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Someone's daughter, someone's worker, someone's girlfriend, someone's wife: Young women and multiple transitions

Jennie Buchanan
Edith Cowan University

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"Someone's daughter,
Someone's worker,
Someone's girlfriend,
Someone's wife":

Young Women
and
Multiple Transitions

Jennie Buchanan
Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Work) Honours
Faculty of Health and Human Sciences
Edith Cowan University
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USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

Although obviously involved in the life of their communities, young women have been largely overlooked in youth studies specifically and sociological research in general. Where young women are mentioned in the literature they are discussed using theories and frameworks designed to explain young men's position. It is assumed within these studies that somehow one's gender has little impact on their social situation. Clearly traditional theoretical approaches to the study of youth do not take into account the multiple transitions experienced by young women.

This thesis sets out to question existing literature in youth studies. The notion that youth is a transient stage between childhood dependence and adult independence will be questioned at a theoretical level by looking at young women as women rather than young women as "youths". In doing so, the study is a theoretical challenge to traditional youth studies notions about youth transition as a linear progression to adult independence. The research contests that for young women, adulthood has a different meaning than it does for young men based on the economic and social subordination of women.

Methodologically, the thesis will be exploring a feminist approach in trying to comprehend and understand the experiences of young women. It will also explore how a feminist research process is an important part of the whole research project rather than a means to an end.

This research endeavours to illustrate the multifaceted experiences of working class young women through presenting accounts of their experiences, views and perceptions as elicited through a series of dialogues with each young woman in the study. The areas of consideration are the relationships young women have within the economic and social realms of life. The study will convey the similarities and disparities between working class young women and locate these individual and common experiences in the wider structural framework of patriarchal capitalist relations.

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate, without acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

SIGNED:

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Over recent years it has become clear to a number of scholars interested in youth studies that the subject of young women's experiences has received less than adequate treatment. Although many agree that the idea of "youth" is highly problematic on a range of fronts (see Wilson and Wyn, 1987; White, 1990; Sercombe, 1990 and Stratton, 1992), it is only in recent times that there has been interest in the way gender relations impact on the experiences of young people.

Having spent my growing years actively experiencing what it

is like to be 'working class' and a 'woman', I was somewhat shocked and disappointed to find that young women are largely invisible in youth studies. When I initially started tertiary studies time and time again I would search for research that focused on young women's experiences only to be confronted by literature that either totally ignored them or treated them as marginal. Where young women were mentioned in the literature they were discussed using theories and frameworks designed to explain young men's position. It was assumed within these studies that somehow one's gender has little impact on their social situation. It was within this context that I was prompted to consider undertaking a study involving young women providing accounts of their own lives. As a working class woman and a feminist, I became concerned with challenging the invisibility of young women in social research.

Initially I was fascinated with the whole question of why women in general are so invisible both in popular and in the more academic literature. Soon it became clear that a project of this scope was unreasonable given my limited time constraints. After consultation with my supervisor and a number of young women from a youth centre that I am involved with, I decided to examine the adequacy of the notion of "youth as a transition" to theorise working class young women's experiences.

The impression gained from traditional studies of youth transition is that becoming adult is a linear progression from school to work. According to Griffin (1985, p.83), such studies have:

...either ignored young women, or tried in vain to fit their experiences into analytical frameworks which were designed to explain young men's position.

Griffin's comments provide a useful rationale for undertaking a research project which focuses on young women's experiences. As I discovered, although they are obviously involved in the life of their communities, young women have been largely overlooked in youth studies specifically and sociological research in general. Where young women are mentioned in the literature they are discussed using theories and frameworks designed to explain young men's position. It is assumed, within these studies, that young women's experiences ought to simply 'fit in' to these models and that somehow one's gender has little impact on their social situation. Clearly 'traditional' theoretical approaches to the study of youth do not take into account the multiple and gendered transitions experienced by young women.

This thesis sets out to question much of the existing literature in youth studies. The notion that "youth" is a transient stage between childhood dependence and adult independence will be questioned at a theoretical level by looking at young women as women rather than young women as "youths". In doing so, the study presents a theoretical challenge to traditional youth studies notions about youth transition as a linear progression to adult independence. The research contests that for young women, adulthood has a different meaning than it does for young men - based on the economic and social subordination of women.

Methodologically, the thesis will be exploring a feminist approach in trying to comprehend and understand the experiences of young women. It will also explore how a feminist research process is an important part of the whole research project rather than a means to an end.

Generally two research approaches were used to deal with the study topic. The first and principal method involved reviewing and analysing research literature, social policy reports and statements and material concerned with the lived experiences of young women and men within the Australian context. The second method involved the participation of the author and 14 working class young women in a dialogical interview process exploring the topic of young women's experience of "growing up".

The study points to the need for social research and applied practice which takes into account the following kinds of considerations in the area of youth studies:

*"Youth Studies" ought to make visible the specific experiences of young women.

*Studies of young women's lives must acknowledge the centrality of gender in the shaping of life opportunities.

*Any analysis of "young women" needs to explore the interface between various "worlds of inequality"

*Young women are involved in multiple and often simultaneous spheres and activities, therefore a study of this nature must recognise young women's involvement in the social and economic spheres and in the sexual, labour, family and marriage markets.

*For many women "youth" has little to do with one way, linear transitions from dependence to independence. Rather attention needs to be given to the multifaceted, complex and often contradictory movements and shifts in young women's lives.

The thesis begins with a review of literature that deals with the idea of "youth as a transition". It argues that assuming one way and linear "transitions" from child to adult, girl to woman, or

dependence to independence is deficient in helping explain what happens to young women. An alternative way of understanding and conceptualising the experiences of young women is proposed and summarised.

Chapter three deals with the kinds of epistemological and methodological questions that feminist research ought to consider. Essentially this chapter provides the reader with an introduction to the theoretical ideas that inform this project as well as a description of the research process that I chose to undertake.

Chapters five and six provide detailed description and interpretation of the life experiences of young women. Using both the ideas and information gained from recent empirical studies and the dialogical process with young women these chapters look at the experiences of young women in the social and economic spheres. Chapter five takes as its theme the social aspects of young women's lives with attention given to the family and domestic labour, relationships and sexuality and leisure. Chapter six focuses on young women's economic life and concentrates on the school, paid work and unemployment.

This study endeavours to illustrate the multifaceted experiences of working class young women through presenting accounts of their experiences, views and perceptions as elicited through a series of dialogues with young women. The areas of consideration are the relationships young women have within the economic and social realms of life. The study will convey the similarities and disparities between working class young women and locate these individual and common experiences in the wider structural framework of patriarchal capitalist relations.

The names and some details of those who participated in the study have been replaced with fictional names in an attempt to guarantee anonymity. In most instances the material from the dialogues is presented as direct quotes. To ensure the text is comprehensible, I have found it necessary to slightly alter a small number of sentences.

CHAPTER TWO

FOREVER ON THE FRINGES:

THEORISING YOUNG WOMEN AND TRANSITIONS

INTRODUCTION

During one of the many discussions I had with young women I asked an 18 year old woman what she thought it takes to become an adult for herself and other women in general. She responded with:

What does it take to be considered an adult woman? I don't know whether it ever happens.

Oh, it takes a lot (laughs). And it depends on whether you're a boy or a girl. For a woman to be considered a total adult I think she'd have to be near the end of her life (Fran).

Although I believe these comments were partly made "tongue in cheek", there are nevertheless a number of rather profound ideas being suggested. For this young woman her experience of growing up is quite at odds with many popular theories about "youth" being a transitional period where young people move from independence to dependence. It seems to me that Marie's comments point us to a number of central questions that demand attention when examining the experiences of young women.

Firstly, is it the case that women's lives can be understood in terms of movements or "transitions" from childhood to adulthood or dependence to independence? Secondly, is it a possibility that women are likely to spend much of their lives in a perpetual state of "adolescence" unlikely to be able to claim social or economic autonomy? Finally is the notion that "youth" is the period of transition between childhood and adulthood useful in helping to theorise about the experiences of young women?

This chapter will devote itself to these kinds of questions. After briefly reviewing literature concerned with theorising young women's experiences I will argue that assuming linear "transitions" from child to adult, girl to woman, or dependence to independence does not consider what youth and adulthood means for women. In fact the whole concept of youth as a transition' is theoretically deficient in helping us to understand young women's lives. Further, popular notions of "youth" as a transitional period neglect to consider that young women may indeed be involved in a multiplicity of 'transitions' or movements.

"TRANSITIONS" AND YOUTH STUDIES

Before being able to examine and explain the experiences and social position of young women it is first important to deal with the question of what it means to be young and what it means to be a woman. While there is not the scope within this chapter to enter into detailed discussions of the sociology of "youth" and "women" it is important that I spend a little time reviewing literature examining the notion of youth as a period of transition.

The idea that "youth" can best be understood as the period of transition between childhood and adulthood is perhaps the most popular supposition informing literature concerned with youth studies and youth issues. However, particularly in relation to explaining the everyday experiences and life trajectories of young women, it becomes apparent that this kind of assumption needs to be treated with a great deal of caution.

As Sercombe (1990, p. 11) maintains, assuming "youth" as a time when transitions occur is problematic on a number of fronts. First of all theorising youth as a distinct period in life assumes that a concrete and consistent age structure has existed throughout the course of history and across geographic boundaries. Of course any theoretical study of "youth" which takes into account historical (see Muncie, 1983, and Springhall, 1983) or cross cultural (see Mead, 1928; Peterson, 1976; and Spencer, 1990) dimensions must recognise that, while "youth"

is "real" within different social contexts, the notion itself is contextual and socially constructed. Or as White (1992, p. 16) maintains,

While there can be no doubt that there are emotional, social and psychological processes associated with 'being a young person', for example in areas such as sexual maturity, societal expectations, and search for self identity, the content and character of these processes is of course shaped by wider cultural and institutional forces.

Another interesting problem associated with the common link between 'youth' and transitions is that many of the transitions, such as the move "from parental home to independent living, from school to work, from non-citizen to political citizen, and family of origin to a new social unit" (White, 1992, p. 20), are not particularly specific or intrinsic to the 'youth' period in one's life. For example, currently 'older' workers finding themselves out of paid work are being forced, under the Commonwealth Government's Newstart programme, into a new dependency on the state and back into education and training institutions.

Separating out "adolescence" as a time of transition ignores that young people are not unique in experiencing transitions.

As life is full of transitions why are the changes occurring in young people's lives seen as more significant and unique than those occurring in older people's lives? For many the transition from being childless to being a parent may be more significant than the transition from school to work.

Finally, and for our purposes most importantly, notions of youth as a transition tend to assume homogeneity amongst all young people and ignores the impact of class, gender and "race" differences. In other words, popular ideas about "youth" being similarly experienced by all young people are not as meaningful or relevant as may first appear and are certainly inadequate as

theoretical tools for conceptualising young women's lives (see Wilson & Wyn, 1987; and White, 1990a).

Generally speaking the sociology of youth transitions has concentrated on the movement from school to work as it is experienced by working class young men. In contrast, young women are largely invisible or marginalised within this literature (See Wallace, 1984; Griffin, 1985 & 1986; Dyson & Szironi, 1983). Although less true today than ten years ago, (See McRobbie, 1991), it is still important to acknowledge the silence that has existed in regards to young women's lives and the assumption that transition is basically a linear move to independence for all young people. A popular assumption within much of the literature is that young men will move on to take up positions in the public and paid spheres of work and that young women will "end up" in the private and domestic spheres as wives and mothers. Another assumption often made is that for young women the transition to paid work is secondary to the transition to marriage and motherhood and that therefore unemployment and prolonged education has less impact on women. This is the case within both more traditionalist 'masculinist' youth studies research and also in the work of some marxist and feminist scholars (Griffin, 1985, p. 187).

Another major problem within much of the literature concerned with youth transitions is that, where it does recognise the legitimacy of young women's experiences, it assumes that they can be understood by applying models and theories developed to appreciate young men's experiences. For example Willis (1977), in his study on working class boys, acknowledges the marginal position of young women but then claims that similar frameworks can be used to describe young women's experiences of transition. This notion of "fitting girls in" is not atypical of research in the sociology of youth. For example, Willis (1977, p. 159) in his renowned study of how working class "lads" get working class jobs claims that,

Though I could not include girls in the focus of this research, the approach outlined here is equally applicable, at least at a formal level, to the study of girls in school.

For many years feminists have been arguing that adulthood for women means very different things than it does for men. The social construction of gender is fundamentally important in shaping the way that women both deal with and are dealt with by the world in which they live. This of course poses a number of questions for any study of the interface between gender and "youth". For example should we research and theorise about young women on the basis of their youthfulness? Or should we recognise that despite the consequences of "youth", women between the ages of 12 to 25 have much more in common with their elder female counterparts than with males of the same age? Certainly if we take on the premise that young women 'grow up' to be women rather than adults, it changes the way that the experiences of young women are framed.

It then becomes clear that when considering questions of 'transition' for young women a major question that begs a response is, a transition from where to where? The central problem is that little account is made of where young women are 'growing up' to and what this means in terms of the concept 'adulthood'.

Feminist researchers have, over the past five to ten years, been highly critical of youth studies work because it has been unable to answer these questions. A response to this deficiency has been the development of alternative theories and research frameworks that reconceptualise the concept of transition for young women (See Griffin, 1986; Wallace, 1984; Thomas, 1984; Taylor, 1985; McRobbie & Garber, 1976; McRobbie, 1991; and Powell & Clarke, 1976). For example, Griffin (1986, p.34) maintains that in order to aim for research that is relevant to young women and which provides a framework for their experiences to be given priority, we need to focus on the spheres that have been considered secondary in youth transitions studies. She argues that research concerned with young women must begin to take into account the sexual and marriage markets and to develop theories that take into account young women's experiences within the family setting.

Further as Griffin (1985, p. 187) sa .

Studies of the so-called transition from school to work have tended to oversimplify the whole process of getting a job, underestimating the importance of the child labour market, informal job finding networks and young women's domestic commitments. Apart from moving from school into the full time labour market, young working class women were also managing social and economic pressures to get a man. I have understood this in terms of their simultaneous positions in the sexual, marriage and labour markets.

Also critiqued has been the notion that youth 'transitions' can best be understood as a single progression from dependence to independence. As numerous feminist scholars have argued, throughout their lives women are particularly vulnerable to economic dependency.

Women are considered a priori to be dependants, just as men are assumed almost from birth to be wage earners/breadwinners and the wage-structure of our economy has been arranged around this basic assumption (Summers, 1976, p. 119).

This basic assumption that men earn the money while women care for the welfare of others has dramatic implications for women ever reaching individual economic independence. The choices and constraints of women's lives are shaped by the "political, economic and social environment" (Harris, 1992, p.288). Restricted access to the labour market means that women do in fact become economically dependent on others for survival (Tulloch, 1984, p.19). The patterns of women's economic dependence are subject to change in that initial parental dependence may shift to dependence on partners or husbands, to the state and back and forth again.

Therefore the notion that youth is a period of transition from dependence to independence is a highly problematic in considering the experiences of young working class women. As Harris (1984, p. 25) points out class cuts across gender making working class women even more vulnerable than their middle class counterparts to economic dependency and poverty.

The notion that young people are involved in "transitions" from dependence to independence is highly problematic particularly when one considers the end points that young women face. It is simply not the case that most young women move from dependence to independence or even the private sphere to the public sphere. Rather, as studies such as Sweet (1987) indicate, it is more likely the case that working class young women remain economically dependent on a male and move from one domestic household to another spending tenuous and unstable time in the public sphere. (Sercombe, 1989, p. 12).

While it is certainly the case that every young person is impacted on by the way that "age" has been institutionalised within such things as legislation, media representations and social policy, the specific way in which they come to experience this is dependent on their social background and gender (Palmer, 1990, p. 24). Age influences the immediate life experiences of young people, but it does not fundamentally determine life opportunities and material outcomes (White, 1990a, p. 13; Roberts, 1983, p. 126; & Graycar and Jamrozik, 1989, p. 244).

As Wilson and Wyn (1987, p. 3) assert,

Using age as the primary focus of analysis has meant that in most instances, young people have been regarded as a homogenous group.....Social class, gender, ethnic and race relations together shape the different members of our society to obtain an adequate livelihood and to exercise power over others. Such divisions have meant that children have much more in common with their parents than they have with children from the 'other side of the tracks'.

Using age as the principle determinant of a young women's circumstances assumes that young women have more in common with young men than their older women counterparts. In terms of trying to find alternative ways of understanding the lives of young women, it is very useful to remind ourselves that young women are women at least as much as they are young.

RECONCEPTUALISING YOUNG WOMEN'S LIVES

It becomes apparent from this review that to make sense of the lives of working class young women it is paramount that our analysis move beyond the traditional explanations which rely on notions of youth in transition. While these theoretical perspectives may reflect the experiences of young men, they are nevertheless inadequate for the purposes of this study.

But what kinds of questions need to be dealt with in order to develop more comprehensive tools of analysis for explicating the lives of young women? What kind of a model will help inform me as I endeavour to make sense of discussions with young women involved in this study? Who are the commentators that have provided the most useful theories? Perhaps the most effective way to answer these questions is to propose a set of principles that I believe need to inform a research project of this nature.

First of all, it is important to acknowledge that work which has already been undertaken, particularly by feminists interested in "youth studies". Much of the more recent work of feminists and a limited number of male youth studies theorists (see Griffin, 1986; Wallace, 1984; McRobbie, 1991; White, 1990a; & Presdee, 1984) does provide the basis for useful reconceptualising of the lives of young women. For example studies which focus on other areas outside the movement from school to work have resulted in the inclusion of young women in academic and other official inquiry.

Feminist interest in the marriage and sexual markets, family relationships, movements from house to house and the involvement of young women in the sexual domain has legitimized and validated these important areas of consideration amongst researchers and social theorists. This kind of work has resulted in a shifting focus away from exclusive interest in young men in the public domain to highlight the public and private spheres of young women's lives. This recent theoretical direction, which makes visible the specific and unique experiences of young women is one that informs this project. At the very least, making young women the subject of my investigation and spotlighting the significance of gender relations provides a strong theoretical basis for reconceptualising the study of "youth".

Another major theoretical contribution to the sociology of young women can be found in the work of both Wallace (1988) and Griffin (1985). The significance of this work is that it calls for the need to investigate young women's simultaneous involvement in a range of spheres or domains. Griffin (1985, p. 187) situates her analysis within what she calls the sexual, marriage and labour markets while Wallace (1988, p. 25) stresses the importance of the three relatively autonomous spheres of the labour market, the housing market and the family.

She claims:

...transition to adulthood should be seen as part of a process of social and cultural reproduction which takes place on three different levels - through the labour market (school to work), through the housing market (to an independent residential unit), and the family (from home of origin to that of destination).

In a study of this nature it is therefore important that young women are allowed to engage in dialogue that deals with their identity in a range of spheres. Empirical and anecdotal evidence from feminist inquiry, women youth workers and my own experience in working with girls' projects suggest that areas such as sexuality, friendships, family, domestic work, consumption and leisure are all among the principle concerns for young women (see Gilbert and Taylor, 1991; McRobbie, 1991; Savier, 1981; Nava, 1984; and Dyson, & Szirom, 1983). Concentrating attention on the movements young people make in relation to popular sociological domains such as the paid work arena, school, crime and public leisure can only account for a limited proportion of young women's lives.

As McRobbie (1991, p. 192) suggests in her article exploring the importance of dance to working class young women, social activities such as leisure, friendships and artistic expression are just as significant or central in the lives of some young women as school, work and family. Social research which neglects the range of social and cultural practices that young women participate in runs the risk of providing a severely narrow analysis. McRobbie (1991, p. 194) argues that to restrict social analysis to the study of activities and spheres that are popular amongst men is to fail to recognise "a diversity of wider social questions and issues which are immediately raised by even the most superficial consideration of (in this case) dance."

Contrary to much popular rhetoric it is not the case that young women are exclusively restricted to the private or domestic sphere. While there may be a great deal of pressure on particular

groups of young women to spend large amounts of their time at home the vast majority spend at least some time in the public sphere. It is therefore important that research with young women not only consider questions that are important to the researcher but identify the varying and interdependent activities and spheres that are meaningful to young women. It is also important to recognise that the different spheres have some impact on each other. For example, a young woman's capacity to participate in leisure activities is highly dependent on the finances and social networks she has at her disposal, both of which are severely limited if she happens to be out of work and physically isolated.

It is also important to recognise that movement in one market or sphere does not necessarily mean progression through another. For instance, it is often assumed that getting a job will enable a young woman to move from her family home and make the progression to independent living. However in many cases the reality is that much of the available work in the formal economy is restricted to part-time, casual and low paid positions (Sweet, 1987; Ross, 1988)). Recent studies such as that undertaken by Hartley (1989) further indicate that as young women's income increases so too does their contribution to their home.

Whilst recognising the major contribution of more recent work on the sociology of young women it is unfortunate that many have continued to perpetuate or overemphasise a number of problematic assumptions. As was mentioned earlier in this chapter, an important trap that much of the recent work on young women falls into is ignoring its own critique of the homogeneous nature of social categories. Just as the concept of "youth" is full of ambiguity so too is the construct of "young women". While the idea that all young people are largely "going through" similar experiences ignores the material realities associated with gender relations so too the idea that all young women share the same outcomes equally ignores the impact of class, "race" and ethnicity (Pettman, 1992, p. 55). The social construct of young women may disguise the range of young women's interests and experiences.

At the very least what is needed is an analysis that recognises the multiple determinants of the life situation and life chances of young women. Therefore it is essential that any analysis of young women's experiences look at the interface between various "worlds of inequality". Not only is critical that we look at the different spheres of young women's lives but we must be able to grasp the dynamic and interconnected nature of specific facets or worlds of inequality (Pettman, 1992, p.55).

While there is not the scope in this project to deal in detail with debates surrounding the interconnections between racism, sexism, class and age relations it is nevertheless important to recognise difference amongst young women and to take some account of how the relations of age, "race" and ethnicity, class and gender interconnect (For a more detailed discussion of the interface between racism, sexism and classism see Pettman, 1992, p. 54-77; Stewart & Jennett, 1987, p. 1-30; Bottomley et. al. 1991).

In this case the research amongst young women must begin with a recognition of the differences among and between (young) women taking into account the specificity and variety of young women's experiences (Pettman, 1992, p. 77). In practical terms this means that not only ought young women be queried as to their experiences of being young and a woman but they also must be allowed to speak of their identities as Aboriginal and non-English speaking, working class, lesbian, physically isolated and disabled young women.

The second important assumption in recent work is that young women's movements are largely one way and linear in nature. The problem with this kind of assumption is that in a very subtle way it supports the idea that as young women get older their circumstances will alter or change in a substantive way. In actuality many young women rarely experience a linear transition from dependence to independence; rather they are more likely to remain dependent on a man or the state. Rather than "progressing" and being awarded "adulthood" status women are more likely to have their status converted while retaining their dependency. For example the "progression"

from being someone's daughter, to someone's wife to someone's mother. As the quote at the beginning of this chapter illustrates young women are rarely considered to have "made it" in terms of adult status.

Another subtle, but nonetheless consequential, problem with applying ideas of linear, one way transitions is that where women do experience a degree of independence it is often the case that their "station" or situation is less than fixed or permanent. For example women's position within the world of work, economy, sexual market can be dramatically affected by such things as a recession, transformations in the labour market, birth of a child, and changing notions of femininity. So a young women may find within a very short time span she has moved: i) from student to paid work to receiving no income support, ii) from living with parents to independent housing to homeless, or iii) from single to married to separated. In many instances women's passage through life is highly tenuous with almost constant movement and only short term periods of mobility.

While working class young women's lives are markedly shaped by economic and social factors, this does not mean that the young women blindly accept 'their lot in life'. The individual and collective responses and resistances of young women need to be recognised as well. On individual levels young women have a variety of coping mechanisms and resistance strategies. These range from the use of humour and irony to subtle and overt subversion. Young women are active agents in making decisions and carrying out action within the wider context of social and economic relations.

In terms of this project it is vital that due attention be given to the multifaceted, complex and contradictory movements and shifts in young women's lives.

One way of illustrating these multiple identities and facets of young women is to imagine them as a diagram of what we as kids used to know as a spirograph. A spirograph was constructed by

using an instrument to guide a pen in circular motions. The resulting effect was an elaborate (at times visually confusing) assortment of lines. The lines were curved in shape, regularly crossing over each other and infinite with no fixed point of entry or exit. Drawing the spirograph was a fascinating affair as the pen would often change direction drastically and regardless of the size and shape of the spirograph would skirt on the fringes but never reach the precise centre. In many ways this provides a metaphor for the movements and experiences of young women. A one directional line which depicts a linear route to independence does not adequately account for the reality of young women's struggle. Likewise a simple circular model with predictable outcomes does not take into account the dynamic, active and shifting ways in which young women may challenge, resist, oppose or subvert the attempts of others to manage and contain their lives. Rather this model represents how young women struggle around the "centre" of adulthood, independence or autonomy, not actually arriving in any definitive or absolute sense. Instead, young women, and women in general, will experience being 'adult' at various points and times in their lives while continually "skirting" on the fringes of adult independence.

CONCLUSION

As Fran suggests, young women's transitions involve a range of complexities and contradictions. As a result any research project of this kind must rely on theoretical tools that provide the basis for dealing the complex and contradictory social world confronting young women. While more recent work dealing with young women as the subject matter provides a sound basis for informing this research project there is clearly a lack of adequate explanatory tools within much of the more traditional youth studies work.

This chapter has provided a brief review of some of the theoretical work which informs this project. To ground our understandings of the experience of young women in male centred models that rely on notions of one way linear progressions to adulthood does not take into account what being adult actually means for women.

This review has demonstrated that research concerned to investigate the lives of young women must keep a number of working principles in mind. Researchers must make visible the specific and unique social position of young women. They must also acknowledge difference amongst young women. This involves a commitment to understanding the multiple identities of young women and investigating their simultaneous involvement in a range of public and private domains. Likewise researchers must begin to appreciate the multiple determinants of the life situation and life chances of young women and consider the interface between various "worlds of inequality". In other words feminist research must question the fact that age has been given such a privileged position in studies of young women. As Otto (1982, p. 8) makes clear, one's gender is not something that young women can easily grow out of in the process of becoming an adult. As Palmer (1990, p. 43) says, if age is the principle barrier that young women face then they need only bide their time and look forward to no obstacles in their lives as adult women.

In order to understand the experiences of young women we need a model that theorises young women from not only the starting point of young people and the construct of 'women' in general but also within the context of relations of social inequality. Any analysis of this nature which ignores sexism, class relations, racism and other forms of marginalisation and structural inequality ignores the context in which young women are forced to negotiate their life movements.

CHAPTER THREE

A FEMINIST RESEARCHING YOUNG WOMEN:

EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL ISSUES

INTRODUCTION

During the course of a seminar that I was asked to run to outline my plans for this research project I decided to begin the proceedings with a short chat about my own background and place within the study. When I dared to suggest that I was the only daughter of working class parents one of the participants (a senior lecturer from another discipline) mockingly suggested that I was yet another sociologist laying romantic claims to an affinity with the subject group in order to justify my involvement in an airy fairy, mickey mouse project. Like many women who are confronted with similar kinds of comments from male academics I immediately felt inadequate and questioned my own credentials and the 'soundness' of undertaking such a study. In retrospect I find this kind of attitude both immature and simple minded in the extreme. After I recovered from my initial insecurities I became especially angry at this person's attitude particularly as he had already made it clear that he believed 'the ideas of feminists are not 'real' or genuine social theories that ought to be used as analytical tools for 'valid' social research'.

Whether I choose to acknowledge it or not my background and experiences have significantly shaped my theoretical understanding and hence the substance of my research activities. I cannot and ought not ignore the fact that I am the only daughter of a woman who has, for the "better" part of her life, lived under state or husband controlled roofs.

Who I am and the very way in which I construct and understand knowledge has a huge bearing on any social scientific work I do and as such it is important to discuss this in the context of the research process.

In this chapter I will discuss the ways in which having a commitment to feminist praxis influences the research process and relationships. The way the research process was designed and the methods I employed will be detailed as part of this discussion.

A FEMINIST AT RESEARCH: LINKING EPISTEMOLOGY, THEORY, METHODOLOGY AND ETHICS.

Although much 'knowledge' that pertains to young people ignores young women, contemporary feminist research in the area of "youth transitions" has argued that young women are not invisible, rather they occupy a structurally different position to young men (Wallace, 1984; Thomas, 1984). Such research not only calls for attention to be directed towards young women's experiences but also argues the need for alternative theories, concepts and constructs to understand the position of young women. (Powell & Clarke, 1975.) This is perhaps the starting point for me as a feminist researcher and as a youth work practitioner.

The connection between epistemology, theory and methodology has been well documented by a number of feminist researchers. (Duelli- Klein, 1983; Smith & Noble-Spruell, 1986; Harding, 1987; Abbott & Wallace, 1990.) Unlike many traditional notions of research as an objective collection of value-free 'facts' feminist researchers argue that a person's epistemological and theoretical assumptions shape the questions they ask, the process or method they choose and the interpretations they make. The distinction then between epistemology, theory, method and ethics is tenuous. For example the line that marks the end of epistemology and the beginning of theory is very blurred and perhaps does not exist. However for the purpose of clarity I will discuss epistemology and theory, theory and methodology, and ethics as slightly distinct and separate spheres.

ON EPISTEMOLOGY AND THEORY

The research question that I have chosen in many ways is motivated by a quandary on a number of epistemological fronts. Like Wallace (1986), I believe that traditional theoretical tools for analysing the phenomenon of 'youth' are inadequate. In the main theories of youth have relied on the androcentric, ethnocentric ideas of men who have supported the interests of those who

control decision making. Unfortunately, as this project has only limited scope, I will not be able to explore the anglocentric nature of theories of youth.

In many ways the whole research project is concerned with exploring new epistemologies and theories. In other words developing our 'knowledges' and theories about young people, particularly working class young women.

Earlier I briefly talked about my own background and how I became interested in this kind of a project. In many ways this is where discussions ought to start. As I have already hinted, I draw a great deal of inspiration from the ideas of feminist women. While there is enormous diversity within various 'schools' of feminism, their common ground is the belief that women are economically, politically and socially subordinate. As such, feminists concerned with the study of youth argue that young women are not only marginalised due to the institutionalisation of age (hence all young people share certain restrictions and controls), but also because of the institutionalisation of gender and the subsequent subordination of women.

If one were to ask me to pin down which particular 'school' of feminism I attach myself to I would probably cringe. Not by any stretch of the imagination would I claim to be acquainted with many of the debates that have gone on between various feminisms. I must also say that, to varying degrees, I have been 'enlightened' by most schools of feminist thought. The marxist feminist tradition has proven a useful analytical tool for understanding the workings of a modern capitalist state, radical feminists provide soul searching questions on the nature and origin of women's oppression under patriarchy, liberal feminism reminds me of the occasional need for pragmatism and post-modern feminism has given me a refreshing reminder of the value of deconstruction.

However I would have to say that I more closely 'connect' with socialist feminist ideas. I would also argue that class and 'race', along with gender are primary mediators of young women's

experiences and life chances. However I especially appreciate the complexity and diversity of analysis that socialist feminism offers.

In terms of my research project the theories that socialist feminists offer to interpret the situation of women have enabled me to develop some tools for understanding not just my own experiences, but those of other women. For example, if I use socialist feminist ideas as an interpretive framework it becomes clear that the notion of transition as a linear progression to independence is a dubious proposition. Do young women go from dependence to independence or from one form of dependence to another? Whilst at school many young women are dependent on their family for food, shelter and support. Supposedly the transition to work will enable them a higher degree of independence, at least financially. As we move into the 1990s young women's chances of gaining independence through their involvement in the primary labour market are becoming more limited (See Sweet, 1987; Maas, 1988; Hartley, 1989; Ashendon, 1990; Lewis, 1990).

Research has also pointed to the pressure young women have placed on them to 'find a man' as a means of gaining adult status socially and economically (See McRobbie, 1981; Hudson, 1984; Thomas, 1984; Griffin, 1985; Wallace, 1986). However, the pressures to "get a boyfriend and settle down after leaving school" may lead young women from one form of dependence, on the family, to another form, on the male partner. What pressures are there for young women to conform to one form of domestic dependence to another? Socialist feminist analysis of the education system, the ideology of the family and the gender segregation of the labour market lead to the conclusion that young women have limited choices about their futures. Under capitalism and patriarchy, women's dependence is materially, socially and ideologically reinforced.

My research project was concerned with finding out about young women's experiences within different institutions such as school, family and the world of work. I hoped to gain insight not only of their experiences, but how they understood their situation and if the young women saw

that their experiences were different from their male counterparts. Feminism does not only influence how I comprehend women's lived experiences, it also impacts upon how I understand the world of research.

As Vellekoop-Baldock (1990, p. 50) maintains, for many years feminists have been critical of the male bias in conventional sociological theorising and research. Not only have critics focused on the subject matter of research projects but the very way in which research has been carried out.

Feminist research and theory has been critical of the male bias inherent in positivist approaches to the construction of knowledge and research and suggests the need for an alternative understanding and practice of the research process itself. (Abbott & Wallace, 1990; Gunew, 1990; Baldock, 1990; Lather, 1986.) Feminist researchers, such as Stanley & Wise (1983), Abbott & Wallace (1990); Lather (1986), Gordon (1990) and Oakley (1981) have been suspicious of any "pretence to objectivity" and of the use of research methods that attempt to detach the researcher from the process of the study (Vellekoop-Baldock, 1990, p. 5). Rather they call for research approaches that:

- * acknowledge the link between theory and methodology;
- * appreciates the value of women's knowledge;
- * recognises the importance of the researcher actively situating themselves in the study; and
- * seeks to situate the researcher so they can engage in a dialogical and reflexive process with the subjects of the study.

I am equally suspicious of any pretence to objectivity and I therefore reject those approaches that emphasise rationality, control, categorisation, detachment and distance and downplay the importance of complexity, integration, intuition, subjective experience and feelings (Smith & Noble-Spruell, 1986, p. 137).

On the other hand I am not trying to give the impression that my research is taking a 'touchy feely' or 'Mickey Mouse' approach and that I am in some way rejecting rigour, precision and meticulousness (Binns, 1989, p. 13). Rather I share the idea that 'good' feminist research values the research process as much as the 'findings' and that as a result the researcher must self-consciously reflect on her part in the process (Reinharz, 1983, p. 163). Feminist knowledge is the outcome of a research relationship and involves a dialogue between the researcher and, in DeBeauvoir's (1949) terms, the Other. Therefore I cannot expect my accounts to be definitive or 'true' in any absolute way. Neither will it be the reconstruction of a dialogue between two equals. In asking the questions, recording the answers and generally 'directing traffic' I will maintain control. To deny that a power relationship exists is naive.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEORY AND METHOD

As I mentioned earlier it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate theory and method. Certainly from my point of view feminist theory has had a great deal to say about the practice of researching 'Other' women.

In keeping with feminist theory in general I was particularly interested in involving myself in research that concerned itself with projects designed by women and intended to challenge the marginalisation of women. As such it was especially important that in the research process I chose methods that challenged the way women are treated within mainstream social research.

Following on from this is the question of reproducing women's knowledge. For far too long it has been assumed that women's ideas, theories and beliefs are not as valuable as men's. Therefore it is also important that the methods adopted allow the 'participants' to maintain some control over their 'knowledge'.

Although some feminists argue against the use of what is often referred to as quantitative research techniques (See Oakley, 1981; Stanley & Wise, 1983) , I reject the qualitative - quantitative research dichotomy. I agree with Jayaratne (1983) when she argues that this dichotomy is neither clear nor useful and that it is no more liberating to use qualitative techniques that objectify women's experiences.

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

With these kinds of considerations in mind, the following research design was developed in order to address the research problem.

The research process was designed to examine and critique existing literature in youth studies. The major theoretical problem under investigation was whether the notion that "youth", as a transient stage between childhood dependence and independence, is a useful tool for conceptualising young women's experiences.

Two research approaches or methods were used to carry out the study. The first and principle method used involved reviewing and analysing research literature, social policy reports and statements and other data concerned with the lived experiences of young women and men within the Australian context. The second method involved the participation of the author and 15 working class young women in a dialogical interview process exploring the topic of young women's experience of "growing up".

SAMPLE - WHO, HOW AND WHY?

The category of 'youth' is highly ambiguous and not terribly easy to describe or pin point. For pragmatic reasons I chose to use the chronological definition of young people as those aged from 12 to 25. I ended up working with a range of young women from age 14 to 22. I approached a number of youth agencies in a particular shire that is generally described as working class due to the high population of residents receiving state benefits of some kind or other; high unemployment rates and a large percentage of state provided housing.

The major contact point for young women who were interested in becoming involved in the project came from a youth centre where I have worked for a number of years. Out of the twenty young women from the centre who expressed initial interest fourteen continued on until the end of the process.

The following details provide a brief sketch of the characteristics of the young women who participated in the study. They all lived in the region previously described.

Annie, aged 17, left school in year ten. She was unemployed for several months before working at a printing firm. Annie is responsible for the majority of domestic work in her home where she lives with her parents and sister. Although unemployed at the time of our dialogues, Annie is still seeking full time work.

Allison, aged 20, left school in year ten. She has been involved in a variety of part time jobs since she was 15. At present she lives with her boyfriend and is responsible for the domestic work in the home. She was unemployed at the time of the dialogues and is seeking part time work.

Debbie, aged 17, was completing year twelve at the time of dialogues. She has worked part time in the fast food industry since she was 15 and has tried bar work, although under the legal age for undertaking this kind of work. Debbie now lives with her mother after unsuccessfully moving away from home. At the time of writing she is waiting to see if she has been successful in gaining entrance to university.

Fran, aged 17, left school in year eleven and has been involved in a variety of part time jobs in the retail, service and hospitality sector since she was 14. At the beginning of the dialogues Fran had a full time clerical job but became unemployed soon after. She has also worked part time in bar work and voluntarily in a pharmacy. Fran has lived in a variety of housing situations during the dialogues, with boyfriend, alone and house sharing. Her involvement in domestic work

has varied from full time to part time. She is currently working casually and seeking full time work.

Jo, aged 20, left school in year eleven and has since worked part time in service and hospitality industry. She has lived away from the parental home since she was 16 but has occasionally moved back. At the beginning of the dialogues she was living with parents, however during the course of the project moved in with her boyfriend. The domestic labour that she undertakes varies according to who she is living with. She is currently unemployed and seeking work.

Kelly, aged 15, was in year ten at start of dialogues and did not return to school for year eleven. At present she does casual baby sitting work and has previously been involved in the fast food sector. Kelly lives with her parents and brother and does household chores. She is currently unemployed and seeking work.

Sue, aged 18, left school in year ten and has worked casually in the hospitality sector. Like Jo, the amount of domestic work the Sue undertakes varies according to her living situation. At present Sue lives away from the parental home and is currently unemployed and seeking work.

Lee, aged 15, was in year ten at the beginning of dialogues and did not return for year eleven. She has worked part-time and casually since she was 14 in the fast food and service sectors and was then unemployed before gaining part time work at a supermarket. At present she lives at home with her parents and brother.

Marli, aged 18, left school in year ten. She has worked in a variety of casual jobs in the service sectors and is currently unemployed. At the moment she lives with her boyfriend and is the major domestic worker in the house.

Nicky, aged 17, left school in year ten and has been unemployed for two years. She currently lives with her mother during the time of the dialogues. Like others involved in this project the amount of domestic work Nicky undertakes has varied according to who she has lived with.

Trish, aged 17, left school in year ten and has worked in a variety of part time and casual jobs. At present she lives in a house sharing situation and does domestic work for herself.

Tonya, aged 19, left school in year ten, has worked in a variety of casual jobs in the retail and service sectors and shares the domestic work with her father. She is currently employed full time as a clerk.

Lisa, aged 16, was in year ten at time of dialogues. She is unsure whether she will continue schooling or look for work. At present Lisa lives at home with her parents and does household chores and babysitting.

Angie, aged 15. Left school in year ten and has been unemployed since then. At present she lives with her mother and shares the domestic work.

The young women who became involved made up a very fluid group. Friendship groups would change and that would mean a change in the plans of those I would be interviewing. Job rosters would change. Moving house and relationship changes happened. Flexibility and back up plans were often required. This also illustrates an important point about the lives of young women. They are complex. They are busy. Young women are playing out a multiplicity of roles. For example a number of the participants were students, who also worked in part time jobs, worked at home, provided child care for their families whilst involved in a variety of social relationships. Being young (for this particular group of women anyway) certainly did not imply a time of 'amnesty of responsibility' nor did they seem to be experiencing a lineal step by step process into the realm of 'adult' responsibilities.

So the sample group varied from the research inception to the conclusion of the project. Some young women who initially agreed to participate ended up not being able to for a variety of reasons. These included gaining part time or full time work, moving house, relationship problems and of course, losing interest.

I had to keep remembering that the research may have been a major priority in my life but that it was just one more "thing" to do on many young women's busy agendas. This is not to say that those young women who became involved saw their participation as a chore. Indeed, for some it was a chance to think and reflect about their experiences with many seeing this as a positive episode in their lives.

Initially a pilot study was carried out with a small number (three) of young women to ascertain whether the research topic and process was relevant, useful and appropriate to the young women. This was a very useful phase where the young women involved asked questions about the topic and the design that enabled me to deal with areas that were not clear. It was also a time where the young women's enthusiasm for the research 'spurred' me on.

The next stage involved discussions with participants to establish their willingness to be involved in the process. This was followed by an in depth dialogical interview with all participants. We discussed experiences young women have of school, work—paid and unpaid, part time and full time, home, leisure, relationships, and the kinds of ideas the young women have about their future. Any questions that participants raised were treated seriously and were addressed as they were asked. As Vellekoop-Baldock (1990, p. 6) argues, this legitimises the involvement of the participants and recognises that the researcher has an obligation to reciprocate.

All dialogue was recorded (where it was acceptable to participants), using a tape recorder and written notes. I began the process of initially identifying common themes and patterns, points of commonality in experiences and backgrounds, contradictions and inconsistencies, and started

to compare this with the information collected from the document search. I then summarised the main points of what and how I had interpreted the information to be used in the next phase of dialogue/interviews.

The next phase involved participants in discussion of my interpretation and analysis of the first round of dialogue.

This discussion was recorded and interpreted to further refine and draw out major themes.

The purpose of this final session with participants was to go over the main points that I had made and check that the young women who participated saw these as being an accurate representation of what they had been saying. It was also important in this session to discuss what I intended doing with the ideas gathered and linking them to theories and explanations that I will be using. This process fulfils the purpose of maintaining a rigorous checking procedure to ensure that my interpretations are as close as possible to what was originally intended by the participants.

In essence, the research method comes out of a desire to deal with two major points. First, it is a critique of the male bias inherent in mainstream theories used to construct the concept of 'youth transitions'. Secondly, it aims to construct an alternative way of asking questions about the experiences of young women; explore constructs of 'transition' and its endpoints for young women; and research young women's experiences.

The research method is my way of dealing with the dilemma of producing an 'analysis which goes beyond the experience of the researched while still granting them subjectivity.' (Acker et al, 1983, p. 429). In the process young women's experiences will be fractured or partly told. However through the use of direct quotations in my research report I will be endeavouring to portray young women as active and living agents within a social setting that imposes major regulations and constraints upon them.

My quest then was to find out what goes on in the 'everyday world' of young women (Smith, 1979) while attempting to link this to wider social structures. I would like to think that the experiences of a small number of working class young women can tell me something about what it is like to be a working class young women in contemporary Australian society. As Duelli Klein (1983, p. 92) says "to acknowledge that the personal is political is to recognise an individual woman's 'personal' problem is similar to many women's 'personal' problems."

SOME OF THE CONTRADICTIONS

Discussing 'ethics' in a truncated fashion is always fraught with problems. In my view to allocate distinct 'ethics' sections in theses or papers can give the impression that the author believes ethics can be dealt with as a topic that can be amputated from the rest of the research process. I certainly do not subscribe to this view. In my view 'ethical' research is research that demonstrates a consistent link between epistemology, theory and method while being capable of dealing with the many and varied contradictions that are likely to arise in the course of the study. Therefore rather than deliberate over the 'ethical' considerations of this study I have chosen to outline the major contradictions and 'curly' questions that I was confronted with in the course of the project. Thus rather than talk about ethics as if they consist of universal regulations or principles to follow I feel it is more useful to reflect on the many dilemmas and contradictions that I encountered in the course of the study.

If we refer to the four major themes underlying a feminist approach to research we will see why it is important to consider ethics as more than mere technicalities. The first is that such research focuses on problems and issues of concern to women rather than men. Secondly, feminist research develops alternative explanations and sources of evidence. Thirdly the reason for enquiry is to facilitate an understanding of women's views of the world and to play a role in women's emancipation. Lastly, the nature of the relationship between the researcher and her

subjects means the development of strategies that will not further disempower the research participants by objectifying them.

Therefore if I as a feminist believe that women are oppressed, then it is a major ethical implication that I make every effort not to conduct research in a way that further depowers other women. To treat participants as 'objects' rather than 'subjects' is highly depowering for other women (Duelli Klein, 1983; Stanley & Wise, 1983).

In contrast, a number of feminists argue that feminist research ought to be about the researcher situating themselves with those being researched. In principle I admire this ideal, however it too does not recognise the implicit power the researcher still has. Whether I want to have power over the young women who participate in my research or not I still have to face the situation that I am the researcher and I have the capacity to make decisions over inclusions, exclusions and interpretations.

It was also important that I be prepared to talk about myself and answer questions to the best of my ability when asked. Young women are often given the impression that their questions are of little value and to refuse or delay the answering of them would be reinforcing these negative messages.

It was also important that I allow the young women to withhold information or choose not to talk. Researchers, be they men or women, do not have a license to probe or delve into young women's personal and intimate lives. Often, usually with very good reason, young women choose to 'block out' or not talk about sensitive areas of their lives. It is here that the 'scientific' skills of intuition and perception are important in 'sensing' when a young woman is reluctant to talk or respond to a question. For example, I did not see a great deal being gained by pressing young women on topics such as domestic violence, incest and sexual history. In using the informal interview/dialogue method I was attempting to create a means by which the young women could

feel comfortable and as unpressured as possible. The option to leave or to not discuss areas that they did not want to talk about with me was also an attempt at transferring power.

While I have been generally unhappy with the way that the question of confidentiality has been dealt with in traditional approaches to research it is important to mention it briefly. I would like to suggest that the question of confidentiality needs to be taken a step further than traditionalists have taken it. Generally speaking if a researcher makes sure that they protect the identity of individuals then they have passed the ethical test. However I believe social researchers need to consider the possibility of exploiting, betraying the trust of or, perhaps more importantly, misrepresenting whole social groups of people.

Although I am a woman from a similar social background to those of the subjects of my study I am no longer young and I now hold a university degree. My life situation and life opportunities have changed considerably and to assume that I 'know' what these young women were 'going through' is highly dangerous to say the least. Finch (1984, p.79) and Oakley (1981) provide useful discussions of the dangers of 'middle class' women assuming knowledge of the experiences of other women.

This connects with how I interpreted and analysed the information gathered. This is one of the many dilemmas I have been faced with thus far. In being committed to the principle of respecting the knowledge of the participants as legitimate, how far ought I go in analysing and reinterpreting their feelings and ideas. Some feminists have discussed the notion of false consciousness in situations where the researcher 'knows' the participants are 'oppressed' and the participant does not think she is. I find this a condescending and inappropriate way of understanding the knowledge of other women. It assumes that the subject does not know what she thinks and that the researcher's 'world view' has been 'raised' to some kind of higher plane of consciousness.

One practical way of dealing with this dilemma was to incorporate 'checking back' sessions in the research process. I used the first session with participants to introduce myself, provide information about the research project and enter into a dialogue concerned with their experiences and ideas about 'growing up' as young women. I then followed up with a session that sought to clarify and seek more information on the initial discussion. It was during this discussion that I asked for young women's feedback on the process undertaken. This session also provided the opportunity to discuss with the participants how I had understood and interpreted their accounts and the way I intended to present them in my thesis.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have raised a range of the epistemological, theoretical and methodological issues crucial to this research project. Acknowledging that research is not a neutral activity and presenting my theoretical stance is one way of enabling others to decide whether the research I conduct is valid and useful. In attempting to link theory to methodology I am aware of the limitations in the process I have developed, with more skills, time and resources perhaps a different methodology could be employed.

I have endeavoured to convey the project's significance given today's rapidly changing economic, social and political context. Young women are now finding it increasingly difficult to gain independence through positions in the primary labour market. Transitions from their family and to independent living is increasingly frustrated given this situation. It is important that we consider what young women are experiencing in their everyday lives with this in mind. At a theoretical level, the project is a challenge to traditional ways of conceptualising transition and 'knowing' about young people. It focuses on those who have been largely ignored in the sociology of youth, namely, working class young women.

The major aim of the project was to find out how young women experience and understand 'growing up' in a way that was enlightening for both myself as the researcher and the young women who participate. The theoretical framework I operate from and the methodology employed comes out of the recognition that young women have traditionally been given little space in social research. I hope to be able to provide that space for a small number of young women to speak out in whilst making a contribution to the youth studies area.

CHAPTER FOUR

WEDDING PLANS AND LOTTO FANTASIES:

THE EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG WOMEN IN THE SOCIAL SPHERES

INTRODUCTION

During the course of one of our talks about the future Lisa made a series of interesting comments. The dialogue went something like this.

I want to travel first before I get tied down. After that I'll probably get married and I'll have a big wedding with six bridesmaids, a beautiful dress and he'll be wearing a suit and look gorgeous. And it'll be a great big piss-up.

I don't know if that'll happen though. I'll probably have to go out and get a job somewhere. (laughing) Knowing my luck I probably couldn't even get a job or else it'd be somewhere fucked like [a local supermarket].

But mate, I'm gonna win lotto and then I won't have to even worry about any of it (with great laughter).

Historically much scholarly work interested in the sociology of youth (as is the case with earlier sociological work in general) has concerned itself almost exclusively with the public and economic spheres. In more recent times feminists (see Dyson & Szirom, 1983; McRobbie, 1991; McRobbie & McCabe, 1981; and Wallace, 1984) have been critical of this trend on the grounds that it tends to make many of women's activities invisible. From very early on in the dialogues with young women my earlier suspicion, that young women saw the social and private spheres as at least as important as the public and economic spheres, began to be confirmed. In the course of this research it became clear that young women themselves frequently identified as friends, daughters, girlfriends, workers, students, recreators, and a range of other community memberships outside of the economic and public spheres.

This and the following chapter provide a discussion of young women's experiences in the social and the economic spheres using ideas generated from recent empirical studies and the dialogical process with young women. In this chapter I have included a discussion of the family, private work, relationships and sexuality and leisure within the social sphere. In the following chapter on economic life I have chosen to discuss the school, paid work and unemployment as being part of the economic sphere. In essence the separation of relationships and institutions such as the school and family into the economic and social spheres simplifies the reality. I would argue that the types of relationships that occur in all of these realms are shaped and mediated by power divisions based on race and ethnicity, class and gender. As such these relations are political and economic.

However before entering into this discussion it is important to outline the difficulties associated with falsely separating aspects of young women's lives. Also acknowledged in this chapter is the interface between different worlds of inequality and the impact of class, gender, "race", ethnicity and Aboriginality. This chapter largely deals with young women's involvement in the social sphere with particular attention being paid to family and domestic life; sexual and social relationships; and leisure and control.

FALSE SEPARATIONS: DISCONNECTING SPHERES OF YOUNG WOMEN'S LIVES.

Oh I don't know which part of my life is more important! Like I get really confused about that. One day(her boyfriend) is more important than anything and then the next I think fuck him, getting a job is more important. Like they're all important (Marli).

Initially when considering how I would order these sections of the thesis I encountered some difficulties in respect to how to separate the different spheres or aspects of young women's lives. Before moving on to provide a synopsis of the field work undertaken during the project it is critical that a number of significant points be made in relation to how this and the following chapter are arranged.

It is also worth noting that working class young women are not always or solely victims (certainly not in any totalising way). While it is the case that young women have to contend with various forms of marginalisation as a direct result of social processes associated with class, gender, race and ethnicity and other structural forms of inequality it is not at all useful to see them as 'totally powerless' or victims in the absolute sense. As well as acknowledging the material and tangible ways in which young women are regulated and controlled in a social and personal sense it is equally important to recognise their capacity to actively challenge, resist and contest their identity and position in society. This involves the recognition that both "agency" (i.e., self conscious choices and activities) and "structure" (i.e., objective relationships and resources) are concurrently at work in any one young woman's life.

This project examines the complexities and contradictions involved in young women's lives rather than accepting grand theories that propose simplistic and straight forward generalisations. Therefore it must take into account differences as well as similarities between young women. For example, one young woman may experience unemployment as "fun" while others, in seemingly

similar circumstances, may provide "traumatic" accounts of life without paid work. To suggest that some young women do not enjoy periods of unemployment would be to deny authenticity. However this does not imply a change in these young women's objective circumstances. Whether they enjoy their unemployment or not does not change the reality that they are structurally vulnerable within the labour market.

So too there is the need to highlight the many "real" contradictions experienced by young women in their everyday lives. To illustrate this let us take one young woman's conflicting experiences of unemployment as a case in point. When I asked this participant to talk about being out of paid work her discussion ranged from how she does all the work at home in her relationship with her boyfriend but "feels that it's o.k. since her boyfriend pays her way and everything", to how she loves being unemployed "going to the beach, watching soapies and visiting girlfriends" even though she feels this isn't the "right attitude" really.

Although it has been suggested that to separate or truncate aspects of young women's lives and deal with them in isolation is problematic, at some point pragmatic decisions have to be made in respect to how the thesis can be presented in a clear and accessible way. The structure of the following two chapters was adopted more for the purpose of fluency and clarity for the reader than to suggest that young women's lives can actually be understood as consisting of the two discreet spheres of economic, and social life. The clear message from young women involved as participants in this project is that the spheres covered in the next two chapters are necessarily interlinked.

Of course the way that I have categorised and arranged young women's lives in the next two chapters also reflects my position as a feminist at research. During the dialogues there was certainly an informal order in the way that I approached discussion. This usually depended on what I understood as a primary activity of the young woman in question. If they were students we tended to start with a discussion of school. As part of easing into the session we normally

went with my informal list of discussion topics at first. This included topics such as what they were involved in at that time, who they lived with, if they were at school, what happened in an "average" day, and what kind of work they have or are doing. However once the initial wariness wore off young women would often go back and forth from each topic. For example, if the discussion was concerned with school, more often than not relationships with girl and boyfriends, family and other significant contacts would come up. If the young woman was employed in paid work it would not be unusual for sexuality, leisure or perhaps housing to come up in the dialogue.

While it is true that my influence would have to have been felt the young women tended to make many of their own links between spheres, such as work and family, that traditionally are separated in social scientific work. For example, one young woman talked about her past and present experiences in terms of which man she was going out with at the time. She realised this about half way through our session and laughingly said she was a bit of a 'boyfriend jumper'. It seemed that who she was in a relationship with at any one point in time dramatically impacted on other areas of her life, such as work, leisure and sexuality. Another young woman ordered the accounts of her experiences in terms of the jobs she has had. In other words, she recalled many of the events in her life in terms of where she was working at the time.

The way in which the young women actually made links between different realms is a prime example of why it is difficult and unnatural to separate the spheres of work, family and home, relationships and sexuality. For presentation purposes however, I will divide up the experiences of young women. I will follow the example of the two young women I described above and separate the chapters into young women's economic and social life. The present chapter will look at the experience of young women in terms of home and family life and domestic labour, relationships and sexuality, regulations and social control and leisure. Also included in this chapter is the participant's perspectives on their future and how they understand what it means to be an adult woman. The next chapter will concern itself with economic life, which will cover

school, the public world of work, unemployment and economic status in terms of dependence and independence.

Finally it is important to remind the reader that the data generated from dialogue with young women should not be taken on its own. In a project of this nature it is not reasonable to extrapolate "evidence" or "validate" grand theories on the basis of such a small sample of informants. The intention in undertaking the field work was to use it as illustrative material in conjunction with other recent empirical and primary research, rather than to simply present it on its own.

THE INTERFACE BETWEEN WORLDS OF INEQUALITY

From the discussion so far it is clear that young women's lives are not simple; rather, they can be best understood as a complex set of relationships or multiple identities existing within a range of spheres. Not only is it important to recognise that any one young woman's life is multifarious involving her in a range of activities and spheres but it is important as well that we acknowledge that structural and systemic inequality results in differences amongst young women. In other words, to examine the experiences of young women is to also examine the various ways in which sexism, racism, class relations and other worlds of inequality interrelate and shape the lives of individuals and groups of young women. At the very least what would be good is a range of explanations that recognise the multiple determinants of the life situation and life chances of young women.

While there is not the scope in this project to explore in detail literature and debates surrounding the interconnections between racism, sexism, class and age relations it is important to at the least recognise difference amongst young women. This becomes especially true when we consider the scenario facing marginalised young women. A project of this nature thus must acknowledge young women's identities as women, as Aborigines, as non-english speaking and/or migrant people, as working class, as lesbian, as physically isolated and/or as people suffering from disabilities. At the same time and as mentioned in the last chapter it is hazardous to assume that young women are totally powerless. Not only does this lead to the notion of young women as victims but it also tends to ignore their capacity to engage in oppressive and marginalising practices themselves. An example that became evident during the course of dialogue came from an Aboriginal young women who said that although constantly confronted with the inhumanity of classism and sexism, working class young women still have the capacity to (and often do) inflict racism on Aboriginal young women.

Also important in our analysis is to not only assume that marginalised young women may be subject to multiple inequality but that such inequality may be qualitatively different. For example, not only are Aboriginal young women potentially subject to sexism + racism + ageism (hence triple oppression) but it is likely that they encounter sexism, racism and ageism differently. For Aboriginal young women sexism at school is different when mediated by racism. In other words, Aboriginal young women experience:

- i) sexism in some ways differently from other young women;
- ii) racism in some ways differently from Aboriginal young men;
- iii) ageism in some ways differently from all other young people; while
- iv) sharing much with all three groups.

In essence social scientists have the difficult task of trying to examine the many different forms or discourses of marginalisation while understanding both young women's shared and different experiences.

In many ways this kind of project can only hope to point to the need for more detailed research. However there are distinct patterns or themes that pertain to the way that different forms of inequality intersect and interconnect in the lives of young women. If nothing else the project points to the need to recognise both differences and similarities between young women.

FAMILY AND HOME LIFE

The family is a site for sets of complex relations. It is within the family that young women learn a variety of 'important life lessons'. Yet within the Australian literature concerned with youth studies and young women there has not been a great deal of interest in what actually occurs in families. From overseas work and the speculation of a number of Australian feminists (see Abbott and Wallace 1990, p. 73-91; Cass, 1983, p. 168-189; Griffin, 1985, p. 44; and Sharpe, 1990, p. 32) it is clear that young women's lives and histories are tied in and shaped by their families and family circumstances (Coffield et. al. 1986, p. 117). If within families different sets of practices and expectations exist for girls and boys then it is important that scholarly attention be drawn to this sphere of young women's lives.

This section explores the social relations that exist within the family for working class young women. It will also look at what happens between young women and their partners. Following this discussion is a brief exploration of the domestic labour young women carry out within the home. This does not mean that this work is not part of the economy; in fact women's work in the home is a major contributor towards the functioning and reproduction of the capitalist economy. However to understand the meaning of this work I believe that we must consider how unpaid domestic work is inextricably bound up with the relations of home and family life. As I mentioned before, separating the different spheres of young women's lives is somewhat unnatural. "Work" within the home is a prime example of the difficulties of false separations.

The young women involved in the project came from a variety of different family formations. Several came from two parent households. A number came from households where the mother was the only parent. For young women living away from their parental homes the types of households varied. Some shared with friends or house mates while many lived with their partners. The patterns arising from my research portrayed a fluidity of movement with many speaking of

a history of movement from parental home, to independent accommodation, only to have to return and, some cases, move out again with boyfriends or other partners. The use of a dialogical research method which demanded the revisiting of all participants was a very useful way to uncover this constant movement from household to household.

While some schools of feminist analysis focus on the family as a site of oppression or subordination, for many young women families were also a site for emotional and physical support. Although many had problems with aspects of living with their families (mainly in terms of regulation) they still believed it was a better alternative than other options available to them. For example, Megan had witnessed the difficulties experienced by a number of her friends who had found themselves homeless. In our discussion it became apparent that, although she had mixed feelings about living with her parents, she had some knowledge of the traumas associated with moving out.

The good things about living at home are that it's safer than when you're not. Like I've got some friends who have been homeless and it was really hard and scary for them. They're living at a youth accommodation place now after going through some pretty heavy shit (Megan).

For other young women the relationship with their parent/s shifted after they had moved out, just got older or changed their circumstances.

I never got enough freedom, my parents used to fight about this and it got so bad I threatened to leave. I left for two nights and stayed at a friend's house then they were saying 'come back, come back, I know I'm in the wrong, I learnt my lesson. That was when I was 16 and now I feel like I have got enough freedom (Anna).

When I was about 15 I matured up a lot and thought yeah I like living with Mum and Dad but when I was younger I was rebelling you know. That was when I hated them (Jo).

Mum used to try and talk to me about everything but I just didn't want to, when I did move out Mum and I communicated a lot more and now when I've got problems I ring her straight up (Allison).

Rules and regulations were a major issue with young women still living with their families. Many spoke about the frustration associated with being subject to varying restrictions and controls. At times much of this seemed unfair and unreasonable. However it would be a mistake to suggest that the result for young women was total powerlessness or helplessness. In effect most of the young women had a variety of ways in which they resisted these constraints. For example Megan spoke about the way in which she "got around" the manner in which her parents strictly regulated her movements after dark. Her tactic is to not overtly oppose rules in the first instance, but rather to work out ways of subverting them.

If I ever want to go somewhere or with someone they don't want me to I will just go and sleep at a friend's house and go from there. I do the same for my friends (Megan).

Leaving the parental home was seen by most as a big step, although for a small number it came as something of a natural progression. However in all instances young women spoke of a range of difficulties associated with securing independent accommodation. A number of the young women I spoke with cited major conflict in the family home as the central reason why they decided to move out in the first place. Nevertheless, in many cases, this conflict resulted in much heartache and trauma around the time when they moved out. Fran who left when she had just turned 17 provided the following description of leaving her mother's house:

It was getting crowded at home. The kids, (I've got a younger sister and brother), were growing up a lot then and the house was very small and my Mother's new boyfriend had moved in and so it was just too crowded for me. With being the oldest and everything I thought that I had probably stayed my limit and it was time to leave. I was really torn for a long time after that (Fran).

Difficulties and problems often do not end once the young woman has decided that she will make the move away from the parental home. As Hartley (1989) shows, in her detailed study of the scenario confronting young people living independently, income levels for young women on a youth wage or social security benefit are grossly inadequate for those with no other means of financial support.

When I moved out from home I was living in [name of suburb] and then I had hassles with my car, the landlord and other expenses. So I had to move back home didn't I? Cos I didn't have enough money (Nicky).

It is also important to not forget the relationships that young women have with "boyfriends", partners or "house mates". A number of young women spoke of intimate and close relationships that they had with people outside of the realm of their immediate family. While these relationships are rarely considered within the bounds of the traditional "family" they are highly significant for young women living away from the parental home.

Having a relationship with a man was a huge factor in decisions young women made about their lives. In regards to leaving their parental home, boyfriends were often a "way out". Sometimes these were temporary exits from their family home as conflicts happened and the young women were left with limited income to pay the rent.

For Allison, moving away with her boyfriend happened because he was leaving the state and she did not want to be left behind. This also gave her the opportunity to move out of a small town she grew up in and this was a contributing factor in her decision to leave.

Well Paul had lost his job and wanted to go back to W.A. I said well I wanted to come with him. Mum and Dad didn't want me to come heh? I had the best job at [name of hotel] but I just got up and left. It was so easy 'cos I had lived in [name of country town] all my life and I was sick of the gossip and bitchiness and I am just so glad I left. Now I'd go back for a holiday but I wouldn't live back there (Allison).

Marli, who had been living at home with both parents had been wanting to move out. Her boyfriend worked away and it was more practical that she stayed with her parents. Living on social security benefits restricted her access to housing. When her boyfriend left his job they decided to move out together. He provided the chance for her to move away from the parental home where she felt like she was treated like a child, and couldn't stand the types of conflict occurring in her family.

My boyfriend had left his job and came back down to Perth and then we had to find somewhere to live and we chose this house. We didn't even last 3 weeks before I moved out and moved back home. Due to the devastation of everything happening at home I couldn't stand it any longer so I moved into a place with other people. Even though there were other people in the house I got lonely. The difference when I was with my boyfriend for a couple of weeks was that I had someone of my own to come home to (Marli).

As Marli points out, living with her boyfriend gave her a sense of belonging that she did not feel in shared housing with house mates. Living in an intimate relationship with someone has different significance for young women than shared housing. Some young women felt that this kind of

household was positive for them in that it contributed to their development and also the fact that they did not have the same emotional responsibilities with house mates as they do with family and friends.

I was in a sharing situation. At that stage there was a Japanese girl, an English couple and a guy called Tony. So there was 5 people in this big 4 bedroom house. It put a lot of limitations on you like if you wanted the lounge room or you had friends coming over you needed lots of co-operation. But that good cos it made you learn to deal with the faults and good things people as well (Trish).

What's good about where I live now is that I'm my own person, nobody asks me where I go or who with and when will I be back (Sue).

There were also the down sides to shared housing. Differences in personalities and in some cases social class caused problems.

One guy we had living with us was a pain in the arse. He worked in a library and had just come back from Europe and thought he was very worldly, real kind of upper class (Trish).

Living at and leaving home are clearly important aspects of young women's lives. Rarely does this seem to be acknowledged in youth studies or youth subcultural studies (Brake, 1985, p. 164). As indicated above, there is a need for further detailed research in what is a significant area of life experience. Living in households with others, be they parents, friends or partners demands an enormous amount of young women's physical and emotional resources. The following section on private work will further explore the way in which young women contribute to their family and domestic lives.

PRIVATE WORK

Before feminist researchers began approaching the study of the world of work definitions of work tended to be very narrowly restricted to public and paid forms of work. However an overemphasis on paid work ignores the enormous contributions that women make by performing tasks in the home or domestic sphere. Indeed commentators such as Abbott and Wallace (1990, p. 126) argue that understanding women's role as domestic labourers is critical in understanding women's position and experience in modern industrial capitalist countries like Australia.

From very early on in their lives young women are prepared for domestic duties. Women actually do huge quantities of work in the home. Research from the United States indicates that women participate in an average of 99.6 hours per week. Women in the United Kingdom devote 50 hours a week just to child care. In France and Sweden the number of hours spent on unpaid house-work is greater than all the hours of paid employment put together. The vast bulk of this labour is performed by women (Taylor, 1988, p. 4).

It is here that we begin to encounter problems in talking about separate spheres of young women's lives. Unquestionably there are distinct links between involvement in the family and unemployment and involvement in unpaid work in the domestic sphere. In many ways both areas are one in the same.

It is absolutely critical, therefore, that studies concerned with young women's contribution in the family are acknowledged as studies of work (Griffin, 1985, p. 7). The refusal to acknowledge that "housework is work is both a reflection and a cause of women's generally low status in society" (Oakley, cited in Abbott and Wallace, 1990, p. 127). Studies of youth transitions have tended to ignore young women's work in the home and domestic sphere and hence perpetuated the idea that young women's work is not real work.

It came as no surprise that many of the participants felt it was important to talk about unpaid work in the home. What did become apparent was the different messages that came through in dialogues. For some young women there is uncertainty over whether domestic work is "real" work. This is not inconsistent with older women's view of work. Rowland (1988, p. 95) describes the ambiguity many women have in relation to their own work in this quite beautiful little discussion:

Women constitute half the world's population; are one-third of the world's formal workforce; do two-thirds of its work hours; carry out four-fifths of all informal work; receive one-tenth of the world's income and own less than one-hundredth of the world's property. Yet some women respond 'No' to the question 'Do you work?'

Many feminists interested in women's contribution to the world of work would not find this hard to believe. As the very nature of work has been constructed and defined by men, 'work' often refers to those productive activities that men value while women are considered to be 'just' housewives, secretaries, child-care providers and emotional support (Abbott and Wallace, 1990, p. 121).

However some young women actually felt that their status grew if they became involved in domestic labour around the house. For example, since becoming unemployed Anna has taken on the majority of the domestic labour in her family. Since taking on this "position" she felt that her role was important and one that gave her some power over her circumstances. Although aware of the contradictions inherent in what she was saying Anna half proudly and half jokingly said, "I'm a housewife that's not a wife."

For other young women whose mothers undertook the majority of work in the home domestic labour was not as significant.

My mum doesn't work so I don't have lots to do...just clean my room make my bed
(Megan).

Perhaps the major reason why young women felt they did not undertake large amounts of domestic work was because there was another woman already taking on the work. Lee felt that she actually did a minimal amount of work in the home because her mother was at home and seen to be responsible for the work getting done.

Like Mum's always been a housewife so it was her that did most of the work. We got told to do the chores but I knew she would do them (Lee).

Lee's understanding of domestic labour as work was very limited. In fact she believed that her mother did not work, rather she was seen to "take care of the home." Because their activities were not seen by others as work and because they were expected to undertake domestic labour as part of their routine some young women underestimated their own contribution in the home. Allison began her discussion by down playing the domestic work she does. However after some reflection she came to the conclusion that she was indeed the sole contributor and that, in fact, she undertook work in the home to "pay her way."

It's nothing really like work. I haven't got a very big house. I just quickly vacuum the floor...I do something every day. But then I always do the washing up and give the floor a sweep every day so its not always that dirty. My boyfriend doesn't do any work around the house and that's fine. Like he's paying my way and everything. I don't mind doing it cos it sort of pays my way. (It is interesting to note that this young women estimated

that she was involved in 1–2 hours of house work every day. Other young women with similar duties estimated that they spent 30–40 hours a week on domestic work)

Still other young women felt compelled to take on domestic responsibilities. This is certainly consistent with recent literature discussing the pressure that structural unemployment places on young women's involvement in domestic labour. For example White (1989, p. 143), points out that:

Not only are young women subject to much greater parental control over their spare time, but there are major pressures upon them to conform to specific notions regarding 'feminine' behaviour and to perform 'womanly duties' associated with domestic labour.

Inhibited from securing paid employment and hence income, many young women face even more pressure to "prove their value" or "legitimise their parent's support" (White, 1989, p. 144). As White (1990a, p. 127) argues elsewhere, the pressure is especially harsh for unemployed young women to put in extra hours performing domestic duties to "make up" for their inability to contribute financially to the family. Given that household work is difficult to put a value on young women are often expected to spend enormous amounts of time cleaning, washing and cooking for the rest of the family.

Kelly provided a useful example of the way in which, contrary to their wishes, many young women are forced to take on duties by parents. Kelly conveyed an incident which had occurred the previous evening. While friends were visiting her mother and father told her to do the dinner dishes. She asked if she could do them after her friends had gone home which prompted a heated argument over why she had to take on these chores while her brother did not. Kelly was very aware of the unequal expectations between what are considered women and men's jobs in the home.

There is ample evidence both within the literature and from the discussion offered by the participants in this project that the responsibility for contributing to the family is disproportionately weighted against young women. As Westwood (cited in Donaldson, 1991, p. 41) claims, daughters are much more relied upon in domestic work than sons, whose assistance is absolutely minimal or non-existent. As Fran said,

My brother does not do anything he's just a very lazy boy. he's just spent his whole life in front of T.V. and he's just very lazy. He's got brains but he's just that type of person He'll wait till Mum gets home. Like he'll scream and yell about dinner but he won't cook it himself things like that he's just a very arrogant sort of male. He's got a very funny attitude towards women like ..he's very arrogant towards them he doesn't mind them as girlfriends but in his own family he takes them for granted which I think a lot of them do when they haven't had the influence that women are normal human beings and deserve respect.

Or as McRobbie (1991, p. 52) quotes a young woman: "my brother doesn't do a thing in the house. He makes a mess and I clear up after him." This is in keeping with identified trends in relation to women's and men's contribution in the home. For example, Baxter and Gibson's (1990, p. 4) study was able to show that in the majority of households women bear the main burden of domestic labour. As Collins (cited in Baldock- Vellekoop, 1990, p. 121) says, "men tend to exclude themselves from domestic labour within the home because it is 'women's work'".

FRIENDS, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY

Relationships within the family and unpaid work in the home, are not only economic relationships, they are emotional and social relationships. Humans are inherently social beings with needs for companionship of all sorts, safety, intellectual stimulation and interesting and fulfilling leisure. This section will explore this realm of young women's lives. We will take a look at the experiences of young women in regard to social and sexual relationships between themselves and with men. Included will be a discussion of leisure and regulation, which for young women are intrinsically linked. Importantly, sexual relationships, leisure and social control and regulation seemed to go hand in hand for the young women involved in this research.

The friendships between young women have not been given much attention in much of the youth studies literature. Feminist research on girls and subcultures has started to rectify this situation. The information available suggests that working class young women are not a publicly visible group. Unlike young men they do not appear to hang around in large groups in public places. Young women are seen to have smaller friendship groups and to carry out these friendships mainly in the private realm of the home and more particularly, the bedroom (see McRobbie & Garber, 1976; and McRobbie, 1991;). Other research illustrates the importance of female friendships for the day to day quality of life for young women (see Griffin, 1985; and Oakley, 1981). For instance, isolated in the home, unemployed young women like Anna look forward to visits from friends in the same situation and vice versa. There is a sense of solidarity and a link with the outside world.

One of the worst things about being unemployed and doing all this housework is that I don't get to go out much. I don't really have the money. But one good thing is that my other friends come over in the afternoon and we have a bitch and a laugh (Anna).

The 'sisterhood' that exists between young women is one very positive thing that this project uncovered. The friendships that young women engaged in also took a number of forms and provided different kinds of support. On an emotional level, friends could talk over problems with their family, with young men, personal health and sexual issues and all manner of 'private things'. As Allison and Lee point out friends are an invaluable resource and influence on young women's lives.

Working out things with Mum and Dad well, it was my friends influence really, like I would go around and tell them that I hated my parents and they'd say 'Look you know they're there to care about you and rarara', so it was probably more my friends (Allison).

I talk to my friends more about things going on in my life. I would never talk to my parents about lots of things in my life (Lee).

Financially, friends were able to support each other through common hardships. What appears to be simple things are essential to the quality of life young women have. For instance, during the dialogues with small groups of young women, they constantly bummed smokes off of each other. They saw this as a natural part of their relationship with each other. Kelly and Lisa often borrowed money from each other for bus fare, cool drinks, cigarettes and food.

We do it all the time, if she gets some money from somewhere we usually share it or at least she buys me things when we go up the shops (Lee).

Tonya, the only young woman with full time work at the time of the research was very aware of how her job made her luckier than some of her friends. In her own way she tried to help her friends out.

Well my best friend Mary hasn't got work and she lives with her Mum who's on a pension. Anyway she hasn't got a car and can't afford to go out much so I always pick her up in my car and pay for her to get into see bands on the weekends. She says she feels funny about it sometimes and I just tell her she can pay me back when she gets a job (laughs). Besides who would I go out with if she couldn't come?

The young women in the research project had networks of friends who possessed things which they could borrow or swap. For instance, Marli used to borrow Lisa's Mum's vacuum, and Angie and her friends would swap clothes and make-up. These findings are compatible with studies carried out by Coffield et al (1986) and Griffin (1985).

Friendships were also valuable ways in which working class young women could present a united front against young men who were hassling them. They were often used for resistance in the school either against individual teachers or for purposes of truanting. (See Wallace, 1984; Thomas, 1984 and Griffin, 1985). Angie describes the sophisticated plans made between friends in order to truant from school:

Before we got caught for wagging school, a group of us used to check who's parents were out for that day and meet there at lunchtime. We used to go to the house separately so it didn't look too sus.

This sense of solidarity however is not something that characterises female friendships in every facet. As Oakley describes in her work on women to women relationships, sisterhood is not a totally unifying concept on the day to day level. Due to the patriarchal and capitalist nature of our society, women are set up in competition with one another for the attention of a man and for the purpose of a paid job (Oakley, 1981, p.266). In the area of relationships with men, young women have conflicting standards. For example Lisa was adamant when she stated that " You

never ever leave your friends over a guy". Yet later on in our discussion she recounted how having a boyfriend meant that she saw less of her best friend than she used to.

This is a very good illustration of the conflicts and contradictions young women are facing in terms of social relationships under patriarchal capitalism. Relationships between women are subject to constraints and limitations due to the subordinate position working class young women occupy. Set up in competition for jobs and men, working class young women have to deal with the concept that your friend could also be your enemy, or at the least competitor.

Young women in the project presented a variety of social lives. Some had a network of friends that enabled them to hang out in large mixed groups. Sexual relationships were not seen as important as social relationships.

You should just go out with who you want. I hang out in a group of guys and girls. We just want to have a good time so I'm not worried about having a boyfriend at the moment (Megan).

Those young women without boyfriends differed on what this meant. For Tonya it means that she gets to do her own thing with a group of other women.

None of my friends have boyfriends we just go out and do our own thing. Just us girls.
(Tonya)

However, for other young women, not having a steady boyfriend meant that they felt something was missing from their lives. Trish poignantly summed up how she felt about this,

I think when you're single you're always searching for that one person which doesn't make it easy and that makes it very lonely too you know going from partner to partner or whatever (Trish).

Central to any discussion of many of the young women's lives is their relationships with young men or 'boys'. So much so that in a number of instances young women conceptualised their past in terms of which boyfriends were actually in their lives at the time. An example of this has already been referred to during the introduction to this chapter when Jo said, "Suppose I'm a bit of a 'boyfriend jumper". This was an astute observation on Jo's behalf as she was also aware how men had been impacting on her life in some pretty negative ways for the last few years. Her experience with her last three boyfriends was marred by emotional and physical violence. Our discussion of this aspect of her life was not recorded due to her wishes.

There are a variety of facets to the relationships young women have with young men. Young women and men engage in relationships on a variety of levels. These relationships need to be seen as existing within the context of gender relations with sexism and heterosexism being hallmarks.

Holden (1989, p.20) says that young men police young women through language, using derogatory terms like "'slag', 'drag' and 'lesbian'". Young men also use or threaten to use physical violence if they believe their girlfriends are 'stepping out of line' (Nava, 1984, p. 12). This was brought home to me in one particular instance when I was interviewing. A young woman was dropped off to our meeting place by her boyfriend. He took this chance to pass over his 'responsibility' for her to me by telling me if this young woman "got out of line, just whack her around the ears". Before I could respond the young woman told her boyfriend where to go

in no uncertain terms. This scenario is a good example of the power relations that exist between young men and women.

The sexist and heterosexist nature of relationships between genders was so pervasive that during this research the young women I spoke with did not mention lesbianism in a positive or serious way. It was a difficult subject to try and bring up. The only time this topic was voluntarily discussed was when Kelly was referring to people thinking she and her friend were lesbians because they were seen walking up the shops with their arms around each other. Her response to this was, " Er yuk, no way, I'm not a lezo mate. That makes me feel sick". We discussed this and she was adamant that it was 'all off' and she didn't even want to talk about it. This heterosexism is deeply embedded in the minds of both young women and men, and perhaps could be seen as one of areas in which heterosexual working class women have the power to inflict pain on other women.

Young women spoke of their relationships with their boyfriends in terms of what they wanted and what they thought their boyfriends wanted out of each other. For example, Sue saw the importance of her relationship as being fun and friendship based.

It's good fun but I don't know at the moment. I mean I'm not in love, definitely not in love. I don't know it has its ups and downs...its really hard but that's how I really want it to stay just be friends (Sue).

For others, like Marli, there was considerable importance attached to having children as a result of the relationship, even where this was not necessarily supported by young men. This means that young women often have to sacrifice their own aspirations and goals until they "fit in" with those of the young men in their lives.

He doesn't want to get married or have children so that's fine. I definitely want to have kids and get married. I'll probably live with him a couple more years just to see how we go together cos we haven't been by ourselves for very long (Marli).

Clearly for many young women, they see their identity and future as very much tied up with their boyfriends and partners. This has major implications for how they see themselves should they find themselves without a boyfriend.

If Paul and I broke up now I wouldn't know what to do. I wouldn't know what to do without a man there...you know it would be so different...I'd want another boyfriend. I don't know, you'd get over it but it changes the way you see yourself (Allison).

Being attached also brought with it a number of contradictions. Initially Marli had wanted to move out to gain independence from her family. Living with her boyfriend resulted in Marli changing her ideas about being independent. Although being in a different role than when she was living with her parents Marli was still finding that her relationship with her boyfriend brought with it its own restrictions and regulations.

I actually probably enjoy having a boyfriend more now as I've matured over time. Like moving out of home at 17 till now because of the factor that I was young enough and did want my independence whereas now I sort of don't mind being attached (Marli).

Throughout the study young women recounted what they felt were the positives as well as the negatives of being in a relationship with a man. For some young women, living with their boyfriends was viewed as a positive step in their relationship. Allison recounted how her boyfriend been a supportive partner for her.

Well Paul is just great to be with, we have a lot of fun together and like when we first started going together he was really good for me. He used to listen to all my bullshit about my family and friends and would just be there for me. Now that we've been together for all this time, he's still there for me like that, you know? (Allison).

Having someone who cares about them is something that the young women in this study felt was really important. Having survived three years in a violent relationship with her last boyfriend, Jo spoke of how it felt to be in a relationship with someone 'gentle'.

My last boyfriend was a real pig. He hurt me a lot. You know not just physically but emotionally. I was a gibbering mess by the time I actually got away from him. Anyway, Micheal, this guy I've been with for nearly a year now is just so different to him. He is really gentle and caring about me. Like if I ever get sick he just spins out, gets really worried and does everything he can to help me. Usually I just want to be left alone when I'm sick (laughs) but it's really nice having a man that is like that. I hope we last 'cos we're really good together (Jo).

Being 'good together' is one of the positive things about being in a good relationship. Whilst many of the young women were not economically independent of their boyfriends they felt that their relationship was based on mutual contribution from both parties. Some of the relationships had varying degrees of 'interdependence' with the young women and men providing mutual support, especially on the emotional level. For some of the young women in the study this sharing and supporting of each other contributed to making them feel that relationships are worth the hard work that they invest in them.

Sometimes it gets really hard. Like he might be in a shitty and I might be too and both of us just want someone to look after us. But we get through it and I realise that I'm really happy being with John and he tells me he's happy too. So I s'pose it is a matter of taking the bad with the good. If you can feel happy most of the time then you can put up with a bit of shit (Marli).

LEISURE

While the study of young men and leisure has received a reasonable amount of attention within youth studies the idea of leisure, certainly in the conventional sense, is a masculine construct (Roberts, 1983, p. 69). For example, the three features of leisure outlined in a discussion of the leisure patterns of young people during the 1988 Brisbane World Expo were: "free activity, free time and the sense of freedom and enjoyment" (Cotterell, 1990, p. 11). As Hamilton-Smith (1990, p. 12) argues, a popular misconception is that leisure consists of those activities undertaken during non-work time. It is especially important to critique this misconstrued assumption as it has special consequences for any examination of young women's leisure.

As was suggested earlier in the chapter, non-"work" time is particularly ambiguous for many working class young women. Young women, while not being employed in the paid and formal sectors of the labour market, are often very active in the informal and domestic spheres. If we were to assume traditional explanations of leisure then for many working class young women, the bulk of their lives will be spent in leisure pursuits. However as the vast majority of young women involved in this project found, much of their "free time" is not leisure time. When they are not involved in domestic work their activities are often constrained through parent's or boyfriend's regulation or the fact that they do not have the financial resources available to engage in often expensive recreational activities. As Hamilton-Smith (1990, p. 12) goes on to suggest, the extent to which young people, as with all people, are able to realise satisfying leisure is largely controlled by the broad social variables of gender and class. While leisure may be liberating and interesting for some, for many, particularly working class young women, it can be coercive and constraining, reinforcing "existing inequalities of power and privilege" (Sercombe, 1989, p. 27-28).

Some authors argue that young women do have the capacity to subvert this regulation and find strengths in women's leisure (see Gregory cited in Roberts, 1983, p. 69; and Nava, 1984, p. 11).

Young women's "play" is often integrated with family and community obligations instead of "demarcating special times and places for leisure" to encourage resourcefulness and an ability to deal with change (Roberts, 1983, p. 69).

However the majority of young women involved in this project spoke mostly of the lack of leisure opportunities in comparison to their boyfriends and brothers. As Cotterall (1990, p. 11) discovered in his study, leisure time available to girls was less than half that available for boys, because of the amount of time girls spent on school and domestic work. White (1990a, p. 146-150) confirms this argument in his discussion of female "streetkids" and the regulation of social space on "the street."

As Hamilton-Smith (1990, p. 12) points out "the leisure arena is centrally important in the transmission of culture and ideology, and potentially provides important resources for personal development and lifestyle enrichment." Therefore considerations of young women's multiple movements ought to investigate their leisure activities. Again this aspect of young women's lives is intricately linked to others. For example while the link between dance and the development of romantic and sexual relationships has not really been considered in systematic social research, clearly it deserves to be (McRobbie, 1991, p. 216).

As the following comments suggest, young women's leisure activities are social in nature and are very much linked to other aspects of their complex lives. To treat leisure as a truncated portion of her life would be to ignore the way in which it is interlinked and connected with such things as friendships, "work", family and home life, sexuality, consumption and schooling.

Dancing, talking with groups of people, catching up with friends, aerobics, getting involved in outdoor activities, getting out of the city, meeting boys, are all things I like to do. But then who can do all of that without money? (Debbie).

I mainly like to hang around with a group of friends like at their place or up the shops. Just walking around. Usually go where there's no parents home. But I don't walk around at night alone. So if I go somewhere by bus I don't like to have to travel on my own at night. But were usually o.k cos there's a group of us (Megan).

A normal weekend would be coming over to Theresa's or going over to Grant's, playing cards, eating (laughs) that's about it that's all I do (Allison).

As is the case in other spheres of young women's lives, access to leisure and fun is very much shaped by the way in which gender relations subordinate and regulate women's options and opportunities. However this is not to say that young women do not have the capacity to resist and challenge engendered boundaries imposed by institutions and individuals. In the main young women are "constructed into a domesticating role" (Stratton, 1992, p. 97) so that generally speaking leisure either occurs within the "bedroom" at home or in the male dominated and controlled public arena.

The young women in this study did have leisure activities in their homes and at the homes of friends. In fact, in some cases their bedrooms were where we engaged in our dialogues. The bedroom was their private space in this context. However, many young women also told of countless examples of leisure that is not seen to be 'typically for girls'. Kelly and her friends would often get an older friend to buy a cask of wine for them and then would go and drink it in the bush or on the local school oval. Kelly recounts this activity with much pride until she remembers that she and her girlfriends were chased from the oval by men. Until then however they had claimed public space for themselves as women. Hanging around the shops in groups was also a favoured activity; several young women gave accounts of how good it felt to be together with other women when a guy walks past on his own. They enjoyed not having to feel that they were going to be either looked at, chatted up or hassled and that they had the power to make at least this one lone young man feel strange.

Nevertheless, such accounts are counterbalanced by the constraints young women have on the free time available for leisure. Griffin (1985,p.) says that young women's leisure activities are mainly concerned with maintaining female friendships and finding boyfriends. Young women's leisure is also constrained by family expectations and regulations as well as access to money.

CONCLUSION

While much of the youth studies literature in this country has concentrated attention on young people and the economy, any serious study that concerns itself with young women's circumstances must also take into account the importance of the social sphere. Certainly one of the central claims of many feminist's critiquing traditional empirical social research is that women's involvement in family and domestic life, sexuality and relationships, and leisure activities has been largely ignored.

After making a number of brief comments about the limits of separating aspects of young women's lives and the importance of taking into account the interface between worlds of inequality this chapter has looked at the social aspects of young women's lives. Working class women are engaged in a series of supportive, constraining and contradictory relationships within their family and domestic lives. The young women involved in this study presented experiences that have commonalities as well as diversity.

The family is a site for emotional, financial and practical support as well as safety for some young women. It is also a site of control and regulation. Many of the experiences young women had within their families were often full of contradictions so that at one moment a young woman may have felt glad to be living at home while at other times all she may have been able to think about was how she could move out.

The process of moving out of the parental home was not simple either. Often there was much in the way of conflict between the young woman and her parents. This was sometimes further compounded due to overcrowding and lack of resources on the part of a young woman keen to move out with friends or partners. Young women's economic situation had a huge impact on the actual experience of living with partners, friends and house mates. In most cases the young

women were economically dependent on their male partners which made them vulnerable, particularly if the relationship changed or became unmanageable. It was often the case that young women would be forced to find elsewhere to live which was usually share housing or a return to their parental home.

Also discussed in this chapter was the home as site of work with most young women involved in a range of domestic activities. Not surprisingly young women often perceived this kind of work as not 'real' work. Nevertheless many young women were in fact involved in private unpaid work. For those at home with parents it was expected that young women, unlike their brothers, regularly complete a series of chores around the home. For those living with partners domestic labour was seen as a means of "paying their own way." As such domestic labour is an economic relationship and an unequal one in most cases.

Relationships with girlfriends and boyfriends was the next topic under discussion. Many spoke of the significance of friendships amongst women as they often provide emotional, practical and degrees of economic support. Relationships between young women and men were discussed in light of patriarchal gender relations where sexism and heterosexism are the norm. The young women invested a great deal of time and a lot of themselves into their relationships with young men and many saw their futures as being tied up with having a lifelong male partner.

The chapter also discussed young women and leisure in the context of the social and sexual relationships young women are engaged in. It was argued that traditional concepts of leisure are neither adequate nor relevant in understanding the conditions confronting working class young women. The young women in this research talked about involvement in a range of leisure activities that were tied up with home and domestic life and heterosexual relationships. They also spoke of a variety of strategies used to resist traditional female leisure expectations.

CHAPTER FIVE

LEARNING, WORKING AND SURVIVING:

YOUNG WOMEN AND ECONOMIC LIFE

INTRODUCTION

It is painfully obvious to the bulk of Australians that we are now in the midst of an economic crisis. Associated with this recognition of an economic slump is the concession that young people will have to put up with exorbitant levels of unemployment for a number of years yet. Although politicians and the media are starting to acknowledge the existence of structural unemployment amongst young people, rarely do they talk about its specific effect on working class young people and women.

Despite over twenty years of activity by feminist activists, the passing of equal opportunity legislation and the initiatives of a number of State and Federal Governments seemingly concerned with 'women's issues', working class women continue to be poorly educated and confined to the secondary and unpaid labour markets. Some, such as Walker (1991, p. 1), argue that this is not equally true amongst middle class women who have enjoyed a significant improvement in access to both higher education and traditional male occupations.

This chapter takes as its central theme the experiences of working class young women in the economic sphere. The chapter examines the ways in which young women are economically subordinate particularly in relation to involvement in school, work and unemployment. While structurally young women are subject to economic vulnerability and dependence it is also important to recognise the many contradictions that exist and the way in which young women attempt to resist and negotiate the economic relationships in their lives.

SCHOOL

Possibly the most examined area of young people's lives in academic research is their involvement (or lack thereof) in school. The school is certainly one of the easiest places to actually make contact with young people and consequently analyse their experience. However in this country there does not exist a comprehensive interest in schooling for girls (Blackburn, 1984, p. 3). This is especially disconcerting given what feminists such as Spender (1975 & 1982), Abbott & Wallace (1990, p. 49), Russell & Smith (1979, p. 2), and McRobbie (1991, p. 45) have claimed that the school inculcates working class young women with values and ideals which prepare them to look forward to a 'feminine' career in the home.

Gilbert and Taylor (1991, p. 19) provide a useful analysis of the Australian situation which indicates that the experience of schooling for young women in this country is consistent with the overseas' experience. They go on to claim that schools are important institutions for the reproduction of gender relations. This is especially the case in relation to the maintaining of ideas about 'women's place' in modern industrial capitalism. Indeed the school is one of the central places for the transmission of ideological messages designed to maintain women's subordinate position in domestic work and in the labour market.

However schools ought not be seen as exclusively sites where gender subordination and regulation occurs for young women. For many young women, the school has also been a place of contradiction and resistance (see McRobbie, 1976; Thomas, 1984; and Griffin, 1985;). As Kessler, Ashenden and Dowsett (1982, p. 1) suggest, schools do not just:

simply reproduce sex stereotypes, or confirm girls in subordinate positions. They do that much of the time. But they have also long been a vehicle for women who rejected conventional expectations and wished to construct their own intellectual lives and careers. The schools are an arena in which a complex and often contradictory politics of gender are worked out.

The fact that imposed gender ideologies are not passively taken on by all young women all of the time is a theme that certainly came through in dialogues with participants in this project. Rather than being forever compliant and internalising these messages the following accounts provided by young women involved in the project make it clear that they are active in negotiating and resisting orthodox ideas about what and who they should and should not be (Gilbert and Taylor, 1991, p. 23).

At school they expect you to be good little girls and do what you're told. I can tell you right now that [a high school teacher] does what he's told when us girls are finished with him (laughs) (Angie).

In year ten I was told that I should leave and get a job cos I wouldn't ever get anywhere. Well I've shown them heh? (Debbie, who is about to complete year twelve and plans to study at university next year).

It became apparent during the course of my research that school was often an ambiguous place for young women. Initial responses about their thoughts on school were varied and yet some

striking commonalities emerged. There were a number of factors that shaped how young women experienced school and what they thought about it. Discussion tended to concentrate on young women's feelings about school in general, subject choice, relationships with teachers and other students and the reasons why young women decided to stay on or leave school.

What I found was a complex array of experience with several common themes emerging. Initially many responded by claiming that they were largely disinterested in school.

School's stupid, it sucks....you need better things to do at school (Kelly).

School's boring, there's nothing to do (Lae).

However, as the discussion progressed it became clear that although many young women were not very happy about having to be at school, there were aspects associated with attending that were positive. The major theme or saving grace for these young women was the social networks they had established through contact with other students.

I don't like school all that much. I like being with my friends but that's about it. I want to leave at the end of the year and work in child care (Megan).

My experiences of school in general were probably meeting new people like I went from a private primary school into a government high school and I think only 2 people from my primary school actually went to this high school...so for me it was like a new opening.
(Fran)

These findings are certainly consistent with the conclusions drawn by a range of researchers conducting similar investigations. In Griffin's (1985) narrative of working class women's accounts of school, for example, much young women were looking forward to "getting out of school", they still felt ambivalent about leaving their girlfriends and the good times.

As mentioned earlier, not only was school often ambiguous it too was full of many contradictions for young women (Wallace, 1986, p.96). To speak of school as a single entity with harmonious aims and consistent outcomes was simplistic for some young women. Teachers and many community messages persuade young people to stay on at school so that they might make themselves more competitive or "get on" in the labour market and secure meaningful work (Griffin, 1985, p. 14). This "new credentialism", where young people are expected to remain on at school regardless of what the content of this prolonged schooling is, has had a major impact on young women (see White, 1990a, p. 38-74). In many instances young women no longer wish to continue on with their schooling yet, due to pressures imposed by parents, teachers and limited opportunities in the labour market, believe that they must stay on in order to gain the credentials necessary for work. The stark reality is that there are vast numbers of young people either out of work or performing menial tasks in low paid, casual or part-time jobs (White, 1990a, p. 75). Despite the promise of equal opportunities for women in education and the labour market the best places are reserved for those who are "predominantly white, male and middle class (Griffin, 1985, p. 14).

The other major inconsistency mentioned was in relation to the different ways in which young men and young women were treated in and out of the classroom. Nowhere was this more striking than in the way "rules" were constructed and carried out. These "rules" reflect the school's role in the socialisation of masculine and feminine behaviours in young women and men.

I remember that we weren't ever caned like the guys when we were in trouble. We'd just get lectured about being 'naughty girls', having the wrong attitude to life and how we should act like a lady.. I would rather of been caned and get it over and done with instead of that bullshit (Jo).

J.B.: So was it more generally boys that were distracters and got in trouble?

Yeah I found that in my classes. But then in different ways. Like boys could get away with some things that we couldn't and visa versa (Sue).

As Gilbert and Taylor (1991, p.20) remind us, historically the education of girls and boys has been overtly and explicitly different and based on supposedly natural differences. This is so from very early ages. As a survey conducted by Russell and Smith (1979, p. 2) found, "sex differences was as evident in the responses of seven year olds as they were in the responses of fifteen year olds. Children in both age groups aspired to occupations which were stereotyped or dominated by their own sex." In general the formal education of girls has been seen to be less important for girls than boys and is therefore limited and narrowly defined (Griffin, 1985; Blackburn, 1984; Spender, 1982). Believing that boys are brighter and better students, regardless of contradictory evidence, teachers play a part in helping these beliefs to actualise (Spender, 1982, p. 74).

Abbott and Wallace (1990, p. 55-58) provide a thorough explanation of girls continued disadvantage in education. They suggest that inherent within the practices of sexist education are the following impediments to young women's equal access in the school:

- * the academic hierarchy remains very firmly masculine;
- * teachers have stereotyped attitudes to boys and girls and that the school reinforces rather than challenges gender divisions in the wider world;
- * text books embody various assumptions about gender identities;
- * gender differentiation is reflected in the organisation of the school; and
- * there are different kinds of classroom interaction associated with the different genders.

While the study did not involve detailed ethnographic work in the school nor any discussion with teachers it was clear from their accounts that young women perceived teachers as having a key part to play in the perpetuation of gender inequalities. For example, Kelly and Lee's comments express their frustration at the inequitable way in which they were dealt with by teachers.

Mr. [year ten science teacher] used to always talk about the clothes we wear and make funny comments about how we looked. He never used to tell the guys off when they did stuff like ping your bra strap and that sort of stuff. He was a bit sort of yuckie and sexist (Kelly).

I wanted to get a girls footy team together but none of the teachers would help. I asked Mr. [a physical education teacher] but he just said they had too much to do (Lee).

It is clear that teacher attitudes and teacher – student relationships shaped the experience of school for young women (Poole and Goodnow, 1990, p. 14). For some, teachers provided a positive role model while for others it was a case of "us versus them" where teacher's objectives and aspirations were at 'cross purposes' with student's goals. In other words what young women wanted out of school and what the school itself wanted often conflicted. The following two quotes illustrate how perceptions of teacher's attitudes and interest had a huge impact on how the young women encountered school.

I just had a bludge of a time – I was terrible. Like I was in the lowest class, I didn't care. Teachers, they were hopeless cos we were in a small town, they didn't care and if you didn't want to work well they couldn't be bothered with you. So that's what it was like school was just a big bludge for me (Allison).

Oh yeah I really enjoyed it, I was always a good student, had good grades and enjoyed achieving, getting good marks and things like that....Oh but I wasn't extremely wonderful at school, but always I had teachers who enjoyed having me as a student....you know I was never troublesome, I enjoyed the subjects I chose (Fran).

As Batten and Girling-Butcher (cited in Poole and Goodnow, 1990, p. 14) state, the influence of teachers on young women's attitudes to school is powerful and far-reaching, not only in the

area of learning, but also in the area of social development. For some young women school itself may not be so much of a problem as the treatment that they receive from teachers. Walker (1991, p. 10) in her study of girls schooling in Sydney, claimed that most girls were not school resisters. Rather they involved themselves in resisting what they considered was the unfair and unreasonable treatment of themselves and others from teachers.

There was a perception amongst many of the participants that girls do not do certain subjects at school. It was often assumed that young women usually choose humanities, social studies and the "soft" sciences such as human biology while young men choose advanced maths, chemistry, physics, woodwork and metalwork. These findings are very much supported by evidence in Blackburn (1984, p. 7), Abbott and Wallace (1990, p. 51), Gilbert and Taylor (1991, p. 20-21) and Foster (1984, p. 22) which shows that girls predominate in verbally based courses in the arts and domestic subjects, while boys are more prevalent in higher level mathematics, scientific and technical subjects.

A number of young women provided accounts of how these kinds of perceptions were reinforced by physical considerations such as the number of young men in particular classes.

Yeah there is a difference in subjects. Like the guys do mechanics and metal work and the girls don't. It's like if that's the one where all the guys are you know you might as well not bother with it (Megan)

It's funny, like there were these underlying connections between the way we were treated and the subjects we took. There was a lot of stuff about being guys or girls (Jo).

There is ample supply of literature which deals with these kinds of themes. According to Dyson & Szirom (1982, p. 55), young women choose "subjects that limited their future possibilities in employment and tertiary education. They usually steer away from the maths and sciences,

choosing more traditional type subjects in the humanities." Although in theory schools are charged with the responsibility of helping all students to develop the skills necessary to extend their opportunities, in practice young women are often encouraged to choose subjects that will limit their future movements. As Munro (cited in Dyson & Szirom, 1983, p. 44) claim,

...most schools in fact channel students on the basis of sex through the overt curriculum: that is, the intentional and planned experiences which schools organise for their students; and through the hidden curriculum: that is, the subtle messages conveyed by organisational practices, role models and differentiated treatment of students

However this pattern of limiting young women's options was mediated by other factors or variables. Allison went to a small rural high school which, because of the size of the student population, had limited resources and options. This resulted in opening up access to "boys only" subjects to young women as they were the only subjects available for all of the students.

We were very limited with our subject choices because of being in a small town. Like I done metalwork and wood work cos all the other girls did. But none of us girls used to play football cos that was the guys thing (Allison).

It is not the case that subject streaming occurs in every single circumstance. Some young women do involve themselves in traditional male activities in the school. However if young women did manage to slip inside the accepted boundaries they would experience a great deal of pressure to maintain their position.

Teachers also had a huge impact on subject choice. In one instance Tonya spoke of the support she received from a teacher who knew of conflicts in the home. As a result Tonya chose subjects because she knew who was teaching them not because of the subject contents.

I had a social studies teacher through junior high. He was wonderful. I really enjoyed him as a teacher and I knew he was taking economics in upper school so I did that....he actually knew of my situation at home. He was just so understanding towards me.....Other teachers like my science teacher in lower school was great to me and I think that influenced me going on and doing a science subject (Tonya).

Without too much in the way of prompting the next subject that came up in the dialogues was the topic of why people left school. This topic is significant in that the move away from school was seen to be one of the biggest potential changes in their lives but one that what could involve a good deal of pain and anguish. Leaving or staying involved making decisions that were difficult and which would have a huge impact on their future. Given the importance of this area of their lives it is worth taking a look at the reasons given by young women for leaving or staying on at school.

As Sue remarked, friendships were a significant reason why she chose to leave.

I left school at 15 because I didn't really want to go on. The only reason I can remember for leaving was cos most of my friends didn't go on and I wanted to be with them you know (Sue).

Likewise some young women continued on because school provided them with a forum for continuing important relationships with other young women. This became even more evident when, after deciding to leave school Lisa discovered that "I was really bored and a bit lonely cos I couldn't talk to my two closest friends."

Family and family crisis was mentioned a number of times as influential in determining how long a given young women might stay on at school.

JB: You left school in year 11 eh?

Yes, the reason I left school mid year, was due to family problems. What happened was that my father found out that my uncles had sexually abused me years ago. He started to put a lot of emotional pressure on me which I found hard to go through with doing school as well. School was the least of my worries so I left and followed through with the trying to sort myself out emotionally. My family was more important than school at that stage (Tonya).

For many young women the message is clear, stay on at school or your future is in jeopardy. It was no surprise that in the current economic climate, where leaving school before the end of year twelve almost guarantees that they will not get paid work, many young women expressed their frustration at being coerced to stay on at school. Abbott-Chapman (1989, p. 29) and Thomas (1984, p.149) both deal with this topic in some detail when they talk about the prevalent practice of young women leaving school early even if the work is routine, menial or mundane. Kelly and Lee were in year ten of secondary school when I first interviewed them and were in the throes of deciding whether they would do their T.E.E. the next year or leave. They were both very aware of what this decision meant for their future and were thinking that they would stay on. Even though they had limited interest in what school was offering they felt that they needed to stay on to increase their chances of getting work. However by the second interview they had both left.

Other young women spoke of the desire to leave school because of the lack of respect they were given as "people" and independent adults. In the words of Kelly, "school is a place where you are treated like a child one minute then expected to behave like an adult the next, and I can't handle that." Many objected to being treated like children who were not accorded respect and responsibility (Griffin, 1985, p. 23).

If there is a topic that certainly demands more research attention it is that many young women do stay on at school. Although there were not large numbers of these young women involved in this project, other recent ethnographic work amongst Australian girls suggests that many do at least attempt to stay on at school for as long as possible and get what they can out of it. For example, Walker (1991, p. 3) challenges the idea that working class girls only resist the educative process when she says that many of the girls involved in her research were very much concerned to use school to their greatest advantage. Clearly they knew that to "move on" and acquire the desired material goods and lifestyle, they needed good educational qualifications. Many young women care a great deal about their academic progress and realise that unless they "stayed on" and "did well" that their whole future would be under threat.

As one young women involved in the project said:

Look what's happened to all the girls around here. They left school too early. I knew that I had to stay on and finish year twelve. If I didn't I'd be finished (Debbie).

PUBLIC WORK

Having earlier examined the central role that young women play in domestic labour it is now important to acknowledge the involvement of young women in public and paid work. It is important to acknowledge at this point that working class women have always been involved in paid work. It is also significant to consider young women's involvement in public and paid work given the tremendous changes that have occurred in the youth labour market over the past twenty years (see Sweet, 1987 & Ross, 1988). Gender and gender stereotyping have had a major impact on young women's involvement in paid work. This has been so especially over the past ten to fifteen years when we have seen a major decrease in the numbers of full-time jobs and a significant increase in part-time and casual work. As a study undertaken by Coventry et. al. (1984) shows, young people's access to part-time paid work is very much dependent upon their gender. Lewis (1990, p. 9) in an exploration of part-time paid work shows how young women have been the group most negatively affected by the casualisation of work.

The scenario facing young women who participated in this project was very consistent with what much of the contemporary literature is saying about young women's place in the formal labour market. In the 1990s paid work for young women has particular characteristics. As White (1989, p. 137) points out, paid work available to young women is largely restricted to part-time, casual, non-unionised, poorly paid and tenuous work in the lower end of the formal labour market or throughout the informal labour market. As Ross (1988) and Sweet (1987) make clear, a close examination shows that many young women who, in the past, would have been successful in gaining full-time and paid jobs have now moved into part-time jobs, back into the home or onto unemployment queues.

The following comments illustrate the restrictive, sexual, poorly paid and exploitative nature of paid work for young women involved in this project. Much of the work is tenuous, with limited

prospects and offering little in the way of a future for young women workers (Wilson et. al. 1987, p. 2). Young women are often expected to undertake diverse activities with little training or support. This means that those involved are especially vulnerable to exploitation as they are keen to keep what limited work they have and are often in industries and jobs not protected by unions or awards.

So yeah I've done a lot of bar work mostly. Bit of drug selling to supplement it you know. I met this guy, he reckoned I should do Raunchy work....like in normal pub work I used to get comments about my body and that so I thought I might as well (Jo).

Waitressing, petrol pumper, (laughs), that was a real good one, and I worked in a cake shop and take away foods, cleaning and bar work...all pretty shitty jobs really (Allison).

I do babysitting for two different families and my brothers are really young so I babysit them too. I like the work. I can get \$20.00 a night but sometimes that is for eight hours work from 6 till 2 in the morning (Megan).

Oh well the first job I had was at the petrol thing and that only lasted 2 weeks. The next one was at the cake shop and that lasted probably 3 months. They've all lasted around three months or so. But my longest job was for a year and a half and that was bar work (Allison).

I put um ..oil in the radiator (laughs). I didn't know where it went (Jo).

As Palmer (1990, p. 119) says, there is little doubt that young women are amongst those who are most vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, sexual harassment, discrimination and industrial accidents. Reeders (1988, p. 153) in his study of young people in the fast food industry,

describes much of young women's work as resembling that of third world export processing plants where workers have few rights and are largely unprotected by unions.

Often due to their relative inexperience, lack of knowledge and poor status as workers young women are at great risk of being sacked for unfair, unclear or trivial reasons. Others, because of they have been employed as casual labour, may not need to be sacked. Rather they are just 'let go' or find that their 'services are no longer required'. Ashenden (1990, p. 21) argues that this scenario occurs either after young women have reached an age at which employers are forced to pay higher wages or perhaps after an 'incident' in which the young woman has demonstrated that she is not 'flexible' or prepared to tolerate unfair or unlawful treatment or harassment. During dialogues, young women such as Debbie, spoke of their vulnerability as workers and the difficulties associated with resisting sexual discrimination in the work place.

Bar work was the worst. If the boss wasn't stopping patrons from having a good old feel he was in there himself (Debbie).

Studies such as Nolan and Hagen (1989) and Ashenden (1990) rate highly the incidence of the sexual exploitation of young women in the workplace. All provide accounts by young women of bosses who's "hands were a bit wandery" and who "constantly make rude remarks about my breasts and my body". As the following remark (cited in Palmer 1990, p. 125) shows, even the formal avenues available for young women who seek some form of redress can be unproductive and, in some cases, counterproductive.

And then I worked at [fast food outlet] and sexually harassed really horribly. I got pushed around, squirted by the hose and not allowed to go outside and everything so I went to the Equal Rights Commission. This lady came to speak to the manager and the kitchen hands had to apologise. I worked the next shift and they all laughed at me. That taught me that standing up for sexual harassment is a huge waste of time.

The young women in this study were mixed in the way they felt about undertaking this kind of work. Some felt that there was much they enjoyed about work while others spoke of many frustrations and difficulties. Certainly paid work brought with it the rewards of income, the feeling of achievement, some positive accolades from those around them and an increased sense of self worth. And of course some working class young women do manage to secure for themselves assured jobs where they were both treated with regard and felt valued.

I get a lot of enjoyment out of doing something with myself and achieving something and not just sitting around and rotting (Tonya).

I like having people recognise that you're working and at the end having money (Sue).

As with school, involvement in paid work exposed the young women to contradictions and inconsistencies around questions of gender roles and expectations. In spite of many advances made in the last few years many young women still are expected to make career choices based on the idea that they will be working for only a few years and therefore do not need to concern themselves with a career (Review into the Situation of Young Women in Western Australia, 1988, p. 19). As Baldock (1983, p. 23) argues, the preoccupation with motherhood and home life in the socialisation and training of young women often leaves them ill-prepared for paid work. The result is that some young women can only conceptualise a narrow range of jobs as possibilities for them. McCabe (in McRobbie and McCabe 1981, p. 57) maintains that even when all restrictions are removed and girls are asked to imagine what they might be in an ideal world, working class young women often only think as far as menial or low status positions. To them it does not make sense to visualise themselves in "interesting and exciting" jobs as their reality tells them that they would not even stand a chance.

A really good job would be a receptionist (Kelly).

If I went back to do some studies maybe I could become a child care worker (Megan).

For those young women who are interested in pursuing work outside of traditional women's areas there are other obstacles confronting them. From school, from the home and from friends many young women face pressure to steer clear of certain jobs and to restrict their interest to 'women's work' (Griffin, 1985; Abbott and Wallace, 1990; and Elton, 1991). The following comments illustrate the way in which gender expectations limit and impact on young women's career opportunities.

When I was at school I really wanted to get an apprenticeship as a mechanic. My Dad is a mechanic and is actually involved in training now. None of my brothers took it up and I thought Dad would be happy that at least one of his kids took it up. But no, Dad's attitude was "You're a girl and it's a dirty job". It's o.k. to work in a smelly service station for shit money, but it's not o.k. to get a trade (Jo).

Oh, I don't know what sort of work I'd like to do. Maybe a vet's assistant. Not a check out chick, a cleaner or a kitchen hand (All jobs that she had undertaken) (Nicky).

For many young women, particularly those from working class backgrounds, paid work is understood within the context of marriage and motherhood. Young women's position in full-time and paid employment is expected to be temporary, in line with their primary role in the home as future wives and mothers (Griffin, 1985, p. 186). Within this context young women see paid work as something important in the short term but often assume that marriage and family will become their main 'work' in the longer term. At times this means that young women have simultaneous pressures to get a job and a boyfriend (Griffin, 1985, p. 188).

Clearly sometimes young women were not aware of these contradictions and inconsistencies. However, as the following comments illustrate, many were aware of the complexities involved in trying to secure paid work in the public arena.

There is a distinction out there, despite equal opportunity. I mean they'd preferably going to go for a male if they have heavy lifting jobs and things like that but they'd go for a female if they want a clerical girl or a secretary (Trish).

Its funny you know cos I mean all partners (in the firm where I worked) were males, there wasn't one female. We had female accountants and male accountants at the same level. There were a couple of advanced male accountants there wasn't an advanced woman accountant. Yeah you watch things around you and you see that women are always put lower even if they could achieve the same (Fran).

Griffin (1985) and Wallace (1984) both emphasise the importance that paid work holds for young women as a source of status and independence both within and outside the family. Family, marriage and motherhood are not the only goals in young women's lives. There does exist a degree of resistance against the expectation that marriage and family are the exclusive endpoints for young women.

I wanna get a job and travel in the future. I don't want kids. Shit I'm too selfish, I wanna do things for myself (Debbie).

Getting a jobs really important cos I want to move out with a group of friends and away from my bloody family. I've had enough of families to last me a life-time (Lee).

UNEMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

If there is one single social problem that has been drawn to the attention of all sections of the community it is youth unemployment. Although many of us are starting to acknowledge the existence of structural unemployment, rarely do people talk about its effect on specific groups of young people. However as Murphy (1988, p. 11) makes clear, the "probability of unemployment does not fall equally on all young people." When the question of youth unemployment is taken seriously and the structure of the youth labour market is examined it becomes evident that working class young women are amongst those most seriously effected by the current recession. Next to Aboriginal young people, working class young women have been the hardest hit by changes in world of work for young people (Jamrozik, 1988). For many of the young women living in the region where the fieldwork for this project was undertaken unemployment is a an everyday and prominent consideration.

During the course of dialogues I was especially interested to find out how this structural change was dealt with by young women. Not surprisingly, many found being unemployed difficult.

It's hard, like when it first happened I felt so insecure inside. But then again I thought to myself, I could be worse off (Allison).

Well, its the most devastating thing to ever happen to me. I think because I had been with a company for about 18 months prior to being unemployed and I found it such a shock. You know I was getting a regular income, was so secure, went away for a month and came back to find out I got retrenched. It was just like God where am I... You know, it was absolutely incredible (Fran).

At the same time there seemed to be aspects of unemployment that were quite attractive to others.

I cannot say that I hate being unemployed (laughs) because I love sitting at home doing nothing. Or going down the beach or going for a walk or go to friends or sitting home watching soapies. I could do that for the rest of my life. I'm just so content I don't know I must be just so lazy (laughs). But no I don't think that this is the right attitude really (Allison)

Unemployment not only affected young women's sense of self and what they did with their time, it also brought with it extra regulation from with the family and the state. The increase in structural unemployment, and the subsequent reduction in income, are forcing many young women to either stay in or return to the parental home. One consequence of this is what Presdee (1984) describes as the "infantalisation" of many of these young people. In other words unemployment for these young women brings with it forced economic dependence on others, be they parents, boyfriends or the state. As a result they are treated like children who are subject to "numerous constraints on their behaviour and coerced into performing an excessive number of domestic duties in order to 'pay their keep'" (White 1990a, p. 126).

It was just a horrible feeling. I'd been getting regular money for weeks and weeks and having my own independence. Now I've got to go in every fortnight and put in a form that asks have you changed this? Have you done that? Where have you been looking for work? (Fran)

When your unemployed you're always questioned, what have you been doing, why are you getting this money. You should get the money but you need to have done this and this, like you have to deserve it which I find really hard (Jo).

I mean having to go into social security and going through all the forms and having them going through all your account of what your mother earns and things like that is bloody horrible (Nicky).

The major consequence of unemployment for young women was the effect on income and financial independence. Recent evidence indicates that while income is decreasing, living costs are increasing for unemployed young women trying to survive on social security benefits and allowances (see Hartley, 1989; Moore, 1988). For young women coping on a low income it is a matter of "constantly juggling money, cutting back or going without" (Hartley, 1989, p. 8). Many of young women's goals and aspiration are then reduced to pipe-dreams and fantasies as they are forced to depend on others for limited amounts of income.

Travel yeah travel, you know I'd love to travel one day and spend money on heaps of clothes, go on big shopping sprees and things like that. I can't do cos I haven't got a job (Marli).

Yeah I have to ask for money all the time. Like I smoke so he buys me a packet of cigarettes when he gets home (Allison).

Oh yeah being unemployed changed my whole living. I found I couldn't go out which depressed me a lot. I still had to pay the bills, like rent, food, cleaning products...just basic needs so to go out and enjoy yourself is just a no-no (Trish).

I mean at the start when I was first getting unemployment benefits I was only getting \$74 a week. I was meant to live on this and pay \$40 a week rent and \$30 left to go on food clothes and everything else. Its just ridiculous, so I found it very hard to do anything I really enjoyed (Fran).

For many, unemployment and the subsequent reduction in income was, in many cases, resulted in a new or continued financial dependency on others.

I've always been quite independent as a young girl and maturing into an adult. The hardest thing about being unemployed was my independence was taken away. I had to rely on going to the social security before 12 o'clock on a Friday to put my form in or I didn't get my pay... you know what I mean it was such a restriction, I was relying on something that I didn't like doing (Anna).

Because I was put in that position of being unemployed not through my own doing I was looked down on as an unemployed bum which i wasn't you know. I was willing to work and wanted a job more than I wanted to be unemployed (Jo).

Another consequence of large levels of youth unemployment is the effect that this has on limiting young women's career aspirations and the fact that unemployment forces them to accept poorly paid and more exploitative work in the informal labour markets. Structural unemployment does not only have a direct impact on those currently unemployed. It also has direct implications for those in part-time work, particularly those jobs in the informal, illegal and voluntary labour market. As Van Tijn (1990, p. 6) reminds us, large numbers of unemployed workers present a pool of cheap and voluntary labour which is readily available to work under informal arrangements for unacceptable wages and conditions. As White (1990b) further stresses, as long as structural unemployment remains high young women will be persuaded to accept low or no wages, unsafe and unhealthy working conditions, tenuous work and sexual harassment in the work place.

At the moment I'm just looking for any work. I need money and I don't care where from (Trish 17).

I did look for work quite a lot. In the end I did a lot of voluntary work. Like I asked a pharmacy if I could get a couple of weeks experience because every job advertised wants experience, which puts a lot of pressure on people that haven't (Fran).

Well its, its ridiculous. They were asking girls of 15, 16 to have had years of experience in pharmacy and you just don't find that...I mean I'm 18 and they expected me to have at least 2-3 years experience in pharmacy. It was just incredible (Marli, 18).

Gender mediates young women's experience of unemployment.

Within the ranks of the unemployed there is a marked division along gender lines. For example, Watson (1985, p. 38) refers to the exploitation of unemployed women by unemployed men as a kind of compensatory mechanism. As unemployed young men have limited social and economic power they use what power they do have against unemployed young women. The following two comments by young women illustrate the frustrations of being unemployed and female.

Its worse being a female because I always think boys can always find something to do. Like my brother he can always find something to do, or his friends. They fix their cars or they go and play sport or something - but sometimes I can't find anything to do.

That's what angers me is, uh, you have to act like a lady, you can't go out like guys do and do this and that like they do -- like going round, hanging round the shops, its not a girls thing (cited in Presdee, 1984, p. 5).

CONCLUSION

After considering working class young women's experiences of learning and working, it would not be unreasonable to say that they do have it tough. Although the young women that I spoke with recounted parts of their lives with strength and a kind of ambivalent optimism, they were also aware of the constraints on their choices and chances. I would argue that the position of women in terms of economic dependency is a major factor in respect of those constraints.

The working lives of young women as have been outlined in this chapter are characterised by uncertainty and insecurity at the personal and structural level. The labour market as it stands is not a particularly inviting nor lucrative place for young women seeking and participating in paid work. The organisation and methods of the school have seen working class young women leave school with limited career options and scope. What the school seems to have prepared young women for is a future bound up with marriage and family life with the assumption that paid work is secondary for women. This is reinforced in the labour market where the majority of women work in the service, retail and hospitality sectors. These areas are characterised by high levels of part time and casual jobs, low rates of unionisation and high levels of exploitation.

This combination of factors contributes to and shapes the economic status working class young women have. As depicted throughout this chapter, young women's lives are characterised by high levels of economic dependency on their family, male partners and/or the state. Suffice to say, the notion that as young women age they will become more independent is something of a misnomer when we take the above factors into consideration. While some individual young women experienced good relationships with one or more of the entities they were dependent upon, in the main this relationship results in young women's structural subordination.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION:

YOUNG WOMEN AND "DEPENDENCY"

INTRODUCTION

The idea that "youth" is a time of "transition" when young women move from dependence to independence, school to work, childhood to adulthood or less responsibility to personal autonomy is problematic on a range of fronts. "Youth" is not a homogeneous category that represents a time when essentially all enjoy similar experiences. Nor can the idea of "youth" be simply equated with that period in one's life when transitions occur. In actuality the whole notion of "youth" has been socially constructed in such a way as to reflect the lives of young men while largely making invisible the concerns and interests of young women.

For social researchers interested in the lived experiences of young women this presents something of a serious problem. It demands the development of a new set of theoretical tools for interpreting the lives of a group of young people who have, up until very recently, been "non-existent" in academic inquiries.

This was the point of departure for this research project. Unhappy with much of the theoretical and conceptual tools available within the area of youth studies I was keen to challenge traditional ideas of youth as a period of transitions involving a one way linear progression to adult independence.

The main theme throughout this study has been that young women are involved in multiple, simultaneous and gendered transitions that often continue on into later life. Young women grow up to be women and as such "youth" for them has a very different meaning than for young men. Young women grow up within the context of modern patriarchal and capitalist relations where relationships between women and men are characterised by the subordination of women. The notion that "youth" is the stage before and leads to adult independence is therefore problematic in trying to understand and conceptualise the experiences of young women.

YOUNG WOMEN AND DEPENDENCY

Looking at young women's experiences in the social and economic spheres it is clear that working class young women are faced with many challenges and limitations. Although the young women that I spoke with recounted parts of their lives with strength and a kind of ambivalent optimism, they were also aware of the constraints on their choices and chances. I would argue that the position of women in terms of economic dependency is a crucial factor in respect to those constraints.

The working and social lives of young women are characterised by uncertainty and insecurity at the personal and structural level. The labour market as it stands is not a particularly inviting nor lucrative place for young women seeking and participating in paid work.

The domestic work young women undertake is performed under a complex system of beliefs and practices. As we have seen domestic work is not perceived by some young women as 'real' work. It is seen by others as work that is meaningful to them in terms of their social status, as adults. For others it is a way of 'paying their keep' while being 'kept'; an exchange between themselves and whoever they live with, be they parents, boyfriends or others.

On the surface of things this relationship may result in a reasonable exchange for some, however in economic terms it is an exchange that is characterised by the young woman's dependency. If the young woman who does housework to pay her way while her boyfriend pays the rent had a reasonable, secure and adequately paid job, how would she then see that kind of exchange? Unfortunately the chances of every working class young woman having the kind of sustained economic security that would enable them to become independent of family, men or the state are limited in this social order for the moment.

As well as looking at a particular group of young women's unique and collective experiences, I have also wanted to work out ways in which to frame and understand these experiences.

One of the criticisms I have levelled at youth studies regards the assumption that 'youth' is the period between childhood dependence and adult independence. The major problem with this is that it does not take into account what 'being adult' means for women and men. As feminists have been stating for a long time, gender is not only a socially constructed category particular to given historical and geographical locations, women and men are constructed in relation to each other on the basis of women's subordination. Being an adult man is a very different experience than being an adult woman. This construction of women as subordinate to men must be taken into account when looking at young women's lives. They will not grow out of being women. Growing into womanhood is an entirely different matter than growing 'up' to manhood. As Nava says,

Labouring in the home, pleasing and serving others, their girlhood merges into womanhood. This state of prolonged dependency and infantilisation - of femininity - may be disturbed in early adulthood only to be recompensed at the moment of marriage. This may appear a bleak and pessimistic portrayal, and it is important not to underestimate the authority of women within the home, nevertheless both compared to men and because of their relations with men, most women never really acquire 'adult' status and the social power that accompanies it (Nava, 1984, p.15).

Womanhood as Nava suggests is characterised by dependency. In order to understand the experiences we need to frame them in terms of this dependence - independence nexus, not only on a personal level but at a larger structural level. When conceptualising relationships in terms of dependence and independence I am not throwing a blanket over all relationships and assuming that all aspects of all relationships are based on women's subordination. Indeed if I did this the young women who participated in the study would probably not be very happy with me. Relationships do have elements of 'give and take' and sharing (Tulloch, 1984). However as

I explained to the young women when discussing how I was analysing their experiences, structurally women are not in an equal position with men politically or economically. While this is the case economic relationships will be carried out between unequal 'partners'.

As portrayed throughout this thesis young women are dependent in the main on their family, their male partners, the labour market and state welfare for their survival. Individual young women felt they had good relationships with one or more of these entities while others were very frustrated and in some cases abused by the same things. Unique and common experiences are very important in attempting to convey the everyday lives of young women. In order to gain another type of understanding of these lives we can link them into a bigger picture. It is then that we say that although young women employ a variety of strategies of resistance and subversion to their social and economic position, structurally working class young women are one of the most powerless groups in society.

This study has demonstrated the ways in which structural institutions impact on the everyday lives of women. As a feminist practitioner (indeed a feminist youth worker) it is not enough that I recognise structural inequality. It is also important that I have a commitment to working for change and the empowerment of young women. In keeping with this commitment to feminist research and praxis I intend to continue my work with the young women involved in this project. Due to my involvement in this research project I will remain in contact with the young women who participated. The community centre where I am currently employed is now providing specific programmes developed for young women. The women who participated in this project will be contacted and encouraged to become involved in an education programme targeting unemployed young women. I also believe that ideas and principles generated from the research will provide a valuable process to guide the further political education of young women in my workplace. Already the experiences and ideas that I gained from "dialoguing" with young women have proved to be useful to me as a feminist youth worker. My commitment to working with young women has been enhanced and grounded by this research project and the information gathered will be used to establish a young women's group arising from the study.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The current economic crisis has impacted on young women in a dramatic way. Not only are they losing out because of their age but also because they are women. As studies such as this one indicate, much more empirical work needs to be undertaken to ascertain precisely to what degree young women, as well as other marginalised groups of young people, are being disadvantaged.

The thesis began by pointing out that young women are largely omitted from traditional youth studies and, where they are mentioned, it is assumed that their experiences can be understood within a framework designed to understand young men's. Clearly, this "adding" or "tacking" on of young women is not adequate in describing and conceptualising the lives of young women. What is necessary are alternative explanations which do not assume that young women necessarily reach economic or social independence and adulthood in the same way that young men do. Linear progressive models of transition, which have for so long been the guiding approaches within youth studies are not adequate in explaining how and why young women "get on" in patriarchal capitalist relations.

This study points to the need for more detailed work on the specific experiences of young women. As a study of this scope cannot expect to generate large amounts of data on young women's activities a more detailed and longitudinal study of this nature would be a useful exercise. It would also be important to assemble data that determines the degree to which income, employment, housing, schooling, health and leisure provision is distributed equitably.

No longer is it reasonable for youth studies research to exclude the specific experiences of young women or ignore the significance of gender relations. Preliminary research such as this study is demonstrating that young women are amongst the most disadvantaged in both public

and private life. Until this is confirmed, through more detailed and thorough work, it will be difficult to argue the need for economic and social strategies that challenge young women's subordination and marginalisation.

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