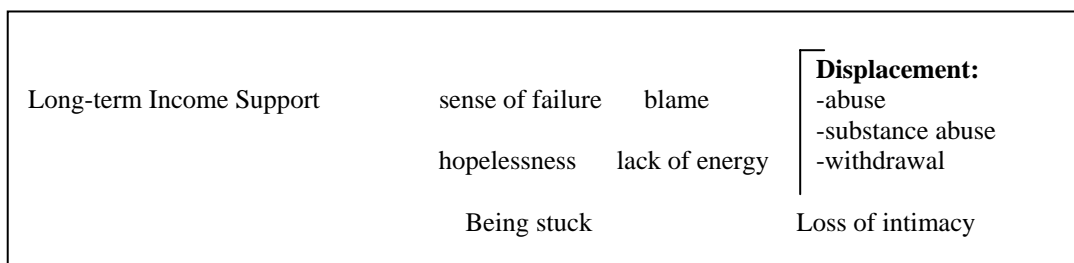
Yvonne: Do the couple turn against each other?

Rene: (Long silence) It makes me always think of that movie with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf* – these incredibly hurtful and horrible, nasty kinds of exchanges and then, back to your corner, get on with it. It's a tension release, it's a way of coping with stuff, it's a debriefing. It's not productive; it's not conducive to having any degree of intimacy that I would recognise.

This accords with Lana's experience in relationship counselling with couples in receipt of long-term income support:

A number of things can happen to the family system. This is an area – oh well, definitely a couple can turn on each other, if that makes sense. They can feel failures and then that can lead to them feeling a failure with each other, a feeling of failure in their relationships, blah blah – and they can get into a system where they blame each other, or one person takes the responsibility and the other blames them, or they can both withdraw from each other, all of which leads to a lack of intimacy in the nice sense of that word. It's a compounding system.

If we were to try to represent these relational dynamics as a process, we might say that the difficulties attendant upon living on long-term income support leads to relational deterioration. It does this through the mechanisms of blame and withdrawal. The tension generated by blame and withdrawal are displaced into destructive behaviours which ultimately lead to a loss of intimacy and therefore further relational deterioration. This further compounds strain in an already difficult situation.



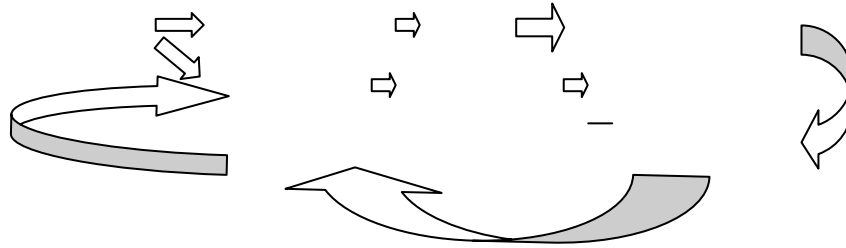


Figure 8.3: Destructive relational dynamic as a compounding system

If we were to draw a rough parallel between this microdynamic and our theoretical formulation at the general level (Fig. 8.1), we might say that long-term income support is the stressor which eventually leads to the exhaustion of resources (leeway). The result is a temporally extended crisis which results in the displacement of intimacy.

Any further stresses such as illness will clearly exacerbate this dynamic. However, not all relationships follow this trajectory. Michael and Barbara stated that they did not blame each other, but displaced unhealthy negativity towards forces outside the relationship, for example the landlord. Other couples may in fact separate as a consequence of prolonged and intolerable stress. Reece, a parole officer, described the quality of his client's family relationships as one of chaotic enmeshment, which originates from the family systems literature (Olson 2000). This refers to a family system which is too flexible, with little structure or leadership, where roles frequently are reversed, and where the emotional attachments are so enmeshed that they permit of little meaningful engagement with the wider society. Tricia, a family support worker, was also familiar with families reliant on long term-income support who could be described as chaotically enmeshed.

The basic contention of the Circumplex Model from which the term “chaotic enmeshment” originates, is that there are three dimensions crucial to how family systems function. These are cohesion, flexibility and communication. Cohesion refers to the degree of emotional bonding. Olsen (2000, p. 145) defines cohesion as “how family systems balance the separateness of their members versus togetherness”, a definition that bears strong similarities to Layder’s dialectic of separateness and relatedness. Flexibility encompasses leadership, roles and rules, while communication has a facilitative function.

The Circumplex Model contends that when the family dynamic operates at either extreme of the first two dimensions and communication is not facilitative, it is likely to be dysfunctional. The goal of family therapy in this schema is to moderate extremes of either flexibility or cohesion such that the family may deal more effectively with their relationships. The model does allow for changes in families’ way of functioning in response to change and therefore is not static, but ignores the question of whether certain situations, such as a combination of stressors, could reinforce and entrench dysfunctional relational dynamics. It emanates from a psychological approach and as such fails to recognise the role that structural factors may play in relational dynamics. It is therefore located within the life world and does not attempt to integrate system considerations.

A further complication is system and life world have colliding understandings of family. The system (as it is expressed by politicians and policy) often assumes family means “people who love and care for you” whereas in the life world it can be “the people you grew up with”, not necessarily the same thing. Many participants expressed a need to separate themselves from the people they grew up with because they perceived their

relationships with members of their families of origin as destructive. Family systems theories hold that individuals will tend to repeat patterns of interaction they learned in their families of origin, and this is consistent with many participants' understanding of their own family dynamics. In this study, my use of the concept of chaotic enmeshment represents a negative dynamic where the family is turned in upon itself, as outlined above.

Another way in which tension impacts upon relationships is through changes in the way in which gender identity is constructed. In Lana's experience, men who had previously worked and were now reliant on long-term income support experienced a sense of anguish in terms of their gender identity, which they had constructed through their jobs. In couple relationships this can lead to a role reversal when women take up paid work. These factors can create or exacerbate existing tension. Often, the pain of loss of identity for those who have lost their labour market attachment is displaced into substance abuse, with flow-on effects for partners and children. Lana called it "chemically assisted withdrawal". Eventually it will be necessary to base one's identity on something else, for example the caring role, artist or even drug dealer.³⁰ This will mean weaker ties with the world of work, reinforcing exclusion from the labour market and the development of a new lifestyle which may act as a disincentive to seek re-entry to the workforce. This process may be understood as a response to displacement from the labour market. These findings align with those of Probert (1996, p. 18), vividly encapsulated by one of the men in her study, who stated: "once your job's gone, you're nothing".

³⁰ This calls to mind Goffman's (1963) work on spoiled identity.

The experience of stigma can also be displaced onto relationships. This occurs when the need to appear normal leads to an attempt at “image-making”, such as when an unemployed youth buys a mobile phone she or he cannot afford, or when a parent incurs debt to buy expensive furniture. This of course leads to financial problems with consequential strain on relationships, as we saw in Rene’s quotes on pages 225-6 and 227.

Finally, as shown earlier, the stress or blame may be displaced onto younger family members; for example, Anna sometimes smacks her child and Abdul had related smashing his child’s bike in a fit of rage and frustration. This behaviour is spontaneous but the displacement is not always so obvious. For example, Lana saw small children “trying to rescue their parents” from the parent’s escape into substance abuse. Adolescents either try to escape the intolerable situation or, as we saw above, can be ejected from the family home.

To summarise, the data shows that tensions which are generated at least partly by system factors are displaced onto personal relationships in ways that lead to a deterioration of the quality of those relations. Illness and disability, social isolation, past trauma, stigma, poverty, debt and identity construction all impact on patterns of interaction, which then become self-reinforcing, but which do not necessarily lead to the disintegration of the family unit.

8.6 Conclusion

We have seen that, contrary to popular assumptions, jobless families who rely on long-term income support do not necessarily fracture in terms of living arrangements. Many approaches are made to Centrelink for income support after the breakdown rather than beforehand. However, in families reliant upon income support for long periods, the quality of relationships is eroded as the family is forced to turn in upon itself. Further, many jobless families defy the stereotypical image of inactivity, engaging in study, voluntary work and caring roles. Finally, the lives of jobless families are not especially enjoyable. Rather, they are often wracked by the stigma of dependency, unsatisfactory relationships, illness, poverty and sometimes trauma. Nevertheless the families do make efforts to escape their predicament, harbouring hopes and dreams with which their employed fellow citizens might identify, and are active in the exercise of the agency available to them, which includes taking up work in the informal labour market. Dwyer (2004) has pointed out that such efforts to survive are constructed as irresponsible rather than “creative” only when those involved are welfare dependents, even though providing for one’s family is seen as a parental responsibility in Third Way discourses regarding welfare and dependency.

The concept of displacement can be used to understand these processes, which occur both within and between system and life world. Displacements in the system tend to reverberate in the life world, and are eventually turned back upon the system when the consequences become unmanageable. Displacement also represents the way in which power is exerted, which usually results in negative effects for the least powerful. This holds true for displacements occurring entirely within the life world as well. Life world and system are not separable in reality; they often mesh to become indistinguishable.

Displacement, therefore, is simply a device which attempts to untangle system and life world somewhat so as expose them to theoretical scrutiny. However, to cast what is happening to jobless families in terms of displacement is not to suggest that all change is harmful. It is more that the concept of displacement registers the consequences of harmful change, which usually is visited upon the least powerful members of society. Though perhaps somewhat crude and certainly open to further refinement, hopefully it provides a basis for understanding which may contribute in some small way to the amelioration of the lives of jobless families. Having here undertaken the untangling exercise, the next and final chapter attempts to draw all the threads of this study together in order to make some conclusions and germane recommendations.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

9.1 Preamble

We have now arrived at the point where some conclusions about the research questions can be drawn, policy implications discussed and some recommendations made, based on the study's findings. Before proceeding to do this, I will briefly summarise the work to date. The chapter will conclude with a consideration of the limitations and the potential value of the study.

9.2 Summary

The introductory chapter presented the research problem, the impact of long-term joblessness on families, situating it in a regional context. It was argued that it is no longer relevant to discuss unemployment per se, as meanings related to work have become more nebulous, partly due to labour market changes and partly due to welfare reform, which has reconfigured income support payments around the notion of joblessness regardless of payment type. Later chapters confirmed that the problem of unemployment has been concealed, making it more sensible to ask questions about the impact of long-term joblessness on families. Hence the research questions asked were:

- Who are jobless families?
- How do jobless families live?
- Are they a distinct group?
- What impact does long-term joblessness have on family structure, relationships and relations with the wider society?
- What are the social implications of the findings; and
- How can policy best address the issue of jobless families?

Chapter two presented the theoretical framework adopted for the study. Layder's (1997) theory of domains was seen as the most suitable because of the multifaceted nature of the research questions, which combine questions of structure with intersubjectivity as well as the interior lives of individuals. Layder adopts a moderate realist position which proposes a stratified ontology - as opposed to a conflation of structure and agency - as the best means to understand the social world and resolve tensions between competing sociological approaches. Layder proposes four domains or layers; psychobiography, situated activity, settings and contextual resources. He argues that these domains broadly correspond with Habermas's conception of life world and system, although he suggests certain modifications. In particular, he disputes the notion that system inevitably colonises the life world in ways that are pathological. The domains are interconnected, even embedded within each other to some degree, and are interlaced by power, social relations and discourses and practices. Though these elements cannot be empirically separated, this model does allow for the exploration of

research problems which incorporate both objective and subjective aspects as I have attempted to demonstrate.

In Chapter three, I outlined a methodology for the present study. It is based upon Layder's (1998) development of a research method he calls Adaptive Theory, which stresses the generation of theory that can account for the social reality under research. As such, it bears some resemblance to Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1990; Glaser and Strauss 1967), though with important qualifications, such as the acceptance of prior theoretical knowledge as an aid to the process of building new theory. The research process was then outlined. It was seen that three sites in regional New South Wales – two on the Far North Coast and one south-west of Sydney – were selected and participant families from these regions were interviewed using a combination of semi-structured in-depth and narrative approaches. A further sample of community workers from these regions were interviewed in a second wave. The families were followed up after twelve months, and approximately one-third of the original sample remained in contact up to early 2004, lending longitudinal depth to the data. Data analysis techniques were described and possible limitations consequent upon the use of Adaptive Theory as a methodology were addressed. These mainly revolved around issues of rigour and standards of evaluation.

The next two chapters provided a context for the study. Chapter four is a large-scale evaluation of current trends in a globalised society. I examined dominant ideological discourses and how they might shape subjectivities and events before proceeding to a

general overview of past and current constructions of work and family. The central contention is that life in wealthy English-speaking countries increasingly is individualised and marked by uncertainty and discontinuity, consistent with the notion of a post-traditional society. Chapter five provided the policy context, giving an overview of welfare regimes and their history as well as analysing current, localised policy directions. I showed how neoliberalism as a set of economic prescriptions articulates with Third Way discourse to produce an income support system which centralises the role of economic participation as a condition of full social membership. I further argued that welfare policy plays a vital part in underpinning late capitalist economies, despite discourses to the contrary.

The next three chapters dealt with the findings generated by the research. Chapters six and seven give an account of regional jobless families, their lives and some common themes, while Chapter eight attempts to build theory which explains the interaction between system and life world in relation to the research questions outlined in the Introduction. Chapter six incorporated a review of other relevant studies and an “expose” of hidden joblessness in order to situate the portrait it paints of jobless families. It also explored family structures and participants’ understandings of the concept of family before describing the regions in which the study took place and presenting three vignettes of jobless families, drawn from the sample. This may be understood as representing the life worlds of the participants.

The next chapter, Chapter seven, explored five themes which emerged as common to the experience of all the families in the study. They are Poverty, Stigma, Trauma, Coping/Adaptation and Being in the (income support) System. These findings revealed that most participants engaged in some form of precarious work, and attempted to keep their reliance on income support hidden from public notice, resulting in a degree of social isolation and a generalised sense of disempowerment. Chapter eight attempted to uncover the mechanisms driving the interactions between system and life world in the case of jobless families. To do this it used the concept of displacement as the major explanatory device, investigating how displacements occur at both macrological and micrological levels and the way in which a displacement may oscillate between system and life world. Family processes were analysed in terms of displacement, the general finding being that system factors generate tensions, which may be displaced with destructive consequences for intimacy. The quality of relationships is magnified by the experience of long-term income support which, when combined with a number of other factors, may lead to family breakdown, often in the form of younger members being ejected from the family home. This illustrates the way in which problems in the life world become displaced back upon the system. Finally, displacement is a process in which the exercise of power often results in negative outcomes for the least powerful. Having briefly outlined the study to this point, I will now attempt to draw some conclusions. I begin with a consideration of jobless families' life worlds and what can be said about them before moving on to system issues.

9.3 The Life World of Jobless Families: Poverty, Income Support and the Past

This study has focused on the effects of long-term income support on families as opposed to a study of the effects of poverty. It was argued in the introductory chapter that there is a difference between the two. In this study, I have shown how poverty is one of several effects of living on income support for long periods. But poverty can also be experienced by other groups. A reasonable income may not insulate one from poverty if expenses exceed income; for example if a large number of people are dependent on one income, a family member requires expensive medical treatment, or rents and mortgages are excessive. How, then, is the impact of income support on families different to that of poverty?

I contend there are two main differences. Firstly, the deserving/undeserving dichotomy means that the experience of long-term income support is one of 'Difference', because of the tendency to stigmatise and isolate recipients, as we have seen. Secondly, the prolonged and sustained interaction between the administrative arms of the income support system (such as Centrelink and Job Network) and its clients leads to a diminishment of autonomy owing to the scrutiny and surveillance exercised over recipients, in particular for Newstart beneficiaries. It also appears to produce a sense of alienation from the mainstream and a perception that these administrative arms are coercive and punitive rather than assistive.

When these two factors are combined, options are more constrained. For example, the ability to obtain credit at reasonable rates of interest, to travel in search of opportunity,

or to use social networks to problem-solve are all limited by the circumstance of receiving long-term income support. This makes the experience more likely to become a compounding system, where various difficulties interact to produce a situation from which escape becomes increasingly unlikely, even with the assistance of precarious work.

It is also reasonable to ask how the experiences documented here differs from the experiences of jobless families in the past; as I pointed out in Chapter one, if they are the same, there would be no need for such a project as this. In the current environment, regional jobless families like those encountered in this study are a relatively new phenomenon, and may reflect the consequences of the global expansion of neoliberal modes of existence. We have seen how the great displacements these modes of existence produce result in a pushing away of those who are superfluous to the production/consumption dynamic of capitalist relations. This means that today there is more physical dispersion of jobless families, at least for those who seek a cheaper existence in regional New South Wales. While jobless families now enjoy some stability at the level of basic survival, they experience their condition in isolation, and need to supplement their benefits by precarious employment. Because of the stigma associated with income support, it is hidden from public view, often locking its recipients into a privatised nightmare from which the increasingly part-time, casualised labour market offers little relief.

Poverty may also be less severe than in the past. Certainly, the lives of jobless families today are comfortable in comparison with their predecessors in the Great Depression. Australia was badly affected, having the dubious distinction of being second only to Germany in the level of official unemployment throughout the 1930s (Roe 1985; Lowenstein 1981; Kewley 1973). Poverty was absolute. Single men took to the roads in search of survival because they could not receive the dole if they lived with their families. Camps consisting entirely of unemployed people existed on the edge of towns. Clothes were made from flour bags and hessian sacks often served as blankets. The dole was meagre and harshly administered. Work for the dole programmes existed then as now. Many people lived in huts they made from whatever materials they could scrounge. Evictions were common. Large families suffered from malnutrition; farmers simply walked off their indebted properties. The experience was so scarifying for some that they never recovered a sense of confidence, self-esteem or security. Evidence from oral histories shows that many unemployed people blamed themselves for their predicament. Those who could hid their situation from the world, just as income support recipients do today, expressing the same sense of stigma (Lowenstein 1981 in Hartman 2002).

Clearly this is not a state of affairs that anyone would ever wish to be repeated and it should not be forgotten that this terrible experience profoundly influenced the development of Australia's modern welfare state. Thus, though there are similarities, the lives of jobless families now exhibit a number of differences to those of the Depression. In the first instance, women are now an integral part of the labour force.

Secondly, families now tend to have less children. Along with new technology in all fields this has contributed to a rise in the standard of living of the general population except among indigenous communities. New consumer durables have resulted in less exertion and time saved in the execution of housework. The existence of dishwashers and automatic washing machines leads us to forget that many households in the 1930s did not even have the luxury of a cold water tap, let alone unlimited hot water (Hartman 2002).

But the great hardship which the people of the Depression suffered was in part compensated by strong social bonds for a significant proportion of those affected. Because unemployment was so widespread there was a much greater degree of militancy. Socialism and communism enjoyed some popularity and unemployed workers unions sprang up. Among other activities, they organised rallies, returned evicted families to their homes and provided support for their members. Work for the dole participants went on strike to obtain better rates of pay. The militancy spilled into violence on many occasions. Consciousness of a collective interest pervaded these developments and cemented the already strong presence of unions in working class life (Lowenstein 1981).

Capitalism relies to a significant degree on the extension of consumption in order to thrive. This, along with the increased emphasis on individualism, means that jobless families today are both materially better off and more isolated. We have seen that they often exist as discrete units scattered among the general population. Solidarity may be

possible when 30 per cent of the working age population is unemployed, but when it is five or six per cent it is far more difficult, particularly in terms of gaining any public sympathy.³¹ Furthermore, should the jobless person also blame him or herself for their position this will also discourage any attempt at collective action. Finally, precarious employment blunts the sharp edge of poverty but it also entrenches income support as a way of life (Hartman 2002). The question we are left to ask, in an environment where the welfare state is being remodelled along lines not dissimilar in some respects to those of 70 years ago, is – will jobless families suffer further deterioration in their circumstances? I contend they will, as my following analysis will demonstrate.

9.4 The System and Jobless Families

These are the conclusions that can be drawn at the level of the life world. I will now draw some conclusions in relation to system factors, beginning with media representation before moving on to a consideration of the functionality of current welfare arrangements.

9.4.1 Stereotypical Representation

Though we have seen there are a number of common elements in the experiences of jobless families, the findings also demonstrate that long-term income support recipients are not a homogeneous group. Some of the differences are attributable to locality (settings), some to family of origin and some to individual temperaments (psychobiography). If we compare the northern samples with the southern one, it is

³¹ Though as we have already noted the unemployment rate belies the true number of jobless families.

apparent that the culture and standing conditions of place of residence also have an impact. Firstly, we have seen that the percentage of the population receiving income support is around ten per cent higher in the north and that the unemployment rate is also higher. Secondly, in the south the income support population tend to be concentrated in pockets of disadvantage such as Housing Commission estates, whereas in the north they are more dispersed physically. Thirdly, there are cultural differences; the commitment to alternative lifestyles did not appear amongst participants in the southern region, which is close to highly urbanised areas. Finally, with no exceptions, participants in the southern sample had grown up either in the area they now lived or in proximal districts, whereas none of the northern participants were native to that area. This fact would appear to support the argument made in the previous chapter regarding the geographical displacement of many jobless families.

In terms of relationship processes within the family, there is also variation. Some families are enmeshed chaotically with negative dynamics that are perpetuated not only by patterns of relating but also the culture of crisis in which they live, whereas others have achieved some kind of stability and lifestyle which permits a degree of integration between separateness and relatedness.

Taking all these variations into account, the participant sample did not conform to the common media stereotype of lazy, disengaged and irresponsible “bludgers” infamously immortalised by *A Current Affair* (1996). This stereotype loosely corresponds with the culture of poverty thesis (Oscar Lewis 1959 in Kerbo 2003) which suggests that the

poor, in an attempt to cope with the unique “problems of living” that stem from poverty, develop a distinctive lifestyle. This isolates them from the general community and tends to become self-reinforcing, producing a “culture of poverty” with common values, attitudes and behaviours, for example generational unemployment, female-headed families and teenage pregnancy. This culture means that the poor are unable to utilise available opportunities to lift themselves out of poverty. This thesis has since been challenged vigorously, most notably by Valentine (1968), and in Australia in relation to indigenous Australians by Tomlinson (1978).

No doubt Lewis’ thesis has been influential in shaping Mead’s New Paternalism, sharing as it does a distinct behavioural emphasis. But in this study, most of the participants were in general self-aware and reflexive, with an astute appreciation of structural conditions and active in the exercise of their agency, whether that took the form of undertaking voluntary work, informal labour, education or political activity. The “mainstream” part of the sample did not appear to be connected to any kind of subculture; indeed we have remarked upon their lack of social networks apart from their own families. The “alternative” participants did belong to a subculture, one which privileged alternative values, and this meant they also were aware, reflexive and active. Further, we have seen that reliance on income support of itself does not precipitate family break up. However, the stresses generated by this way of life, when combined with other negative factors such as disability and trauma, can erode relationships to the point where they are destructive, even if family structure remains intact. Although the community workers’ clients (the generational group) appear to conform more to the

stereotype, the participant sample should serve as a warning against accepting these public myths at face value.

9.4.2 Social Cohesion

In Chapter five I argued that welfare provision is a necessary factor in maintaining capitalist economies in developed nations. In addition to this, I would argue that three principal outcomes of the welfare state are social cohesion, social control and the relief of extreme hardship. It is hardly original to suggest that the stereotypical image of jobless families created by media representations serves to create a convenient scapegoat upon which the general population can vent their ire (though in recent years this place has been taken by asylum seekers). Moreover, it is convenient for neoliberals to have something like “welfare bludgers” to blame when capitalism appears to be ailing. In an ironic functionalist analysis, Gans (1994, p. 276) showed how a group classified as undeserving can contribute to the general social wellbeing by providing moral legitimation for the more deserving, reinforcing norms (by violating them) and by supplying “popular culture villains”. However, equally important is the fact that income support allows recipients – especially those with some (precarious) employment – to maintain at least a façade of social integration and thus dignity, as we have already seen. Scapegoating occurs largely at the level of public debate, since income support recipients take pains not to disclose their reliance upon the state precisely in order to avoid stigmatisation (Hartman 2002). Hence social cohesion is achieved by the dual means of keeping poor families somewhat attached to society and the creation of a bogeyman in the collective mind (Hartman 2005).

This kind of social cohesion is at odds with one which is predicated upon an ethic of care, as Dean (2004) and others (Dwyer 2004; Orton 2004; Ellis 2004) have argued. As I noted in Chapter five, these authors have framed their examination of the welfare state in terms of an exploration of dependency, responsibility and care in the context of human rights. They contend that the debasing aspects of dependency effected by neoliberal/Third Way policy prescriptions could be countered by a recognition of our universal *interdependency* and that a welfare state based upon an ethic of care would be more just for all. Such an approach is consistent with the arguments I have been making, which emanate from an emancipatory perspective.

9.4.3 Social Control

Closely allied with the goal of social cohesion is that of control, as Piven and Cloward (1971) argued over thirty years ago. It has already been observed that the neoliberal rationalities have introduced a series of measures designed to make the receipt of income support payments more onerous for specific groups. In Australia, welfare reform has been driven by the discourse of welfare dependency and the detachment from society it is alleged to produce (Reference Group on Welfare Reform 2000a). In reality, many of these measures amount to coercion, since non-compliance can result in financial sanctions severe enough to render some recipients homeless (Pearce, Disney and Ridout 2002; *7:30 Report* 2002; *7:30 Report* 2001;). The requirements attached to the receipt of the Newstart (unemployment) benefit in particular serve to prevent the free movement of beneficiaries. The obligation to complete a fortnightly “dole diary” recording a specified number of attempts to find work, which must be countersigned by

the prospective employer; the “activity agreement” which specifies a series of activities from which the recipient is compelled to choose; and the need for all welfare beneficiaries to supply a wealth of personal information which must be updated as their circumstances change, means that the individual is subjected to a species of surveillance which closely approximates the disciplinary “gaze” which Foucault (1979b) famously likened to Bentham’s panopticon (Hartman 2005).

However to return to the earlier point regarding the positive functions of the undeserving, we can also see that the treatment of one group and the discourse which surrounds it can also help to produce the alignment between individual desires and the aims of neoliberal governments. What person would wish to think of themselves as a “bludger”? And who would not wish to assert their independence from the infantilising nipple of welfare dependency? For those unsure as to how to achieve such an outcome, the state will provide self-esteem training and jobsearch skills. The quasi-markets created by the government to provide “competition” between various employment and training agencies will operate to educate (unemployed) income support recipients in exercising choice, and a case manager will be appointed to provide assistance which is tailored to individual needs. This configuration of discourse and practices can be regarded as producing docile subjects who discipline themselves in the name of individual initiative and responsibility (Hartman 2005).

9.4.4. The Entrenchment of Welfare

Notwithstanding these unattractive elements, without doubt the income support system is a necessary and valuable lifeline for those not in a position to participate in the formal labour market. It is a relatively generous system for families with young dependent children, but not for youth, single people and families with children older than sixteen years (McNamara et al. 2005). I have argued that despite calls from neoliberals for the dismantling of the welfare state, it is in fact well entrenched in wealthy nations. Far from operating to the detriment of the neoliberal cause, the welfare state may be one of the necessary conditions of its existence by underwriting the flexible labour market and managing populations such that the fabric of society remains intact. Anti-welfare rhetoric is an essential part of this schematic. To quell any doubt to the contrary, one may employ a hypothetical scenario: imagine what would happen if the welfare state was in fact abolished overnight. Literally millions of people would become instantly destitute; there would be no-one to blame for excessive government spending; maintenance of civil order might become troublesome; and it is possible that markets might collapse, as in the Great Depression, producing a similar state of turmoil and hardship (Hartman 2005). Furthermore, the ways in which the welfare state is being reshaped serve the interests not only of jobless families but also employed families, mainly through the system of family benefits. Its demise would therefore be electorally difficult to achieve.

9.5 Implications for Policy

That the welfare state is here to stay is positive for those who need to rely upon it. But its current emphasis on economic participation means it is a system designed to assist

life transitions rather than offer a permanent way of life. Yet we have seen that for particular subsections of the population, reliance on income support *is* seemingly permanent, and cannot be ascribed to moral failings which are exclusive to unemployed people; it then becomes a prison which traps its recipients through poverty, exclusion and stigma. Familial relationships often are diminished and meaningful attachment to society is restricted. If secure employment is the only recognised route out of these dilemmas, then rather than tinkering with supply side issues like behavioural change through moralistic remedies such as mutual obligation, it would seem obvious that providing adequately paid work for all those who want it should be seen as a large part of the solution.

The impact of joblessness on families leads to stress on relationships partly because family members are thrown together with little outside relief. Nearly all the participants in the study agreed that a job would help things enormously. For Reece, not only is a job a “stabiliser”, but it displaces other activities with negative consequences, such as drug use. Lana asserted that employment leads to marked improvement in people’s lives and felt “there would be more honour all round” if there were enough jobs for those who wanted them. Rene suggested full employment would lead to a dramatic lowering in the crime rate in her area. Participants who were members of jobless families almost without exception asserted their wish to work, though in the case of sole parents, this was usually qualified by a desire to work hours which would still allow them to be with their children.

It is therefore ironic that a discourse is arising about labour market shortages and the “shrinking” workforce (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2005a; *The World Today* 2005; Garnaut and Contractor 2004). In recent public discussions, politicians such as the Federal Treasurer have reflected upon the “need” for more aged, women and disabled persons to join the workforce in order to promote continued productivity for the nation (Costello 2005). This ignores the facts tendered in previous chapters regarding unemployment, underemployment and precarious employment and suggests a “kneejerk” reaction to the realisation that government expenditure on income support can only rise in the future. Confirmation of this suspicion can be found in the most recent Federal Budget. Measures such as “adjusting the JSCI” and “lifting the threshold at which job seekers are classified as highly disadvantaged to reflect improved labour market conditions generally” will save \$457.4 million, while a further \$167.1 million will be saved by extending certain waiting periods to all working age payments. The \$82.7 million spent on an “improved compliance framework” is estimated to save \$563.6 million in the future (*Australian Government Budget 2005-06*). In addition, as previously noted, future sole parents and many disabled will be forced onto Newstart.

Again, this can be read, not only as an attempt to displace the cost of election promises such as the new Family Payments and the Medicare Safety Net onto the least powerful, but also a deliberate strategy to pursue and harass these citizens, particularly when one considers these changes have been introduced at the same time that those on incomes over \$100,000 a year have been awarded between \$41 and \$86 per week in tax cuts (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2005b, p. 1). This is entirely consistent with my argument that

welfare is not being abolished but reshaped. The Federal Treasurer, Mr Costello, has been quoted as saying “that’s (welfare reform) a part of getting as many people as possible in this working age group into the workforce” (*Sydney Morning Herald* 2005c). Yet, even if unemployment really is at five per cent, this means there are still not enough jobs for all, begging the question yet again of where the jobs for these groups will come from. It is more likely that pushing these groups onto the more lowly paid and coercive Newstart benefit will be the way cost reductions are achieved.

I have argued above that this situation might be amenable to the creation of new (productive) jobs, particularly in view of the funding cuts of the last thirty years which have seen the disappearance of much public sector employment in the name of efficiency. Since rural and regional Australia are particularly affected, a policy of decentralisation would also be worth serious deliberation. It is important to note, however, that paid work – particularly that which is low paid - can often be little more than meaningless drudgery which devalues the humanity of those it enslaves. This suggests a further possible solution, such as Tomlinson’s (2001a, 2001b) call for a Basic Income, which by its universality would erase the link between income support and demeaning dependency. This would involve a recognition that useful social contribution can be achieved in a variety of ways apart from economic participation, and that not all are able to participate equally. It is, however, self-evident that all of these suggestions conflict with neoliberal ideological tenets and as such are likely to fall on deaf ears.

Further policy implications may be drawn from the displacement principle outlined in the preceding chapter. If system changes such as funding cuts and labour market transformations mean displacements into life worlds, policy makers and politicians would be wise to consider the possible effects of their ideologically driven decisions, particularly if those displacements eventually result in crises of such magnitude that the state is once again forced to intervene. In effect, therefore, I am arguing for a return to policies which involve government spending on public services and infrastructure on a large scale. This raises the problem of finding the funds, which traditionally has been through increased borrowing or higher taxation, something the electorate finds as repugnant as the retrenchment of welfare. The possibility that productive state-owned enterprises might be able to provide some of these funds, however, is likely to be regarded as heresy in the neoliberal/Third Way policy environment and dismissed out of hand as a utopian remedy that never worked well and can no longer work at all in a globalised world.

9.6 Reflections on the Limitations and the Value of the Study

I have already made some comments in the Methodology chapter on some limitations. Sample size was relatively small, though compensated for by the richness of the data it yielded. Possible future research directions are indicated by the smallness of the study and its restriction to three regions. However, finding participants willing to open their family lives to researchers will continue to be problematic. The Methodology chapter also pointed to issues surrounding the interpretation of data in qualitative research. To some extent this was ameliorated by the triangulation of the first sample with the second

wave of interviews with community workers, and by the use of documentary evidence such as Centrelink material and the literature.

The very difficulties which I have remarked upon as possible limitations above are also those which make the study valuable. The problems I encountered in accessing participants are unlikely to abate in the current research environment, making this project unique in terms of the insights it generates. The emphasis upon regional joblessness is also novel. Further, the study was undertaken at a historical juncture where the “problem” of unemployment appears to have subsided whilst simultaneously quite radical welfare reform is occurring. These factors united combine to make the research a valuable resource for policy makers as well as other researchers. Finally, I asserted in Chapter two that my research should be accessible to those it studied and their contemporaries. While the theoretical chapters may be somewhat opaque to the ordinary reader, the findings should be reasonably easy to digest for many interested income support recipients. I hope it is not too grandiose an aspiration to hope that this work may add in some small way to that of others already working for improvement in the lives of jobless families.

9.7 Concluding Remarks

In a post-traditional society where uncertainty about almost every facet of life makes an appeal to an authoritarian form of communitarianism inviting, individuals are disengaging from citizenship in its widest meaning in an effort to foster a sense of security. Those unable to be assimilated into this model are to a large extent invisible,

confirming Johnson and Taylor's (2000) research on the invisibility of Australian poverty. However it has been seen that income support does at least stabilise a precarious situation.

An attempt has been made to reveal the lives of jobless families as they live in regional NSW today within a greater context of post-modernisation and globalisation. In the sense that they are subject to stigma and relative poverty, they share something in common with their forebears who lived through the Great Depression and thus may suffer some of the same harm, though it may be on the psychic more than the material level. This is accentuated by greater social isolation and the apparent permanence of this way of life.

Nevertheless, there are still those who believe that the human condition can and should be improved in spite of economic determinism and moralistic condemnation. Therefore, just as we honour the memory of people who lost their lives in war for the sake of those not yet born, so should we not let the misery and the brutality of the Great Depression be a waste of human endeavour by allowing its echoes to continue to resonate today. Policy-making needs not only to heed the voices of those it purports to serve, but also to reflect the wisdom acquired by contemplation of historical precedent in order to avoid the repetition of past mistakes (Hartman 2002).

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APPENDIX

Jobless Families in Regional New South Wales
Doctoral Research Project
Guide Sheet for interviewing

A. Background Information

1. Sex and age of participant
2. Employment status
3. Number of members in immediate family
4. Relationships between family members/family role
5. Length of time of such relationships; what determines the lifespan of relationships (how do they begin and end?)
6. Relevant biographical details of family members (births, deaths, marriages, etc)
7. Current material and relational circumstances of family members
8. How does the participant define a family?

B Temporal Patterns

1. How is the week spent
2. Where is time spent
3. With whom is time spent; nature and frequency of family contacts

C Joblessness

1. Feelings about joblessness
2. Does long-term joblessness change beliefs, feelings, behaviour between family members
3. Are there any difficulties experienced in the family that the participant would relate to long-term joblessness of a family member? Elaborate.
4. If there are difficulties, how are they dealt with?
5. Are there any positive aspects to long-term joblessness in respect of family life?
6. What is the relationship between participant and income support administrators?

Jobless Families in Regional NSW

Doctoral Research Project

Guide Sheet for interviewing community workers

How is joblessness specifically related to the problems your clients present with?

How does joblessness affect the family as a system?

What impact does joblessness have on relationships between family members? Is there a common pattern?

How do jobless family members spend their time?

How do jobless family members spend their money?

How do jobless clients feel about not having a job?

How do jobless clients feel about agencies who administer elements of the welfare system such as Centrelink and Job Network?

In your view, what is the single most important policy or measure that could be implemented in relation to joblessness?