DEPENDENCE AT WORK:  
A Study of Ninety Young South Australian Workers in an Individualised and Precarious Labour Market

Catherine Earl  
Bachelor of Arts (University of Adelaide)  
Bachelor of Social Work (Hons) (Flinders University)  

Centre for Work + Life,  
Division of Education, Arts and Social Sciences  
University of South Australia

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  

June 2010
I declare that:

1. this thesis presents work carried out by myself and does not incorporate
   without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or
diploma in any university;
2. to the best of my knowledge it does not contain any materials previously
   published or written by another person except where due reference is made in
   the text; and all substantive contributions by others to the work presented,
   including jointly authored publications, is clearly acknowledged.
Acknowledgements

First and foremost I need to thank the ninety young people who participated in this research. Their experiences and stories fuelled my energy as a researcher and I am grateful for their generosity and contribution.

SA Unions were the industry partner for this research. I would like to thank them for their enthusiasm and the interest shown by union members and officials. SA Unions provided many opportunities for the dissemination and discussion of my findings throughout the period of the research.

I am very appreciative of the opportunity to undertake my research within the supportive environment of the Centre for Work + Life. Colleagues offered constant stimulation and support. I am glad I was able to share the PhD experience with fellow students, particularly Ali Elder who shared my office and all my triumphs and tribulations.

Special thanks go to my supervisor Barbara Pocock, who provided consistent encouragement and guidance. I will not forget the time she devoted to my thesis and her capacity to grasp and discuss my fledgling analyses. I am also grateful for the supervision I received from Susan Oakley, particularly in the latter stages of thesis development. Her suggestions were challenging and have fostered my confidence as a researcher.

I would not have completed (or for that matter even started) my PhD without my family, who never allowed me to be lost in the world of academia. Finally I would like to thank my partner Damien, who has supported me through these four years and in all my endeavours.
Abstract

This is an in depth qualitative study of ninety young South Australian workers’ agency and power in the labour market. Recent changes to the youth transition experience include increased participation in work and study, and prolonged dependence on parents. These changes require an investigation of the nature and adequacy of current patterns of intergeneration support. There are dramatically conflicting views in the media and debate in academic circles regarding young people’s attitudes and aspirations, and the extent of their ability to choose their circumstances. This affects how they are viewed in society, and what support is deemed appropriate and provided.

Interviews and focus groups were conducted in metropolitan and regional areas with participants from diverse backgrounds. Emancipatory and critical theory approaches focussed attention on structural influences and social justice issues in the data. Structures identified by participants as vital to their life stage and transitions to independence from parents are the labour market, family, education and welfare. Participants describe the strong influence and complex interactions between these institutions that provide much of the intergenerational support for this group of young people. These interactions need constant individual negotiation on the part of the young person to maintain support, reflecting individualisation. The holistic approach of ecological systems theory is adapted to investigate the different levels of influence on the individual experience.

Despite an eagerness to participate in the labour market, participants report issues with low pay and insecurity of work hours, and express feelings of marginalisation and disenfranchisement relating to labour market regulation. These conditions result in long-term dependence and difficulty managing other life commitments, such as study.

Participants report receiving a variety of types and levels of support from parents, from full and unconditional to no support whatsoever. Support is at the discretion of parents with some young people receiving much less than others, regardless of need. Insecurity of earnings results in changes to the level of support needed over time causing ‘fluctuating
dependency’ while at home, and can involve adult children returning home after periods of independence.

Participants without adequate support from parents are highly dependent on participation in the labour market and consequently have little agency. Characteristics of commodification of labour are frequently reported by participants, demonstrating a low level of industrial citizenship. Most participants do not use unionisation or exit-voice to influence their working conditions, but rather a constellation of behaviours termed Dependent Relationship Power (DRP). However, this individualised strategy has no generalisable effects on other young workers’ conditions and only minimal and short-term benefits for the individual young worker.

Findings of the research include considerable hardships to young workers because of lower pay rates based on age. The arrangement that young people are required to carry the burden of the incentive for their employment needs reconsideration, and if incentives are required, then they need to be sourced differently. Also, the common erroneous public image portraying young people as demanding, career savvy, self-indulgent ‘job snobs’ needs challenging through dissemination of accurate information about the realities of young people’s work, such as youth pay rates and exploitative working conditions.
# Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DECLARATION</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONTENTS</td>
<td>V</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURE LIST</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE LIST</td>
<td>IX</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The research area</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The research questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major themes of thesis</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thesis structure</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach and methodology</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins of the research</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epistemology</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature Review</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review of empirical research</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of framing concepts</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The qualitative approach</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample characteristics</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection criteria</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample demographics</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industry profile</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data collection methods</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus groups</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Analysis</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue with stakeholders</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Findings and thesis development</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure list

FIGURE 1 - Model of research methodology ................................................. 11
FIGURE 2 - Youth Ecological Systems Model (YESM) ................................. 57
FIGURE 3 - Interaction between labour market dependence and parental
dependence ..................................................................................................... 128
FIGURE 4 - Inverse relationship between parental and labour market
dependence ..................................................................................................... 146
FIGURE 5 - Louise’s fluctuating dependence ................................................. 150
FIGURE 6 - Relationship between commodification and industrial
citizenship ..................................................................................................... 157
FIGURE 7 - Cycle of Dependent Relationship Power (DRP) ......................... 175

Table List

TABLE 1 - Age profile of participants by data collection method .................. 21
TABLE 2 - Industry distribution of participants against ABS 2006
census data for the target population ......................................................... 23
TABLE 3 - Institutional demands and resources ........................................... 116
Chapter One

Introduction

The early working experiences of young Australians may influence their attitudes and behaviour at work for the rest of their lives. A larger proportion of young people are combining work and study than ever before, extending the time they are primarily dependent on parents. This thesis investigates labour market engagement issues from the perspective of young workers, with a particular focus on agency and power.

Prior to my PhD candidature, I had experience of issues relating to the casual youth labour market through my work as a social worker assisting young people to prepare for and find work. I became aware that many of the young people I worked with had little or no family support and needed a secure income to support themselves. My clients’ prior work experience, if any, was usually in highly precarious casual employment.

My responsibilities in this work focused on obtaining stable accommodation and necessary work preparation, including job training, budgeting, time management, interview skills and suitable clothing or uniforms for work trials or employment. Even with assistance, the nature of the youth labour market meant that successful employment outcomes for this group were primarily in casual, low paid, low skill jobs, with no obvious career progression. Some young people were assisted to return to education, either through bridging courses or to school, with the hope that they may have greater opportunities in the future.

On reflection, I believe I was delivering a time limited, quasi-parental support service, for young people who were not receiving this from their own parents. Possibly due to this lack of ongoing and intensive parental support, arrangements made with or on behalf of the clients sometimes failed and they returned to the service several times.

A number of the impediments that these young people faced were not to do with job skills, but more to do with the lack of life supports necessary to obtain and maintain work. I was able to assist them find supports from institutions such as welfare and education, but it
seemed they were still missing out on important informal supports, especially from their families. Without such supports, jobs were likely to be of only brief duration and have little long-term effect in terms of reducing reliance on the welfare system.

This experience led me to question traditional assumptions about youth wage rates, the education system, and labour market opportunities. I realised the vital importance of family support in enabling and protecting young people in their engagement with major societal institutions, including the labour market.

Given the considerable funding for service provision to young people in this phase of their lives, an increased understanding of the significant influences contributing to outcomes and experience is useful for policymaking and program delivery. I was interested in studying these influences in-depth to add to knowledge in this area and was therefore committed to the goals of the proposed Australian Postgraduate Award Industry (APAI) research project.

The research area

The research area is significant; in Australia young people’s participation rate in the labour force is high, with many young people combining work and school. The youth labour market is casualised and precarious, and offers lowered rates of pay on the basis of age.

Very disparate views have been promulgated in the media about young people’s experience at work. At one extreme employers are advised, ‘DO NOT hire young people. They are selfish, fickle and have no trust’ (Schriever and Leneghan 2007 p.19). Young people are portrayed as not being interested in readily available ‘real jobs’, that is, with standard hours in an office like environment (Budd 2008 p.3), and they are described as brash, over-confident, cocky upstarts (Thomson 2007 p.5). These were common media themes throughout the period of this research, 2006-2010. The global financial crisis produced further condemnation of young people and the branding of them as ‘job snobs’, with many articles focussing on their need to come into the real world and better manage their finances and work lives (Carty 2009 p.8).

This view of young people sees them as assertive and demanding in relation to their working conditions and wages. They are portrayed as confident in voicing their opinions
and requests directly to employers who are concerned about their power to leave and gain employment elsewhere. A 2007 survey of employers demonstrated these views:

Almost 90 per cent of employers surveyed say that gen Ys are more demanding than other workers when it comes to advancing their careers and 79 per cent say gen Ys are more likely to ask for a pay rise. They are also much more likely to demand better office amenities and more time off to study, training opportunities and mentoring. (The Advertiser 2007 p.55)

This view depicts young people as an homogenised generational stereotype and encourages hostility from older and more powerful generations. On the other hand, some journalists and researchers suggest young workers are treated poorly and may have worse conditions than other groups of workers. They suggest that opinions like those expressed above have no factual basis for the majority of young workers. These commentators identify factors they believe have changed in the labour market which have affected young people disproportionately. For example, Davis (2008 p.21) argues that ‘young people have been at the bleeding edge of economic reform’ and that there is ‘a pattern of systemic neglect that the stereotypes seek to cover’.

A journalist, who is also a parent, describes the experiences of her son and his friends as not fitting with the stereotype of privileged, demanding, skilled, young workers (evidenced in the earlier examples):

Is it young people who have changed so much, or is it the job market? …The young people I have known wanted proper work earlier. But they tripped from casual job to contract, from part-time to on-call, from on-trial to on-commission. Some, like my son, encountered exploitative bosses who did not deserve loyalty, and did not get it. (Horin 2007 p.33)

A range of existing research reports support the above views and experiences. For example, the Office for Industrial Relations (NSW) and Workcover (NSW) commissioned a survey of young people (aged 12-25) in 2005, about their awareness of industrial issues (ACIRRT 2005). They found young people to be ‘vulnerable workers who are easily and often exploited by their employers’ (ACIRRT 2005). Similarly, research in South Australia in 2005 by SA Unions found that ‘young people were one of the most exploited groups in the workforce’ and that ‘the South Australian community is generally oblivious to the high level of exploitation that occurs’ (Schluter 2005 p.1).
Research is essential to address these conflicting reports and views, which raise important questions about young people and their engagement with the labour market. In light of this, the research forming the basis of this thesis aimed to examine young people’s experiences in the workplace, in an attempt to resolve conflicts arising from different perceptions of young people’s agency and power. A significant goal of the research set out in this thesis, is to look at the pathway to economic independence taken by young people between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four, and identify supports and barriers encountered. A further goal is the exploration of strategies young people are using to influence their working conditions and the effectiveness of these.

Questions of individual power, choice and agency are a central concern of social science research, particularly in research on youth transitions (Evans 2002; Heinz 2009; Woodman 2009). The rise of individualisation, that is, the breaking down of traditional structures and collective ways of being and the increased emphasis on individual responsibility and choice (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002 p.22-23), suggests increased agency in current times. In addition, many industrial relations theorists have written in recent decades about the decline of regulated, protected, standard employment (Standing 2002) and the growth in commodified, insecure employment (Vosko 2000). Partially successful efforts to protect human labour through worker rights, for example to security, a living wage and safety at work, were designed to give workers the capacity to live and reproduce themselves. This gave rise to the concept of industrial citizenship, a status reflecting workers’ rights, wage securities and other protections (McCallum 2005a p.33). However, research in many countries since the 1970s suggest that these securities have been eroded, thereby increasing the commodification of labour (Vosko 2000 p.1; Campbell 2004 p.93; Papadopoulos 2005), that is the compulsory sale of human time and effort in the market in exchange for subsistence and survival. Labour is increasingly being organised to match production schedules and these changes have significant impacts for human and social capital (Watson et al. 2003).

Significant social theorists are observing the decline of traditional social structures and secure pathways more generally (Beck 1992; Sennett 2006; Bauman 2007). There is some suggestion that the destabilisation of traditional pathways and structures increases the options and choices available to individuals. This has been of particular interest and debate in youth literature and research on young people’s transitions from childhood dependence to adulthood. The idea that young people have agency and choice in deciding their life-
course challenges the idea that there are structural conditions which are beyond the control of any individual.

Beck’s work is interpreted differently by various youth researchers and theorists. For example, Woodman (2009) argues that many youth theorists have misinterpreted Beck’s ‘choices biography’ to suggest that individuals have more agency than they really do. Woodman (2009 p.254) suggests that the structure/agency dichotomy may be an old style division or category that is no longer adequate to explain current social conditions. These arguments are central to the situation of young workers and therefore to the research set out in this thesis. Given the increasing emphasis on individual choice and responsibility in popular discourse, against the background of what appears to be an environment of decreasing security and structure, the extent of power exercised by young people is an open question.

**The research questions**

A series of important research questions arise from the material described above, which address some of the current conflicting opinions regarding youth experience and add knowledge to areas where there has been little research activity. These questions are centred on the choices young workers make, their experiences of employment, and the barriers they encounter. It is also important to examine young people’s capacity to exercise influence and voice in the workplace, through traditional or other means.

Specifically, the questions at the heart of this thesis are:

1. What are the conditions of young people’s employment and what reasons do they give for being concentrated in casual employment; that is, does it reflect preferences and choice, or labour market opportunity?
2. How does work impact on young people’s transition to financial independence?
3. Is youth labour commodified and does this limit the effectiveness and/or capacity of young people to experience citizenship and voice in the workplace? What strategies are available and utilised to address and promote citizenship and voice for young people in the workplace?

The first question is addressed in this thesis by means of analysis of the current work experiences of a group of young South Australian workers. This is important in exploring the diversity of young worker’s situations and the influences acting upon them, from their
perspectives. The disparate views described earlier, in both media and academic literature, cannot be resolved without deep analysis of the lived experience of the young people concerned. Casual work is a particular focus because of the large proportions of young workers employed in this type of work.

Early labour market experiences are recognised as fundamental to the development of lifelong attitudes and behaviours in the labour market (Huntley 2006 p.26-27; Oliver 2006 p.66). The changing labour market makes it important to understand current experience in order to identify implications for potentially changed attitudes and engagement into the future. Without this it is impossible to develop and/or maintain effective support services, policy, and legislation.

Question two recognises the importance of work in establishing financial independence. I examine whether and how early work experience affects the achievement of financial independence. Known quantitative data is expanded upon through the analysis of the perceptions of a group of young workers regarding the significance of their earnings to their patterns of dependence. The profound effects of extended dependency on, for example, family relationships and personal decision-making, cannot be identified from quantitative data.

The final question relates to the reasons why young people may, or may not, experience citizenship and voice in work. This has a connection with the degree of commodification they experience, the terms of their employment, and has implications for the level of power and influence they may be able to exercise in the workplace. Current strategies used by young workers and supports available to them, reflect their level of power and degree of citizenship or commodification. These strategies are identified and examined for their degree of effectiveness in order to confirm findings relating to citizenship and commodification.

**Major themes of thesis**

I have structured the analysis of the data arising from the research questions into two major themes. The first resulted from a reassessment of the original focus of the research as a consequence of participant responses; this expanded the scope of analysis from work alone, to include other major institutions, that is, family, welfare and education, that emerged as inextricably linked to participants’ power and autonomy in the labour market.
A holistic approach is necessary in order to understand the complex patterns of dependency described by participants because the nature of their dependency affects the choices and opportunities available to them in their life stage. This theme concerns the levels of dependence on, and security of necessary institutional supports, which are seen by participants to be of vital importance in their transition to independence from parental support. The theme is the focus of chapters four, five and six.

The second theme focuses specifically on participants’ experience of power and status within the labour market. I analyse participants’ understanding of the locus of responsibility for working conditions between the state, employer and employee, for its influence on their labour market attitudes and behaviour, particularly in terms of strategies adopted to challenge negative aspects of their experience. This theme is explored in chapter seven.

**Thesis structure**

This section describes the structure of the thesis and gives a brief outline of the remaining chapters. The thesis is structured to proceed from the broadest issues and influences identified from the literature as affecting young workers, to focus on specific data arising from the accounts provided by participants.

Chapter two details the methodology for the research, including the early influences of critical theory and emancipatory approaches in the development of the research program. I also discuss the process and related logic and rationale for the chosen data collection methods of individual interviews and focus groups. I describe the difficulties encountered in following the research plan and the consequent actions taken. Finally, I identify the limitations of the research program and findings.

In chapter three, I review relevant empirical research to establish existing knowledge, gaps in knowledge, and the relevance of these to the thesis. While there is a focus on Australian studies, some highly relevant international research is included, where it adds depth and explains local context and experience. I then present the conceptual and theoretical framework used for the data analysis. The analysis uses the theoretical concepts to enhance understanding of the data, and allows the data to supplement and/or challenge these existing theories and concepts. Towards the end of the chapter I present a holistic model depicting overlapping relationships and influences that has been developed from the
literature and data analysis, because it provides a framework for the findings which unfold throughout subsequent chapters.

Chapter four describes and analyses the institution of the labour market, the first of the four key institutions identified by young people as important supporters of their transition to independence from parents. I include participants’ perceptions, attitudes and experiences of youth working conditions. Information on industrial relations regulation, youth wages and issues of working time, provides a basis for subsequent analyses and addresses research question number one.

Chapter five completes the analysis necessary in order to answer the first research question. It explores the key institutions of family, welfare and education that, in addition to the labour market, shape young workers’ experience. Participants describe widely different experiences with these institutions, the interactions between them and their dependency on them. This chapter establishes the insecurity of young people’s dependence on institutions, and how failure of any one of them appears to cause significant hardship and jeopardise successful transition to adult employment and independence.

Chapter six maps the diverse levels and types of dependence on parents reported by participants, along with the conditions under which this support is provided. It also examines the experience of independence from parents and introduces the concept of ‘fluctuating dependence’. This concept is developed from data analysis and reflects the insecurity inherent in the transition between parental and labour market dependence, which characterises many of the participants’ experiences. The chapter also demonstrates the ways in which youth labour market conditions contribute to this insecurity.

Chapter seven investigates the concepts of individualisation, industrial citizenship and commodification as they relate to the work experience of participants. I examine strategies for change, and their effectiveness as identified by young workers. In this chapter, I introduce and model the concept of dependent relationship power (DRP) to describe the dependent relationship that a number of participants have with their employer and the way they attempt to improve their working conditions by ‘value-adding’ informal services and behaviours to their standard employment contract. To reinforce this concept I provide a number of examples, one of which relates to young workers’ understanding of occupational health and safety responsibilities. The individualised strategies (DRP) used by a number of participants, as this chapter shows, are of questionable effectiveness.
The final chapter consolidates the key findings from chapters four to seven providing evidence for an overarching argument regarding young people’s power in the labour market, and the relationship between this and their level of dependence in other life domains. Implications arising from the research findings, including the need for further research, are discussed to conclude the thesis.

**Conclusion**

The thesis contributes a deep socio-political analysis of the labour market experience of a group of young South Australian workers to current debates about the degree of individual agency versus the influence of important social structures on the nature of youth transitions. The data explores young workers’ degree of power and level of autonomy in their interaction with the significant institutions in their lives, and particularly in the labour market. This power is revealed as fluctuating and unreliable, suggesting the need for stronger institutional supports. I also recommend future fruitful lines of research.
Chapter Two

Approach and methodology

This chapter describes the origins of the research and its process. This process is modelled in Figure 1 on page 11 and the chapter follows its chronological structure, with sections corresponding to each major phase depicted in the model.

The first section outlines the early origins of the project, including the funding source and aims of the industry partner in supporting the research. The emancipatory aims of the industry partner were clear and the epistemological underpinning of the research was further developed after the recruitment of myself, the sole PhD researcher. The second section on epistemology identifies the assumptions made and the reasons they are applicable to the current study, and the third section details the approach taken in reviewing the literature and how information identified was used in the research question development and data analysis.

The reasons for adopting a qualitative approach are explained in the fourth section and relate to the research questions and types of data needed. The reasons for targeting specific characteristics in the sample population and a description of the sample obtained are detailed in the fifth section on sample characteristics. This provides a picture of the participants in the sample and places them within a wider context of the youth labour market in South Australia. The data collection stage is described in the sixth section, detailing the reasons for the methods chosen. Next, the data analysis section describes the process of analysis and the effect early analysis had on the direction and scope of the research. Finally there is a brief reflection on how the data analysis was transformed into the thesis.

Origins of the research

The union movement in South Australia, represented by SA Unions, has been active in the exploration of issues of concern to young workers through the funding of the Young Workers Legal Service and other committees and investigations. To extend its knowledge
of the experience of young workers, it initiated the study, providing ongoing additional financial support and encouragement. The partnership between SA Unions and the University of South Australia was established in order to obtain an Australian Postgraduate Award Industry (APAI) from the Australian Research Council (ARC) to fund a PhD candidate to undertake this research. The project aimed to deepen knowledge of the current value and status of young workers in South Australia through an exploration of the perspectives of young workers. SA Unions intend to use the findings of this study to assist organisations which work with, or advocate for, young people, to take action to empower young workers. The research commenced following the appointment of myself as a PhD candidate in April 2006 and was completed in May 2010.

Figure 1- Model of research methodology

[Diagram of research methodology]

- Emancipatory Critical Theory
- Empirical Research
  - Youth transitions, 'dependency', generation vs transition
  - Youth employment
- Framing concepts
  - Individualisation
  - Commodification of labour
  - Industrial citizenship
  - Worker voice
- Qualitative Approach
- Through DECS, Community Services, Flyers, Snowballing and SA Unions
- Sample Characteristics
  - 90 participants
  - Aged 15-24
  - Employed in Industries of significant youth employment
  - Gender bias towards female
  - Age bias towards school aged young people
- Focus Groups and Interviews
- Content, Thematic and Theoretical
- Addition of Theoretical Concepts
  - Ecosystems theory
  - Intergenerational support
  - Exit-voice
  - Exploitable dependence
  - Reciprocity in the employment relationship
- Conferences and Policy Forums
  - Presentations and Workshops
Epistemology

Critical theory and an emancipatory approach underpin the research methodology. Both perspectives require the researcher to be reflective about their position in relation to the topic, methods chosen, and the participant group. My background in youth employment, and qualifications as a social worker predisposes me to identify and acknowledge structural influences and barriers. This aligns with the underpinning assumptions of critical theory. A critical theory perspective is primarily concerned with the nature of social structures; as influential, existing objectively, and able to be challenged and changed by people (Blaikie 1993 p.52). The nature of my previous work involved attempts to change the employment experience of disadvantaged young people on an individual basis. An aspect of my interest in this research is the potential to use an emancipatory approach to identify and challenge structural impediments in order to achieve positive change for the whole group. These approaches underpin this research in terms of studying the interactions of young people with the social structure of the labour market, which has changed over time and is likely to continue to do so.

The ontological approaches of emancipatory and critical theory researchers like myself are constructivist in nature, with multiple realities being recognised as influenced by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, gender and disability values (Blaikie 1993 p.203; Mertens 1998 p.18). People’s ability to perceive ‘reality’ occurs in an environment with forces and conditions that the individual may not fully understand or of which they may be unaware (Blaikie 1993 p.203). Therefore, these approaches require a thorough investigation of social structures as well as individual perspectives. Recognition of this is incorporated into the methods used for data collection and analysis, particularly the emphasis given to existing theory, in the analysis of participant responses. Theory was also used in research question development and data analysis, and is depicted in Figure 1, a model of the research process.

Critical theory is interdisciplinary and open to the appropriation of theory and methods from a range of disciplinary areas (Morrow 1994 p.15) as is the emancipatory approach. The latter approach is influenced by a diverse range of theory derived from humanistic psychology, critical theory, feminism and post-structuralism (Truman et al. 2000 p.4-12). The research area of this thesis spans multiple disciplines including youth studies, industrial relations and human development. Reference is made to theory from these disciplines and others such as feminism, in order to understand and interpret the data.
As a methodological approach, critical theory is founded on the idea that the human potential for reason allows humans to criticise, challenge and change characteristics of social structures and societies (Blaikie 1993 p.52). In this thesis I am therefore attentive to the critical perspective offered by the young people and to the problems that young people name. This reflects a critical theory approach, which generally aims to construct social theory that confronts current social or political problems, and has a direct interest in the emancipation of the oppressed (Kellner 1989 p.1) – in this case, young workers with relatively weak voice and low social and economic power. It is necessary also to know what is perceived as good, so that it can be continued and/or reinforced; however where injustice and potentially exploitative practices appear, these need to be highlighted, explored and analysed with a view to redressing exploitation and disadvantage. Accurate information enables informed decision-making, which increases the likelihood of positive outcomes for young people.

The emancipatory approach brings together four common perspectives (Mertens 1998 p.18), which relate to the current research. The first perspective considers the lives and experiences of marginalised groups and individuals of primary importance, emphasising the importance of studying of these experiences, including the means by which oppressive power relations are maintained. Young people in the labour market are such a group, being vulnerable and subject to poor working conditions (McDonald and Dear 2005 p.10). The second perspective focuses analysis on the how and why of inequities and asymmetric power relations. Considerable attention is given to this perspective in the investigation and analysis of young workers’ positions of power in the labour market. The third perspective emphasises the relationship between the results of social research and social action for change. The intention of the research in this thesis is to enhance the position of young people in the labour market. Close links with the SA Unions, as industry partner, provides opportunity for the findings to influence their policy and activities relating to this group. However, whether the research is truly emancipatory in action cannot be known at this time and evaluation of this aspect is not a part of this project. Finally, emancipatory theory is used to develop the research approach and a set of beliefs about why the ‘problem’ occurs. The research analysis in this thesis identifies problem areas and develops theory about causes, by using theoretical and other literature to form research questions. Then, by returning to the literature in the final stages of analysis, the theories are refined. Thus, the four perspectives explored by Mertens (1998 p.18) are intrinsic to the research project and have informed the methodological process.
Power relationships are recognised as significant by critical theorists (Kellner 1989 p.1) and require careful consideration when constructing methodology, particularly in terms of the way ‘knowledge’ of the participants is gathered and interpreted. Findings can be influenced by the relative power positions of the interviewer and interviewee, and the potential influence able to be exerted by the researcher on both the questions asked, and the interpretation of the responses, that is, on the ‘knowledge’ produced by the research.

Similarly, Truman et al. (2000 p.12) emphasise the need for researchers with emancipatory aims to reflect on their location and power as researcher in relation to research participants. A sense of ‘objectivity’ can be achieved through a reflection about the influence of values and social positioning (Mertens 1998 p.20). As a researcher, I am aware of the power imbalance inherent in the research relationship, with the research subject as the ‘object’ of investigation and the researcher holding much of the power. I considered a number of strategies to address this issue, and incorporated them as much as possible in my research design, within the timeframes and resources available. Wherever possible, I collected data in a familiar environment for the participant, for their comfort and to minimise the power advantage I held as a researcher. The research was explained to the participant prior to their consent and involvement was entirely at their discretion. Interviews were also recorded and transcribed in their entirety, to increase the accuracy of context and content of discussions for later analysis.

This research project thus began with open research questions, to which I aimed to bring a diverse range of youth voices. My goal and practical intent for the process was to maximise the safety and comfort of participants, and to minimise my power as a researcher. Of course this is an incomplete effort; completely erasing the power of the researcher is not possible, but using the strategies described I attempted to give power to the interviewees.

In emancipatory research it is also important to acknowledge tensions that arise (Truman et al. 2000 p.12). Two tensions emerged for me in the course of this research. Firstly, I encountered a dilemma when some participants reported situations where their experience did not reflect their current rights or entitlements. I felt a conflict between my role as ‘researcher’, an observer who does not intervene or interfere, and my ability to provide information that might improve their situation. I dealt with this by suggesting an appropriate service for resolution of the issue after the conclusion of the interview; trying
to avoid contaminating the data I was collecting, but still giving the research subject relevant and helpful information.

The second tension I encountered was related to the focus of the research area. Initially the focus of the research was to be solely on young workers’ experiences specifically within the domain of the labour market. This focus expanded as a result of the data gathered, when it became apparent that this domain was inextricably entwined with participants’ experience of other institutions, such as family, education and welfare. It became apparent, as analysis unfolded, that young workers’ experiences could not be adequately addressed without consideration of these other structures. While the domain of the labour market, and young workers’ experience within it, remains central to this thesis, the research territory and analysis has developed beyond a narrow focus on ‘work’, reflecting the evolving nature of the method adopted.

Literature Review

The literature review had two major functions in the current research. Both functions were integral to the research and established a knowledge base and theoretical framework for the initial investigation.

Review of empirical research

The first function concerns placing the research in the context of previous international and national studies relevant to the youth labour market experience. I reviewed key texts and journals to establish the current knowledge base and areas of debate in the field. This enabled the research direction and methodology to be refined in order to maximise the potential for a valuable contribution to the field of study.

Development of framing concepts

The second function of the literature review was to construct a conceptual and theoretical framework for use in developing the research questions and later in the analysis of the data. This commenced with an examination of theory explicit in the project application, including in the initial research questions, for example, labour commodification. These provided areas of investigation for the interviews and focus groups.

Attempts were made to translate the concepts into everyday language and experience in questioning participants. The questions for participants did not refer to the theories directly or by title. There were two reasons for this. The first was that using the theory titles
directly in the questions would require explanation, as they are not commonly in use. The second was that a long explanation about the meaning may have influenced or limited responses to experiences characteristic of the theories. The guiding questions for interviews and focus groups can be found in appendix 2 and 3 along with the demographic data collection sheet (appendix 1). The open process produced data that did not fit easily within the theories initially explored, making it necessary to locate and add additional theory to the framework. The framework in chapter three results from both these processes and includes all theory used to frame analysis.

The qualitative approach

As explained in chapter one, the research was designed to answer three questions:

1. What are the conditions of young people’s employment and what reasons do they give for being concentrated in casual employment; that is, does it reflect preferences and choice, or labour market opportunity?
2. How does work impact on young people’s transition to financial independence?
3. Is youth labour commodified and does this limit the effectiveness and/or capacity of young people to experience citizenship and voice in the workplace? What strategies are available and utilised to address and promote citizenship and voice for young people in the workplace?

There is considerable quantitative data about the experience of young people, from a variety of sources such as the Longitudinal Survey of Australian Youth and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS). Less is known about young workers’ understandings, meanings and perceptions of their employment experiences. Cropley (2002 p.14) suggests a qualitative approach is most useful in such situations, where descriptive data is needed and the data is ‘narrative’ in nature. Qualitative researchers usually study complex phenomena in natural settings and avoid oversimplification in portraying their findings (Leedy and Ormrod 2001 p.147).

Leedy and Ormrod (2001 p.148) state that, as in this study, qualitative researchers often commence with general questions, and as the study proceeds, the focus on specific problems increases. The focus in this study is on attitudes and experiences and initially required only general questions because of the evolving context in the research area and the quantitative data available. A further reason for adopting qualitative research to
address the aims of the thesis is that my analysis is intended to reveal meaning and hypotheses are generated rather than tested by the research (Cropley 2002 p.14).

In addition, Leedy and Ormrod (2001 p.148-149) describe a number of research purposes best served by qualitative methods, which align with the purpose and research questions at the heart of this thesis. They include a descriptive function revealing the nature of certain situations and relationships, which applies to the youth labour market and the enabling and/or disabling relationships young people experience within it. Secondly, qualitative research has an interpretive function whereby the researcher attempts to gain insights, develop new theoretical perspectives and/or discover problems. Such an intention exists within the current research given its exploratory and emancipatory objectives. Thirdly, qualitative research performs a verification function in terms of testing the validity of assumptions and generalisations. This is also an important objective of the current study.

The qualitative findings produced by the thesis methodology are important for effective policy making. Young people’s understandings of their experiences are significant because of their position as ‘insiders’. In order to describe and address policy problems accurately, it is necessary to comprehend the experiences and understandings of the people that the policy is directed at. This is an ethical issue. The voice of young people is vital in research and knowledge making that is about them, and recognises their right to participate in matters of direct interest.

Therefore, qualitative methods align with the aims of the thesis and are most likely to create new and deeper understanding of existing knowledge in the area of youth employment. The qualitative approach also provides the opportunity to develop theory that can be tested and generalised from further research activity in the future.

**Sample characteristics**

**Size**

The exploratory and complex nature of the research questions required time-consuming and labour-intensive data collection methods. Time and resource constraints precluded a large enough sample size to produce representative data in terms of any relevant characteristic, for example, employment status or industry, or demographic characteristics such as, gender, age or ethnic background. Time constraints limited the sample numbers to a targeted eighty to one hundred young workers. At the end of the data collection phase
ninety participants had contributed to the research findings. This sample was selected using a ‘purposive’ mode of sampling, which encouraged the recruitment of young people from diverse backgrounds and experiences. Selection criteria and recruitment efforts were developed with this goal in mind.

**Selection criteria**

The participant group was selected from the 57% of young people aged fifteen to twenty-four years of age in South Australia who are employed (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006a) in the industries described later in this section. The age-range was chosen because it encompassed the years of transition from school to work; given that the focus was youth, not child labour, and because there is some comparable data for this age-range, for example from ABS.

Since the research began with a focus on work, all participants were required to have experience of work, so that they could comment on those experiences rather than general labour market experiences, which might consist only of job search. Young people’s experience of unemployment and job seeking, while significant and interesting, was not the focus of this research. Because of their current engagement with work, it may be that the participants in this study are a particularly resilient group, or unusual in their capability in finding or retaining employment.

The final selection criteria for participants concerned their industry of employment. The industries focused on in this research were chosen after analysis of youth employment statistics and other factors, which are described in the industry profile subsection below.

It is likely that there are many young people in less advantageous situations than participants in this study, including those who are totally excluded from the labour market. This means that the claims made from this study need to be appropriately modest recognising the specificities of the sample group.

**Recruitment**

I recruited participants using multiple methods with the goal of finding participants in a range of situations, for example in varying work types, and to ensure the inclusion of diverse experiences within the data. This was important for the research, to allow for a full and deep analysis of the working situations of set of young people in South Australia.
Initially, it was envisaged that significant assistance with recruitment would come from the project’s industry partner, SA Unions. However, at the time of participant recruitment, the unions’ ‘Your Rights at Work’ campaign occurred, consuming considerable union resources and attention. The result was that participants were recruited primarily through the South Australian Department of Education and Childrens Services (DECS), the Youth and Community Service Association newsletter, the South Australian Policy Online newsletter, and youth advisory bodies associated with local government. One youth service supported a focus group of their youth advisors, who had themselves been selected using affirmative action principles to reflect community diversity, and include the most disadvantaged groups. I also used ‘word of mouth’ and ‘snowballing’ for recruitment, with positive results for both focus groups and individual interviews.

In the metropolitan area, I recruited some student workers from work education classes in years ten, eleven, and twelve, from a public school. The school region included lower to middle socio-economic populations as indicated by data from the Australian Census of Population and Housing (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004a). Data on weekly household income was used to calculate the percentage of households living on less than $300 per week in the relevant school zone areas, this being a measure of economic disadvantage used in Adelaide’s Social Atlas 2001 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002 p.25).

The school was chosen from an area that included higher than average levels of disadvantage but was not the most disadvantaged. In metropolitan SA an average of 16.3% of households live on less then $300 per week, whereas the suburbs in the chosen school area ranged from between 19% and 23% (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2002 p.25). In the most disadvantaged areas, some of which were adjacent to the school district, over 30% of households lived on less than $300 per week.

While weekly household income is not a completely reliable indicator of a participant’s socio-economic status, this measure was readily available and I used it to select potential recruitment sites that were unlikely to include an over-representation of students from wealthy or very poor families.

The other three school sites selected were in rural South Australia and were targeted for geographical diversity. One was in a seaside tourist town and the other two were inland agricultural towns. Again, all three were public schools, catering to years reception to
twelve, and were of different sizes in terms of number of pupils. At these schools, working students volunteered for participation after being given information about the project by school staff. One of the school focus groups was drawn from working students in one class; the other two were working students from various classes. A factor in the selection was the schools’ willingness to participate, but overwhelmingly the schools were enthusiastic in their support of the research, so this was not a limitation.

SA Unions later assisted when more targeted recruitment was required in specific areas that were not well represented through earlier recruitment activities; for example the initial recruitment strategies failed to attract males in the twenty to twenty-four age group in the construction industry. SA Unions assisted in the recruitment of these young men for the research. The young men were either apprentices or had recently completed their trade qualification in a number of different building trades.

**Sample demographics**

In this section, the sample group is described using demographic data about the target population as a whole. This description is provided to place the sample group within the larger target population and identify differences and similarities between the two. Young people from various backgrounds were encouraged to participate in the research, but there were no specific quotas set for any particular participant group. Even where some characteristics of the sample are reflective of the target population as a whole there is no implication that participants are representative of the entire population. Numbers are too small to generalise findings and this was not the intention of the research; instead the goal was to elaborate and explore experiences at a deep qualitative level.

The participant sample is not reflective of the target population in a number of ways. The gender and age profile of the research participants is set out in the table on the next page (Table 1). It shows that young women outnumber young men; just under one third of the participants were male. The final group included only 32% males whereas they represent 51% of employed young people in this age-range (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006b). Efforts were made in the latter stages to recruit young males to address this imbalance, and these efforts met with some success.

The sample included 10% of young people who identified as being born outside Australia, which is a similar proportion to the 8.42% in the targeted population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006c). A number of these participants were African refugees, recruited through
a migrant youth organisation. My sample of young people who identified as being born outside Australia is therefore not representative of the cultural diversity of this group in the population.

One participant identified as an Indigenous Australian, but was not recruited specifically for her Aboriginality. This is approximately proportionate with the 1.54% of Indigenous workers in the target population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006d). Any unique experiences, which may have resulted from this participant’s indigenous background, were not explored, as she did not disclose this information during the focus group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1- Age profile of participants by data collection method</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aged under 18</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total participants</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Averaged between 5-6 participants in each focus group i.e. 12 focus groups in total.

The majority of participants were living at home (around 70%), with three participants living with other relatives, ten living in share houses, five with a partner and one living in a home-stay boarding situation. Around 20% of participants were receiving some form of financial support from the government through Centrelink. This compares with approximately 16% of all South Australian young people, receiving youth allowance, including young people not employed (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2004b). Recruitment methods for the sample group may have produced this over representative result through successful efforts to recruit less privileged young workers for emancipatory and social justice reasons, as discussed previously in the epistemology section. It is also possible that a small number of the sample group, aged over 21 years and not studying, could have been receiving Newstart Allowance. These people would not be included as the above statistic relates to youth allowance only. The number of young workers in the sample group receiving welfare demonstrates that the categories of ‘welfare recipient’ and ‘worker’ are not mutually exclusive for this age group.

With respect to levels of education there were considerable differences between the sample group and the target population of young workers. Firstly, just over 50% of the sample was currently still attending high school. This means the educational profile of fifteen to twenty-four year olds in the research sample is comparatively low in their rate of year
twelve completions. The 2006 census found 58% of the target population had completed year twelve (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006e) but only 42% of the sample group has. Six participants had left school before year twelve and only a small group of participants had completed schooling and had not pursued further qualifications. Of those who achieved formal vocational qualifications, fourteen participants had certificates and two had diplomas. This rate of achievement (18% of the sample group) is low, compared with 21.4% in the target population holding this level of vocational qualification (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006f). Six participants have a degree or higher-level qualification. This rate is also low at 6.6% of the sample group, compared with 9.1% of the target population (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006f). There are two possible reasons for these discrepancies. Firstly, because of the emancipatory aims of the research, the sample may be skewed towards more disadvantaged participants who may participate less in higher levels of education. Secondly, the large proportion of younger aged school attendees in the sample would tend to skew results for the whole sample away from completed post-school qualifications. The low level of academic and vocational qualifications in the sample may have implications for their labour force experience and may have some influence on the findings from this research.

Casual work was the employment status for 92% of the student workers in the sample. Using unpublished ABS data from 1998, Campbell (2000 p.85) reports a similar level of casual work for Australian students aged 15 to 24.

Seventeen participants were union members, sixty-nine were not union members and four reported not knowing whether they were union members or not. This rate of 19% union density in the sample group is higher than the 10.5% reported by the ABS (2008a) for this age group. Unionisation rates have been declining in recent years and have almost halved since 1998, when 19.9% of this age group were members (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008a). This over representation could reflect the involvement of unions in some participant recruitment for this research.

Industry profile

Seven industries (see the table below) were selected for inclusion to gain a diversity of experience. Six of these industries (excluding Agriculture) together employ approximately three quarters of all South Australian workers between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four. Agriculture was added because of the inclusion of young workers from rural areas. Table 2
(on the following page) provides the industry distribution of participants against ABS statistics for the target group as a whole (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006b).

Table 2- Industry distribution of participants against ABS 2006 census data for the target population

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Industry</th>
<th>Sample %</th>
<th>Population %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accommodation, Cafes and Restaurants</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retail</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health and Community Services</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property and Business Services</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>76.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NB: Population does not total 100%, as only selected industries are included.

There are some marked differences between the participant sample and the percentage employed in the general population in three industries. Firstly, the research sample has a greater proportion of workers from the accommodation, cafes and restaurants industry, than the employed population represented in ABS data. The number of participants from this industry may be inflated by focus group participants reporting their fast food employment as being in this category, rather than retail, as reported in the census. In addition, approximately fifty percent of the sample group were still at school and only able to work part-time, and retail and hospitality are the largest employers of this group (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006g). Participants in this industry were commonly employed in direct customer service or food preparation, in businesses varying from national supermarket chains, to family run take away food outlets.

Secondly, only one participant was recruited from manufacturing. ABS statistics show that manufacturing employs approximately ten percent of young workers in South Australia. A close examination of the statistics demonstrates that a majority of the work in this industry is full-time and largely employs males. Males are under-represented in the sample group, which may explain why manufacturing industry is under-represented. Young workers who are still at school have limited opportunities to obtain work in this predominantly full-time work area. In recognition of the under representation of these workers the relevant union was contacted in an effort to recruit specifically from manufacturing industry. Unfortunately, this was unsuccessful because the data to identify potential participants by age was not readily accessible.
The third difference related to the health and community sector, which was overrepresented in the sample. This is probably due to the recruitment drive I undertook through networks in that industry. I intended to recruit clients of the services in that sector because of the emancipatory goals of the research. This was successful and these clients worked across a number of industries and occupations. Unintentionally, I also recruited a disproportionate number of workers in the health and community services industry, including youth workers, social workers and other health professionals.

The other four selected industries are represented in the sample in approximately equal proportions to the ABS statistics for the relevant population group. Even so, the participants are unlikely to be representative of the wider population given their small numbers and findings would need to be tested by further research before generalising to the larger population group.

**Data collection methods**

This section describes the methods used to gather data. Although this project is primarily qualitative, research and information is included from a range of sources, both qualitative and quantitative. This element of analysis was undertaken in a similar way to Vosko’s (2000 p.9-10) use of national statistics to give context and weight to her research on temporary labour in Canada. Babbie (2001 p.315) argues that existing statistics related to the topic of research should always be considered as a supplementary data source and are particularly helpful in providing a context and location for the research, both historically and conceptually. ABS statistics were analysed to provide a general picture of young people’s employment in South Australia, including their employment status and industries with the highest employment of young people by gender. This analysis informed the scope of the project, the topic development, questions for data collection and the inclusion of certain groups to reflect the diversity of the target population in the participant sample. The use of ABS data also allows contextual comparison with other states or countries in future research.

**Focus groups**

Focus groups were used as the primary method of data collection because they are efficient in terms of the number of people who can be involved in a relatively short timeframe, while providing opportunity for in depth discussion and exploration of topics. Krueger (in Babbie 2001 p.294) identifies five advantages of the focus group which apply to this
research. Firstly, the capturing of real life data in a social environment was a major benefit. Young people were confident and enthusiastic when discussing experiences with their peers and ideas were generated and explored in depth, through group interaction. In most groups existing relationships or common interests assisted in this process. The topic generated lively discussion and the groups appeared to enjoy the opportunity to be ‘experts’ in the research area. A second aspect of the focus group, which proved particularly useful, was the flexibility to explore topics and ideas arising from the discussion. The material gained from the groups has high face validity and many apt quotes were obtained that enliven and explain complex data.

Krueger (in Babbie 2001) points out the benefits of the focus group for speedy results at low cost. These are certainly advantages for time limited research with budgetary constraints and were factors considered in the choice of this method. Krueger (in Babbie 2001 p.295) also identified disadvantages relating to a lack of control, ‘special’ skills required, group differences, and difficulties in data analysis, assembling groups and creating a conducive environment for group discussion. These disadvantages did not have a significant effect in my research, as the theoretical perspectives adopted all advocate the necessity for researchers to relinquish some control in the research process. Successful recruitment strategies were put in place in assembling the focus groups to address the potential difficulties with recruitment. At the time of the data collection, as the sole researcher, I was close to the targeted age range and am experienced in group work with young people. I endeavoured to create a conducive environment for the group discussion, by giving consideration to the individuals in the group make up, choosing a familiar and comfortable venue, and supplying refreshments and nibbles.

However, I am aware that the aforementioned advantage of some participants existing relationships promoting confidence in discussion, also involves dynamics between participants unknown to the researcher. Such dynamics may influence the data collected. This was made evident on one occasion when some participants later advised me that the presence of their employer’s daughter in the focus group influenced their contribution. This was resolved on this occasion by further data collection and private interview with these participants. Nevertheless, this experience demonstrated that the interviewer can be ignorant of important dynamics influencing data collection, without always having opportunity to recognise or remedy the situation.
Questions for the focus groups were based on the research questions developed deductively from the literature (see appendix 2 and 3 for interview and focus group question guides). The focus group questions were created to stimulate discussion and elicit experiences on topics directly related to the research questions and the language used was non-academic in order to be easily understood and inclusive. The process was semi-structured in nature, to cover the important issues as pre-determined by the researcher based on analysis of pre-existing research, but also to be flexible to group concerns. Mertens (1998 p.321) identifies this flexibility as a particular benefit of focus groups, in encouraging insight gained from ideas generated by the interaction of group participants. Focus groups also allow the researcher to analyse group norms and dynamics around the issue of investigation (May 1997 p.113). This flexibility and the group directed discussion, led to data collection on broader topics than anticipated and eventually to an extension of the research topic. This change in focus was a tension identified and reflected upon earlier in this chapter.

**Interviews**

DeMarrais (2004 p.52) states that researchers use qualitative interviews when they ‘want to gain in-depth knowledge from participants about particular phenomena, experiences, or sets of experiences’. This means that typically, interview questions and follow-up questions should be sufficiently flexible so that in-depth knowledge is obtained from the interviewee’s particular perspective. This method does not have some of the advantages of the focus groups described above, but allows deep exploration of specific themes identified in the groups. This process both confirmed and extended the knowledge gained in the focus groups.

Interviews were semi-structured to pursue specific questions, with the flexibility to probe beyond the questions, and enter into a ‘dialogue’ with the participant (May 1997 p.111). Semi-structured interviews provide the opportunity to share power with research participants and hence are favoured by feminist researchers. Graham (in Reinharz 1992 p.18) describes semi-structured interviews as the ‘principal means by which feminists have sought to achieve the active involvement of their respondents in the construction of the data about their lives’. Reinharz (1992 p.19) argues that feminist researchers find interviewing appealing as a means of accessing participants’ ideas and thoughts in their own words, minimising the influence from the researcher’s words, language and expressions. This process is in direct opposition to how women have been treated historically, being ignored or spoken for, by researchers (Reinharz 1992 p.19). This
material supports the selection of interviews in order to enhance the power of the young people participating in this research.

All interviewees met the same selection criteria as focus group participants. Initially, I had intended to identify issues within the focus groups which needed further exploration, and to choose interviewees who had relevant experiences from the focus groups. I later decided to interview new participants for three reasons. The first was that new interviewees, with no knowledge of the group discussions, were in a better position to confirm or challenge themes arising from the groups. The second was that the sample was extended by twenty new participants, rather than duplicating data from the focus groups. Lastly, the interviewees were largely young people who were unable to attend a focus group. These tended to be at the upper end of the targeted age-range, working longer hours and consequently less available for group activities. I did not want to exclude this group from the data collection. Table 1 (page 21) details age-range and gender of interviewees and focus group participants.

The interviews were conducted at a time and place negotiated with the interviewee as convenient to them. Face-to-face interviews took place in venues that provided privacy and comfort and were arranged by the researcher. While I expressed a preference for face-to-face interviews, participants’ time constraints resulted in a number of interviews being conducted by telephone. This required a particular sensitivity to interviewee intonation and hesitation on the part of the interviewer, given the loss of visual cues. This was highlighted as a concern for qualitative researchers by Sturges and Hanrahan (2004 p.108-110) and Novick’s (2008 p.397), although these researchers found no evidence of any effect on the quality of the data generated by telephone interviewing. Even so, in using this method, I took time to build rapport before commencing the interview; calling to prearrange a convenient interview time, checking at the time of interview that they were in a private and comfortable environment and available for the length of time required. During the interview I made efforts to verbalise all my responses, particularly when clarifying meaning and probing for more information. This method was successful in engaging a range of people who would otherwise have been unable to participate in the research. It was valuable to include these participants who were particularly time-poor.

There was no difficulty in recruiting for interviews, and interviewees were willing to spend time and share personal experiences, at a depth and in a degree of detail impossible to obtain in a group setting. Some interviewees’ quiet disposition made it unlikely that they
would have contributed as much in focus groups. Their willingness to participate may indicate they felt a personal connection with the subject. On the other hand, a number indicated they had not thought about some of the topic areas until the interview.

**Data analysis**

Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed in full. I then analysed the transcripts using content and thematic analysis. My analytical process used a number of steps that Creswell (2003 p.191-195) describes as generic to qualitative research. I analysed each transcript three times for specific content and themes. The first analysis considered the transcript content and created codes for the data. The second analysis used these codes systematically to ensure a thorough coding of all data, and then sorted and consolidated these codes into key themes. The third analysis considered the key themes against relevant theoretical concepts. This final analysis was written as thematic narrative pieces with subsections, theoretical discussion, descriptive elements and quotations.

The data I produced through this process created new insights that are contextualised theoretically and then transformed into this thesis, specifically making up the content of chapters four to seven. As the sole researcher, I analysed all data, which ensured consistency of analysis.

**Theoretical Analysis**

Initially the research process was deductive, in that the literature review identified theories of commodification of labour and industrial citizenship as likely to be important in explaining the work experiences of young people. In the third stage of analysis it became apparent that the identified theories did not fully explain all the specific behaviour and experience reported, and therefore an inductive process commenced. Noting the specific behaviours reported, a return to the literature was necessary and theories of individualisation and dependence became central to the theoretical analysis of the data.

This iterative research process (depicted in Figure 1 on page 11) shows both the deductive and inductive aspects of the analysis. The result of this process is an empirical analysis of the lived experience of young people in the labour market, where for them characteristics of individualisation and dependence exist at the same time.
Dialogue with stakeholders

I also took an iterative approach to testing and amending the analysis, through presentations and dialogue with a range of interested individuals and groups. This included presentations at academic conferences and seminars, political groups and unions and at a policy forum specifically focused on youth employment. These provided opportunities for expert comment on findings at various stages of the research and ascertained how harmoniously the data fitted with the knowledge of specialists in this field. Much of the feedback supported the preliminary and later analyses and the relevance of the research findings to policy and practice.

Findings and thesis development

The data analysis produced a volume of findings on themes that were in excess of what could be thoroughly addressed within the limits of this thesis. The interview and focus group methods allowed for new themes to emerge, for example, the influential institutions other than the labour market. Others, such as motivations regarding union membership are of interest, but were not central to the current experience of the participants in the labour market. Difficulties were experienced in deciding what themes and data to omit in order to achieve the necessary depth of analysis within the required word limit. What remains is the theory and data most pertinent to the research questions and area of investigation.

Conclusion

The research project is an ARC industry partnership between SA Unions and the Centre for Work + Life at the University of South Australia. This partnership had emancipatory aims relating to the disadvantage young people may experience within the labour market. These aims are underpinned by critical theory assumptions relating to the relationship between social structures and individuals and groups within society. Both approaches are inherently critical of structural injustice. The emancipatory approach requires positive action as a part of research findings, and this meant that particular attention was given to areas where current structures may have a negative influence on youth labour market experience. Given the open nature of the research questions and the need for an in depth understanding of perceptions and opinions, a qualitative approach was adopted.

Initially, theories of commodification and industrial citizenship emerged as relevant from the literature review. After early analysis, a return to the literature was necessary to
develop the theoretical framework further, and theories of individualisation and
dependence were added given their relevance to the data.

The sample recruited was not reflective of the overall population of working South
Australians between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four in the seven specified industries
and this was not a goal of recruitment. The sample contained higher proportions of women
and lower proportions of qualified individuals. These and other specific characteristics of
the sample group require some level of care in interpreting findings made from the
research.

Focus groups and interviews were the primary data collection methods. Focus groups were
used to maximise participation in terms of numbers, and to enable collection of the social
interactions around the topic areas. In-depth one-on-one interviews were used to extend
and supplement focus group data.

There were a number of stages of analysis, including preliminary content analysis,
themetic and theoretical analyses. The theoretical analysis required a return to the
literature, as mentioned previously. Finally, some incidental data and analysis was not
included in the final thesis where it was determined not to be relevant to the core research
questions.
This chapter has been divided into three major parts. The first part is a review of empirical research, including international and national research in fields that relate to youth labour market experience and have direct relevance to this thesis. I discuss areas of agreement, areas of debate and gaps in current empirical knowledge. The second part of this chapter is the theory and conceptual framework used for data analysis. Theories such as individualisation, commodification of labour and industrial citizenship are central to the research findings and are drawn on in subsequent chapters. The final part sets out the Youth Ecological Systems Model, which is placed here because it draws together the concepts and theories identified in this chapter and used throughout the data analysis in chapters four, five, six and seven.

**Empirical research background**

The five sections in this first part of the chapter are a review of empirical research relevant to the focus of this thesis on young people’s labour market engagement. The first section identifies areas of current agreement among researchers relating to changes in the labour market and educational engagement. The consequences for young people of these changes provide a foundation for the research presented in this thesis. The second section reviews international research that assisted in refining the research area and in interpreting the data. Thirdly, the two major conceptualisations of youth, as either in ‘transition’ or as a ‘generation’ are evaluated because this thesis takes a position within these perspectives. Fourthly, literature on the institutions providing intergenerational support is examined because of young people’s dependence on such support. Finally, the degree of influence young people have on their life course is explored through empirical findings relating to the ‘agency/structure’ debate.

**Areas of agreement**

There is general agreement among researchers that the labour market has been undergoing change in areas which include insecurity of employment (Standing 2002), expansion of
underemployment (Bessant 1999; Abbott and Kelly 2005 p.96), flexibility in working hours (Deery and Mahony 1994; Preston 2001) and the intrusion of work into home life (Pocock 2003). Particularly focussing on youth, Wyn (2009a p.1) states, ‘the widespread emergence of flexible and precarious employment has meant that individuals need to be able to regularly learn new skills and take up new work options in order to survive’.

Young people have been described as being in the ‘frontline’ of those affected by these changes and are expected in policy and practice to ‘make their own way through it’ (Spierings 2004 p.86).

Changes in the labour market are associated with the increased participation of young people in education. The decade 1996 to 2006 saw growth in numbers of young people, aged fifteen to twenty-four, attending educational institutions (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008b p.95). Census data shows that in 1996, 71% of 15 to 19 year olds were attending education compared with 75% in 2006. Similarly, for 20-24 year olds the figure grew from 27% to 34%. This may be because there is general recognition that education is an increasingly important precursor to employment (Ayers-Wearne 2001). Wyn (2009b p.48) has found that young people understand this importance and try to protect themselves from a changing and precarious labour market through building extensive educational and career biographies in the youth life stage. However government policies associated with the age at which young people are allowed to leave school, and the need for young people to satisfy education or job seeking requirements to obtain welfare, have a clear objective of extending the time young people spend in schooling. In addition, the increased time spent in school and incidence of post-school qualifications has not increased the security of transitions or produced better career outcomes for many young Australians.

Research in the nineties identified that young people in a number of western countries, were no longer experiencing youth as a short and straightforward transition to adulthood (Du Bois-Reymond 1998; Dwyer and Wyn 1998; Looker and Dwyer 1998; Rudd and Evans 1998). While there is general acceptance of this change, there are a range of positions on the extent to which young people are contributing to the changing nature of their life stage or whether they are responding to challenges in a new environment. Some unresolved issues relating to these diverse positions are of particular relevance to the research questions and are explored in the following sections.
Youth as transition

International research

Researchers across western nations are exploring the changing nature of youth as a life stage. While there may be some commonalities, there are also distinct differences. In the USA, Arnett (2000 p.469-471) describes a new youth experience between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five of ‘emerging adulthood’, characterised by exploration, instability and lifestyle diversity. It ends when long-term bonds and commitments are entered into, for example, in relationships and employment. Arnett (2000 p.479) extrapolates findings to other western industrialised countries, although there are major differences between his population and comparative Australian experience. One example of such differences is that Arnett (2000 p.471) reports that the majority of 18-19 year olds in America have left the parental home, while only 18% of Australians in this age-group had done so (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009 p.25). Such significant differences between the two populations limit the usefulness of this concept for Australian research.

A more useful approach for Australian youth may arise from Bynner’s (2005) research in the UK. In considering youth transition, Bynner (2005 p.380) argues that attention needs to be given to the impact of various structural changes in the wider social and institutional environment. These include technological advances, globalisation, an increasing premium placed on qualifications, greater uncertainty about the future and also delays in partnership and parenthood. Bynner (2005 p.379) describes ‘biographical pathways’ which are longitudinal and dependent upon previous ‘steps’, which have been influenced by the personal, financial, social and cultural resources available to the individual. Bynner (2005 p.380) highlights that traditional routes to adulthood, for example, early parenthood, are still in place for some, but what may have been normative experiences for previous generations are now only experienced by a marginalised minority.

The significance of such socio-economic influences is reinforced by longitudinal research of Canadian young people's transitions. Andres and Adamuti-Trache (2008 p.140) found much evidence to support Bynner's finding that patterns of youth had changed less for disadvantaged youth. They continue to experience some of the traditional routes to adulthood, such as parenthood and a departure from the family home at an early age. Andres and Adamuti-Trache (2008 p.140-141) emphasise the danger in adopting the ideology of individualisation that neglects the importance of structural influences, given that their data shows clear divisions in advantage (or disadvantage) in occupational status.
and income, based on gender and class. Research that considers too narrowly the subjectivities of individuals may not identify such group and structural patterns. Andres and Adamuti-Trache (2008 p.141) argue that such research will only substantiate Bourdieu’s idea that individuals can become ‘accomplices in their own mystification’. This means they may accept popular explanations for their circumstances and incorporate these into their own understandings and descriptions of their experiences.

**Transition versus generation perspectives**

Youth has been defined as a transitional phase occurring after childhood and ending in adulthood. This concept presupposes an end stage, which is definable and different from the point of departure. Since the 1990’s transition researchers have described pathways as diversifying. Sweet (1998 p.5) says that prior to the mid 1970’s ‘transition from initial education to working life was a simple matter for most young Australians’, but acknowledges that it has become increasing complex since then. Heinz (2009 p.392), writing more recently from this perspective, describes the effects of environmental factors on the efficiency and organisation of transitional pathways. Despite acknowledging increased complexity, such researchers still consider youth to be a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood.

English researchers Bradley and Devadason (2008) provide further evidence of complexity, but add a challenge to the time-limited nature of the concept of transition. Extending the age bracket in their study from twenty to thirty-four, they found many young adults were still experiencing low paid and low status jobs in a precarious labour market in the upper age-range studied. They had not ‘transitioned’ to a more stable adult labour market, which would underpin the acquisition of housing, family formation and other previously attainable ‘adult’ markers.

A new generational approach has been developed to explain such findings. This approach emphasises the distinctive characteristics of an age group, in a particular social and political environment, and does not consider past models as normative. This model accepts that the majority of young people may never achieve historical normative markers of adulthood, but have a changed experience of life patterns, for example, in employment and family formation. As a proponent of the generational perspective, Wyn (2007 p.168-169) argues that the transitional model of measuring current youth experience against the progress of the baby-boomer generation, only results in constructing subsequent generations as deficient and is not useful in understanding contemporary issues. The
‘deficiencies’ found through the transitional model may have contributed to the perception of young people as ‘problems’. In Australia, both Bessant (1993) and Wyn (2004 p.2) have reported a shift in research, policy and practice, since the 1970’s, to a focus on the problematic nature of youth. Wyn (2004 p.6) connects this shift in focus to the demise of the full-time labour market for young people.

Drawing on theories of individualisation, risk and choice-biography, Wyn (2004 p.9) advises a rethink of what is known about past transitional pathways, to understand the social change being experienced by youth at present. There is no longer a clear sequential transition from school to work and young people are increasingly involved in both concurrently. Wyn and Woodman (2006 p.497) suggest that a deeper understanding of the youth experience can be developed through a generational perspective that considers the prevailing social, political and economic context for each generation.

Using the Youth Research Centre's Life-Patterns study's data on shifting attitudes and experience, Wyn and Woodman (2006 p.500) develop the concept of 'the new adulthood'. They argue that changes in the labour market, education and the actions of the state have destabilised the traditional markers of adulthood and new ones may be being established. While considering social, political and economic conditions as crucial in understanding generational experience, Wyn and Woodman (2006 p.500) argue it is also important to understand how young people influence the characteristics of their generation.

Wyn and Woodman’s position has been criticised by other youth researchers. For example, Roberts (2007 p.264) argues that Wyn and Woodman’s rejection of the transition perspective is unnecessary. Roberts (2007 p.265) emphasises the complementary nature of the two approaches (transition and generation), suggesting there is no need for a researcher to choose between these perspectives but instead can simultaneously consider both. Another point of contention for Roberts (2007 p.267) is Wyn and Woodman’s proposition that the subjectivities of present day youth result in them wanting and creating different types of adult lives. Roberts (2007) argues there is very little evidence to support of these claims and the little evidence available suggests there may be similarities in the values and outlooks of present and past generations of young people, despite changing political and economic circumstances (Roberts 2007 p.267). I accept Roberts’ contention and have drawn from both approaches in addressing the research questions that are the focus of this thesis.
**Intergenerational support and institutions**

Whatever position youth researchers take in the transitional/generational debate, there is no question that the youth life stage requires some level of support. Intergenerational support is provided to vulnerable groups in society for example, the aged, children, people with a disability, supporting parents and young people. The source (in the form of societal institutions) and the amount of support provided have profound effects on the life experiences of these people. However, the expectations of the role and the responsibilities of each generation to each other are not clear or explicit, particularly in times of change. In this thesis, I explore current institutional supports received by participants and how this affects their experience of transition to adulthood. An understanding of the functional and changing nature of intergenerational support is necessary in any analysis of the youth life stage.

Rubery (2004) has led discussion about intergenerational societal responsibilities in a changing social environment. Rubery (2004 p.1) views national social economic models from a lifecycle perspective using notions of an intergenerational contract, and questions whether current models rely on a new intergenerational contract, or whether they ‘result in a more fragmented, individualised and high risk system of provision over the life course’. In the life stages ‘transition to work’ and ‘transition to career and independent living’, Rubery (2004 p.1-2) names a number of key institutions such as the labour market, education system, family system and state support systems as significant. Acknowledging that much of the support for young people in this life stage is provided directly from parents, Rubery (2004 p.2) also points out that young people are increasingly required to take individual responsibility for their support, for example for paying back debts from their education and training.

Rubery (2004) analyses a number of intergenerational supports provided through institutions and identifies some key challenges. She sees changes in the labour market and patterns of education as major issues for younger generations (Rubery 2004 p.6). Related challenges for intergenerational support include: the need to fund a larger share of the population in education, active labour market programs or training for those not in higher education, and the implications of a reduction in the stability of families (Rubery 2004 p.6).
Te Riele (2004 p.244) perceives an interrelationship between the institutions of the labour market, family and welfare, resulting in young people living in a state of ‘ambiguous dependency’. The ambiguity arises because while still dependent on parents, young adults engage in some adult practices, such as contributing to the family economy, driving and voting, all reached at different ages. Also, the age at which a young adult is deemed independent from parental support in claiming welfare is well above the age of adulthood for other matters. This may be a government policy response, shifting the social cost of increasing numbers of young people who are unable to support themselves on to the family. As Furlong and Kelly (2005) point out:

These debates are not merely rhetorical. In Australia, for example, they frame policies such as the Common Youth Allowance which takes as a key point of reference levels of parental/guardian income up until the young person is aged 24 - assuming a relationship of dependence until this age (Furlong and Kelly 2005 p.212).

These policies are indicative of public policy reliance on parents as primary supporters, even of adult offspring, rather than a wider public policy approach to sources of intergenerational support for this group of young adults. The current Rudd Labor government has reduced the age of assumed dependence by one year as of April 2010, and plan to further reduce it in the future (Centrelink 2010). These changes took place after data collection so the implications have not been fully explored. However, the modesty of this change is unlikely to impact the findings of this thesis, which relate to the age-range fifteen to twenty-four, with no participants over the age of twenty-three receiving welfare at the time of interview.

Bessant (1993) identified that parental dependence was a significant characteristic of the Australian youth experience over ten years prior to te Riele’s use of the term ‘ambiguous dependency’ and the work of Furlong and Kelly. Bessant (1993 p.36) argued that a new ‘dependulty’ phase was being experienced by young Australians, characterised by increasing delays in accessing the full-time labour market and other economic, social, psychological and cultural signifiers of adult status.

Youth occupy a niche labour market position with specific characteristics, including a concentration of employment in low skilled, part-time/casual work in the service sector, higher rates of occupational injury (Quinlan 1999; ACIRRT 2005; Mayhew 2005; Loudoun and Allan 2007), and lower propensity to claim workers’ compensation (Schluter 2005 p.6). Also dependent adult young people may not be able to access parents’ finances
(Bessant 1999 p.14), while their employment may not provide independence and/or financial security (Bessant 1999 p.11). Lower youth rates of pay are enshrined in Australian awards and agreements, that pay young workers a percentage of the adult minimum wage, increasing each year until they receive the full wage, usually at twenty-one. The justice of paying lower wages has been challenged (Bessant 2000; White and Wyn 2004) because the policy assumes young people are dependent and subsidised by parents, and that young workers are less productive and therefore are unattractive to employers at full adult wages.

Bessant (1999 p.6) states that ‘there is general consensus that too many young Australians live without basic provision for their basic needs'. This lack of provision for young people’s needs because of low wages and welfare payments, not only extends dependency, but also reduces the likelihood of maintaining independence after leaving home. One consequence of this is a ‘boomeranging’ back and forth from parental home to elsewhere, described by Natalier (2007 p.18).

The previous Howard Liberal Government’s (1996 to 2007) policies in areas like income support, labour market regulation, education and training saw a withdrawal of support in a number of areas that affect young people, indicating that young Australians may continue to be disadvantaged with reduced standards of living (Bessant 1999 p.8). The election of the Rudd Labor Government in late 2007 was quickly followed by the ‘global financial crisis’ and the effects of these events on the circumstances of young people in Australia are not yet clear.

While there is agreement that support patterns are changing and there is an increasing emphasis on the family as the primary support for young adults, there is little research on attitudes of families and young people to this situation. In the Netherlands, Du Bois-Reymond (1998 p.71) found that ‘post-adolescents’ expressed ‘nonchalance’ about flexibility and uncertainty in the transition process because ‘they know they are backed up by their parents’ financial and cultural resources’. Du Bois-Reymond’s statements raise questions in terms of their applicability in the Australian context, particularly the degree to which young people have access to parental resources, given Bessant’s (1999) earlier comments that there are no guarantees that these resources are available to all young Australians.
A number of gaps emerge from the existing empirical research detailed above. Several of these are addressed in this thesis and relate directly to its key research questions as set out in chapter one. Firstly, there is a need to clarify ambiguities in the adequacy of the current supportive institutions (including work and the labour market) for youth, and the demands they impose as prerequisites for provision of support. Secondly, given that families are seen to be increasingly the primary source of support for dependent young people, it is important to establish what patterns of dependencies exist between young people and their parents, how they are negotiated and what young people’s attitudes are to their dependent status. Finally, the effect of different levels of parental support on the ability of young people to manage paid work while studying and achieve desired adult milestones, needs further investigation.

**Structure and agency**

The prolonged dependence acknowledged by numerous researchers raises the question of the degree of agency available to young people. Youth research could be conceived as falling along a continuum, which emphasises individual agency at one end and attributes a much greater role to social structures at the other. Young people can be conceived as free individuals making their own lives through a series of choices, or as individuals restricted to pathways determined by their social position, or somewhere between these extremes. This is generally termed the ‘structure/agency’ debate.

The location of researchers’ perspectives on the structure/agency continuum has implications for the amount of choice they attribute to young people. This is implicit in the conceptualisation of structured pathways versus choice biographies. Furlong and Kelly (2005 p.212) argue that much of the discussion in academic and popular literature on youth transitions takes the view that ‘life is largely the sum of the choices we make, and risk management is a matter of individuals making better choices’. Such a position emphasises individual agency and neglects structural factors such as age, class, gender, ethnicity and geography which are particularly significant for dependent young people (Furlong and Kelly 2005 p.212). Echoing Marx, Furlong and Kelly (2005 p.212) argue that ‘individuals make choices but not under the circumstances of their own choosing’.

Heinz (2009) also finds that circumstances such as family and educational structures support young people in making reasonable decisions, that open rather than close options in the life course. Heinz (2009 p.402) describes decisions as ‘embedded in socially and emotionally ambiguous situations’ which result in unequal transitional outcomes.
Articulating a similar position to Furlong and Kelly (2005), Heinz (2009 p.402) states that an over-emphasis on individual agency without regard for social inequality may generate false conclusions and result in ‘blaming the ones who do not take initiative[s] to make themselves employable at any cost’.

Choice as a concept has become important academically and in the public consciousness. Spierings (2003 p.1) describes it as permeating the way we live, consume and learn, and says choice is growing as a feature of public policy. Although Spierings (2003 p.1) argues that the notion of choice is often just an illusion, he explains that the concept has been internalised to support the desired ideal of individual autonomy: in who we are and what we do. For this reason, there may be a widespread rhetoric of choice, even where choices are severely constrained.

When reviewing youth research, Ball et al (2000 p.4) and Thomson et al (2002 p.321) found that young people referred to their ‘choices’ frequently, indicating a belief in their own agency. Young participants emphasised their 'choices' and successes as the result of hard work, determination and luck. They also blamed themselves for ‘choices’ resulting in a lack of success. They did not see how diverse life experiences and a myriad of educational and training opportunities obscure structural and material factors that influence individual choices and decisions.

The implication of the above findings is that, when analysing participants’ statements about their circumstances, it is important to be attentive to structural constraints, even when participants appear to discount or deny such influences. The findings of this thesis are a result of an investigation of participants’ agency within dominant structures, which for the purposes of this thesis are termed institutions.

**Summary of background research**

This empirical literature review has identified that there are three major areas of agreement among researchers regarding youth employment. Firstly, the labour market is seen as increasingly precarious and flexible. Secondly, education is perceived to offer some protection in the changing labour market and therefore young people are involved with this institution in greater numbers and for longer periods of time. Lastly, related to these changes is a complex and extended youth life stage involving both work and study. Some international research on the current youth experience in western countries resulted in an increased emphasis in this thesis on structural influences to complement participant
reports. I am influenced by Roberts’ (2007) argument that the transition and generation perspectives in youth research are complementary, and have utilised this approach in my own data analysis. The extended and dependent nature of the youth life stage makes an analysis of intergenerational support mechanisms important in assessing their effect on young people’s motivation and decision-making. Young people’s ability to make decisions and have agency in this environment is a question at the core of this thesis.

**Theory and conceptual framework**

In the following sections I describe the concepts and theories used to frame the data analysis. Individualisation and neoliberalism are described first because of their relevance to the current social context and smaller scale changes that are experienced by participants. Some of the effects of these changes in the labour market are transfer of risk and changed working hours. This is followed by theories and concepts which relate to workers’ status and power in the labour market including commodification, industrial citizenship, unionism, voice and exploitable dependency. Nussbaum’s (2000) theory of ‘capabilities’ directs analysis to environmental factors that might restrict the abilities of participants to exercise power in the labour market. Finally, Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory is explained because it is used to construct a model of the levels of influence of different social structures and processes on the experiences of the participants. Some of the theories and concepts presented here were a part of the research from the outset and others were added as analysis unfolded. What follows is the complete theoretical framework for the research analysis and findings included in the thesis.

**Neoliberalism and individualisation**

Neoliberalism and individualisation came to my attention as providing possible explanations for the changes reported in the empirical research relating to youth transition and employment. As the data analysis proceeded individualisation became central to understanding participant experiences and attitudes, particularly with regard to current institutional functioning and the power and agency of the individual in the labour market.

Neoliberalism is a political ideology that provides supportive conditions for individualisation and is manifested in current global and Australian politics. It is characterised by ‘economic rationalism, the free market, small government, privatisation, and the separation of ‘deserving’ and ‘undeserving’ poor’ (Edwards 2007 p.2). Edwards (2007 p.2) states that a neoliberal state encourages individual liberty and choice but also individual responsibility, with support only available to deserving individuals who ‘give
something back in exchange’. Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2009 p.52) also state that a neoliberal focus on the individual and increased acceptance of personal responsibility are virtually synonymous with the social process of individualisation. These two overarching forces have a significant impact on the life experience of all participants, for example, through their contact with the labour market and/or welfare institutions.

Alloway and Dalley-Trim (2009) have recently found that young Australians accept a discourse of individualisation and consequently the sole responsibility for their life choices and circumstances. Beck (1997 p.96), one of the most notable international theorists on individualisation, provides the following definition:

‘Individualization’ means, first, the disembedding of industrial society ways of life and, second, the re-embedding of new ones, in which individuals must produce, stage and cobble together their biographies themselves... put in plain terms, ‘individualization’ means the disintegration of the certainties of industrial society as well as the compulsion to find and invent new certainties for oneself and others without them.

Participants described their experience with key institutions that influence or determine their choices, abilities and life path. The changing role and structure of such social institutions is the subject of considerable attention from writers on individualisation. Sennett (2006 p.183-184) argues that the social institutions that provided many of the certainties of industrial society are changing and are becoming more short-term and erratic. Sennett (2006 p.187) states that the ‘hard reality’ of these times is that insecurity is not only the unwanted consequence of market fluctuations and our higher reliance on them, but that it is produced by, and is fundamental to, new and changing institutions. Within these new institutions, people lack interpretive power or ‘narrative agency’ and feel as if they have no voice.

Beck (1992 p.140) also highlights significant changes in the institutions of the labour market and family, which he calls the ‘axis of living’. During the sixties and earlier, Helmut Schelsky (in Beck 1992 p.140) and others spoke of family and occupation as the two great forms of security in modern times. Whether or not this was an accurate reflection of those times, Beck (1992 p.140) argues ‘it is in many cases no longer valid today or in the probable future’ and both occupation and family have lost much of their protective function.
Bauman questions the power of individuals to develop successful strategies in the absence of these larger protective structures. Bauman and Tester (2001 p.110) argue that individuality may be a myth, giving individuals little ability and choice over their life path:

...there is room for suspicion that individuality and individual freedom are a sham: that hidden behind the ostensible ‘individualization’ a new slavery is taking root; that while people may be indeed seeking their own unique biographical solutions to life problems, their search and most certainly their findings are prescribed, decided in advance so they should all fall into a narrowly circumscribed pattern.

There is conflict in the structure/agency debate as described earlier in this chapter, and there is a dissonance between reports of young people’s acceptance of the neoliberal philosophies of individual responsibility and choice, and Bauman and Tester’s (2001) assessment of the realities of limitations to choice. This thesis contributes to empirical research in this area by deepening analysis beyond rhetoric to focus on young people’s agency and the barriers and or supports for decisions or pathways. Young people’s agency is at the heart of the first and third research questions, which investigate whether young people’s labour market position and conditions are a result of preferences or powerlessness, and whether they have agency in influencing or challenging their work conditions.

**Transfer of risk**

Bauman (2007 p.3) states that regardless of any constraints to choice, there has been a transfer of risk onto individuals. Each person is expected to be a ‘free chooser’ and therefore bear the consequences of these choices even when they could not fully comprehend the risks involved. The concept of the risk shift onto individuals applies across many life domains. The focus of this research is young workers in the labour market and some clear examples emerge that are particularly significant in the participants’ experience. One example is the shifting of entrepreneurial risk from business to employees by arranging work hours to fit with market driven workloads resulting in ‘flexible underemployment’ for employees, and a reduction in costs for employers (Beck 1992 p.147). Abbott and Kelly (2005 p.96) describe this transfer of risk in Australia over a decade later as a ‘transition from uniform, secure systems of life-long employment to more pluralised, risk-fraught systems of precarious underemployment’. This flexible underemployment is explored in this thesis for its effects on young people’s capacity to be financially independent and plan other life activities, and relates directly to issues raised by research question two.
Another example of the transfer of risk from employer to employee that became particularly useful in the data analysis is provided by Holmes and Gifford (1996) in the area of occupational health and safety (OHS). Holmes and Gifford (1996) explain that small employers with ad hoc management styles often take a ‘reciprocity’ approach (Wolcott in Holmes and Gifford 1996 p.447) to the employment relationship. In this approach employers interpret legal minimum conditions in employment contracts (including OHS) as discretionary and a reward for employees ‘good behaviour’. ‘Good behaviour’ is based on an employer’s perceptions of an employee’s ‘work, performance and skills’. Interestingly, employees’ views of risk protection are not dissimilar to that of their employers. Employees see their own skills as their main protection against occupational health and safety risks (Holmes and Gifford 1996 p.447). Holmes and Gifford (1996 p.448) found a shared understanding between employers and employees, of the power hierarchy existing within the industry, where responsibility for occupational health and safety risk is ‘devolved from the more powerful to the less powerful’. Both employers and employees adopt a model for risk control that focuses on individual skills and responsibilities.

While the research by Holmes and Gifford (1996) is not specific to youth, it illustrates a transfer of risk from employer to employee. The ‘reciprocity approach’ in the employment relationship and consequent employee responsibilities is relevant to young people’s occupational health and safety, as well as other behaviours and attitudes at work. This is tested and explored more widely in the participants’ labour market attitudes and understandings.

**Flexibility of working time**

Beck (1992 p.143) emphasises the temporal and spatial flexibilisation of wage labour as a result of the transfer of risk in an individualised labour market. This flexibilisation is evident in the ‘subordinate’ areas of the labour market, where much youth employment is situated. Initially I did not review literature on working time in depth, both because there appeared to be little directly addressing youth issues and because it was not yet clear to me how important the issue of working time is to young workers. Early in the data collection it became obvious that this was a major concern to participants and was a fundamentally negative aspect of many young workers’ employment experience. Subsequently I drew from international authors including Schor (1992), Hochschild (1997) and Epstein and Kalleberg (2001) who have considered issues of working time, although primarily for adult workers. Their findings are relevant to the participants’ experiences but do not
encompass the range of issues and concerns expressed by young workers such as split shifts, on-call arrangements, fluctuating hours and therefore income, and the effects these conditions have on their relationships with employers. I identify relevant aspects of the work of these researchers and discuss them below.

Schor (1992 p.5-9) provided one of the first major investigations of American work time, arguing that there was a creeping increase to work hours diminishing leisure time, contributing to widespread time poverty and feeding a ‘work-spend’ cycle. Schor (1992) also observed that hours were increasing for workers who previously would have not worked as much, that is, wives and children. For example, the working hours of American youth initially declined with growing prosperity and longer education. Schor (1992 p.25-26) argued that this trend was reversing, with the likelihood of young people working, and the actual hours worked, increasing. As described earlier in this chapter, Australian trends are similar, with more young people entering the workforce while at school and/or further education. Schor (1992 p.27) reported teachers’ concerns over students sleeping in class, due to overwork and late night shifts.

Further developing Schor’s (1992) ideas, Epstein and Kalleberg (2001 p.6) argue that working hours have not increased for all Americans, but that increases are concentrated in the upper and lower strata of the labour market. While Epstein and Kalleberg (2001 p.8) only identify workers with particular characteristics of race, class or gender as having less autonomy (or choice) over hours worked, this could well apply to the youth labour market which is located in the secondary labour market (characterised by low skilled and low paid work). A lack of choice over work hours worked has implications for young people’s ability to successfully negotiate the demands of structured educational participation. Epstein and Kalleberg (2001) also emphasise the significance of a lack of choice over the time of day worked. Some times, for example nights and weekends, have a disproportionately negative impact on worker lives (Epstein and Kalleberg 2001 p.7), illustrated by Schor’s (1992 p.27) example of students unable to stay awake during class. The effects of labour market engagement on participants life activities including educational attainment is explored throughout the data analysis but particularly in chapter five which focuses on the interaction of the major institutions with which young people are engaged.

More recently in Australia, Pocock (2006) with reference to Schor’s theory, identifies an ‘early-onset cycle of work and spend’ arising from her empirical research into young
people and work issues. Pocock (2006 p.190) argues that young people’s high levels of consumption and the values associated with them drive paid work in two ways. Firstly, through the pressure placed on parents to buy consumer needs and secondly, the paid work young people engage with in order to pay for consumer goods (Pocock 2006 p.208). Mobile phones and take away foods are seen as notable examples of new consumer items that current family incomes must provide for. In order to answer research question two, I investigated young people’s reasons for working and their economic autonomy. Patterns of consumption and dependence are complex and the analysis needed to consider levels and styles of parental support in order to deepen understanding about young people’s potential for economic autonomy in flexible and precarious employment.

Hochschild (1997) also examines the changing nature of time divided between work and other life activities in American families. Her concept of ‘the time bind’ highlights the unsustainability of current lifestyles where elements of work invade home and vice versa. For example, Hochschild (1997, p.46) discussed how home-life has taken on the flavour of industry, with efficient, clearly structured ‘home’ time. On the other hand, increasing self-surveillance at work has allowed the long hours to be more fluid, with social elements creeping in, such as email and gossip. The practices used to mitigate the effects of the ‘time bind’ require a level of autonomy at home and at work, which is unlikely to be available in the youth labour market when considering the work of Epstein and Kalleberg (2001). The level of autonomy and agency that young workers have in these domains is a core issue addressed in this thesis.

These work-time theories and concepts are particularly useful in addressing research question number one: the conditions of young people’s employment and the reasons they give for being concentrated in casual employment. The above theories about flexibility and working time assist in understanding why young people might accept flexible working hours despite the consequences of such hours, financially and in other life areas. However, these concepts and theories are insufficient to address all of the issues and concerns raised by participants and particularly the complexities resulting from concurrent engagement in multiple domains including work and education. The analysis deepens knowledge in this area.

**Commodification of labour**

Neoliberalism and individualisation have fostered conditions in the labour market that have reignited interest in the notion of the ‘commodification of labour’. This term is
generally accepted to mean the reduction of human labour to a commodity for sale, unconstrained by regulation. Labour theorists and researchers like Vosko (2000 p.1), Touraine (2001 p.11) and Campbell (2004 p.93) have taken up Polanyi’s (1944) concepts and have expressed concern about the current re-commodification of labour. Commodification of labour is relevant in research on youth employment experience because it is likely to be obvious amongst the marginalised and powerless segments of the labour market, for example, the less skilled or youth segments.

Vosko (2000 p.18) argues that workers are not ‘free agent[s]’, because for the period of time that society determines that the individual is able to sell their labour, they are forced to do so. During this period of time the need to participate in the labour market in order to survive, means that self-determination is severely constrained. Welfare income may be available in this period and Vosko (2000) and Esping-Andersen (1990) argue that the level and conditions of its provision can influence the degree of workers’ commodification. Vosko (2000 p.19) argues that welfare can be used to provide ‘extreme forms’ of economic compulsion to work, affecting workers’ power and mobility within the labour market. Esping-Andersen (1990) also states that a citizen’s access to income security through welfare outside of the labour market reduces the commodification of labour.

Shaver’s (2001) work brings these concepts into the Australian context and identifies specific shifts in Australian welfare that reflect global trends. She describes a transformation of social rights to income support into conditional forms of support, requiring specific obligations. She compares passive and rights-based welfare with newer ideas of participatory or active welfare, dividing recipients into worthy and unworthy, in the neoliberal tradition. Vosko’s (2000) and Esping-Andersen’s (1990) work indicates that such conditions would be likely to contribute to a move towards commodification in the Australian labour market.

Young people’s access to welfare or other alternatives to labour market engagement and the nature of the support received is therefore a critical factor in consideration of the first part of question three: whether youth labour is commodified and whether this limits the effectiveness and/or capacity of young people to experience citizenship and voice in the workplace. Welfare’s role as a key supportive institution influencing young people’s engagement with the labour market and their transition to independence is considered in chapter five. Its importance as an alternative to labour market engagement, supporting the decommodification of labour is considered in chapter seven.
Citizens or something else?

Citizenship is of relevance to two main research themes: dependency and young people’s status in the labour market. However there is a gap in citizenship literature with regard to youth. Therefore theory and concepts from other areas of citizenship literature are drawn upon because they are relevant to young people’s labour market engagement. This section firstly considers literature on women’s citizenship in relation to the situation of youth because of similar dependent family relationships and marginal labour market attachment. In the second section I consider a number of theorists who make a strong connection between labour market engagement and citizenship (Jones and Wallace 1992; Bradley and van Hoof 2005), identifying the theoretical characteristics of industrial citizenship that are utilised in chapter seven to measure young workers’ power and status.

Historically, independence has been considered a prerequisite for citizenship. Political and social theorists increasingly advocate broader notions of autonomy in conceptions of democratic and social citizenship (Lister 1997 p.106). For example feminists have emphasised the ideals of autonomy and agency rather than independence, in their struggles against exclusion from full citizenship, whether in the name of equality or difference (Lister 1997 p.107). These issues have relevance to a consideration of the citizenship status of youth in dependent relationships.

The general position of women in the labour market is characterised by relatively low pay and poor conditions, and this has parallels with the youth experience. Although a growing proportion of women are in the labour market for most of their adult years, their efforts do not guarantee economic independence (Lister 1997 p.108). Part-time work and inferior pay and conditions indicate labour market marginalisation and exclusion from social rights. Part-time work rarely provides women (or young people) with sufficient resources for the genuine economic independence necessary to shift imbalances in domestic economic power (Lister 1997 p.139). However, paid employment is currently considered to be a ‘key to citizenship’ (Lister 1997 p.138).

Dahl (in Lister 1997 p.111) emphasises the importance of economic autonomy as a social right, arguing that ‘access to one's own money should be considered a minimum welfare requirement in a monetary economy’. Economic independence and an income are seen as prerequisites for participation in and enjoyment of private and public life; the absence of these results in feelings of powerlessness and minimal freedom of movement. The
extension of the dependent youth life stage, deferring the attainment of some characteristics of citizenship past the age of adulthood, makes this literature relevant to their experience. The investigation of young people’s attitudes to their status and aspirations for independent citizenship in this thesis provides an analysis of young people’s perceptions of these issues, which has to date been poorly researched and documented.

Sennett (2006 p.164) states that citizenship itself is changing and argues that while a good political system is ‘one in which all citizens believe they are bound together in a common project’, ‘new capitalism’ avoids responsibility and disguises ‘its own indifference as freedom for individuals on the periphery’. For Sennett (2006 p.171) true democracy requires that citizens are willing (and able) to make some effort to find out about the world around them and how it works. However the new economy creates a political climate, which makes it difficult for citizens to think like ‘craftsmen’, that is investing time and thinking about things deeply. This theory suggests that people are finding it increasingly difficult to be involved in democratic processes and this produces indifference to circumstances they perceive as beyond their control. These ideas are used in the analysis of participant attitudes and engagement with government legislation and regulation and the institutions most important in their lives, including their choice of strategies when attempting to influence labour market conditions.

Young people’s dependence on their parents and the labour market relates to research question two: how does work impact on young people’s transition to financial independence? Lister’s (1997) theories assist in addressing this question in chapter five. The nature of young people’s citizenship at work is the core focus of research question three: is youth labour commodified and does this limit the effectiveness and/or capacity of young people to experience citizenship and voice in the workplace? What strategies are available and utilised to address and promote citizenship and voice for young people in the workplace? This question is addressed in chapter seven, analysing young people’s opportunities for power in an individualised labour market and utilises Sennett’s (2006) work in combination with literature on industrial citizenship described in the next section.

**Industrial citizenship and unionism**

Where young people’s citizenship is in question their ability to exercise industrial citizenship in the labour market is of interest. McCallum (2005a p.33) identifies that writers on industrial citizenship agree that workers should receive fair wages, reasonable
conditions for employment and should enjoy protection from unfair termination, privacy and adequate occupational health and safety conditions. Input to processes of employer decision making is also important, for example through collective bargaining, consultative committees and work councils that increase voice for individuals and groups of workers. These are the core characteristics of industrial citizenship, and I make use of these to assess participants’ citizenship status in the labour market.

Fudge (2005 p.11) argues that industrial citizenship began to unravel in Canada in the 1980s, when the federal government embraced neo-liberalism, weakening industrial citizenship and eroding social rights. In Australia, during the Howard years, Cooper and Ellem (2008 p.2) describe a state agenda of ‘reducing union power and driving the individualization of the employment relationship’. In Australia, unions have been a major strategy for improving work conditions by strengthening worker voice and power through collective action. A marked decline in union membership is indicative of the erosion of industrial institutions supporting workers. In 1986 nearly one in two employees were union members, compared to only one in five in 2007 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008c p.131). Freeman (1980 p.645) describes a number of ways that unions provide voice to workers including through grievance and arbitration systems that offer dissatisfied workers a means for expression and change, collective bargaining where the only other strategy might be exit, and helping with the creation of desired work rules (Freeman 1980 p.646).

McDonald and Dear (2005 p.15) argue that the lack of union involvement by young workers makes them particularly vulnerable and ‘a large gap exists in access to services that uphold and advocate for youth rights in the workplace’. Many researchers have explored young people’s propensity to join unions. For example, British researchers Waddington and Kerr (2002 p.299) have found that the decline in union membership of young workers is sometimes attributed to more instrumental or individualistic attitudes than in other age cohorts. However, they argue that young people on the whole do not have an ideological opposition to trade unionism, and employer resistance and union inefficiencies are more influential factors than individualistic attitudes regarding the reduction in young people’s union membership (Waddington and Kerr 2002 p.298). Family networks are also seen as influential (Waddington and Kerr 2002 p.303).

Australian researchers Buchanan and Bretherton (1999 p.12-13) also find little ideological opposition to unions amongst young participants who were more likely to express positive
perceptions of unions and a greater propensity to join a union, in comparison to older workers. In their study, 60% of participants said they would prefer to be in a union, than not (Buchanan and Bretherton 1999 p.13). This raises a question as to why unionisation amongst young workers has fallen so steeply in Australia.

Waddington and Kerr (2002 p.300) find that young workers are more likely to change employment than accumulate grievances with one employer, resulting in higher turnover and lower unionisation. High unemployment may also deter young people from becoming union members, as they fear victimisation or reduced job prospects. Gallie and Rose (in Waddington and Kerr 2002 p.301) find ‘...rising opposition to unions from employers, particularly at small sites, during the 1980s is likely to have accelerated the decline in the unionisation of young workers’. Waddington and Kerr (2002 p.314) add that young people are not at odds with the agenda of trade unions but may feel out of touch with the people delivering it, that is ‘middle aged men’. The themes of competition for jobs and employer attitudes affecting strategies for improving working conditions are developed in this thesis.

Lowe and Rastin (2000 p.206) propose three different factors affecting young people’s propensity to join a union: job dissatisfaction, general union attitudes and perceived union instrumentality. In the Australian context, Oliver (2006 p.77-78) adds that ‘the danger for unions is that young people, having learned to make do in student employment without unions, will continue to see unions as irrelevant to their graduate careers’. Oliver (2006 p.78) states that student employment has been assumed to be irrelevant to young people's socialisation into work. He argues this is a mistake and that by the time university graduates enter the adult job labour market, they have considerable experience from their student employment without union involvement (Oliver 2006 p.77).

There are many theories about the lack of young workers’ involvement in unions. Clearly unions do not significantly increase the power and voice for the majority of young workers because they are not members. Given the considerable research in this area, some of which is cited above, this thesis does not deeply investigate these issues. However some examples of additional factors relating to young people’s propensity to join unions are provided in chapter seven, where this adds to existing knowledge. In addition to the decline in the significance of unionism, McDonald and Dear (2005 p.11) argue that young people are reluctant to access internal mechanisms for complaint within workplaces. This is important background to my exploration of the unstructured, informal and individualised
strategies participants use to improve their working conditions, and the effectiveness of such strategies.

**Voice and ‘exploitable dependency’**

As mentioned previously, voice is a significant characteristic of industrial citizenship and so this thesis investigates young people’s experience in this area. This section draws from a number of writers who have developed concepts I use to analyse participants’ reports about their ability to have influence in their workplaces.

Hirschman (1970) has suggested a framework for ‘voice’ and ‘exit’ as strategies of influence, where voice involves demanding change and exit involves going elsewhere to seek satisfaction. Hirschman (1970, p.4) illustrates these concepts by describing a firm with the business of selling products. He contends that if there is some change to the product being sold that is not satisfactory to the consumer, then the consumer has two avenues with which to affect the firm and show their dissatisfaction. One option is that of ‘exit’; not buying the product will affect the firm’s revenue and may lead management to consider ways to rectify the drop in sales. The second option is to ‘voice’ their dissatisfaction directly to the firm or to another powerful authority. In response to this, the firm again may search for ways to satisfy the consumer. If the firm takes no action in response to either the ‘exit’ or ‘voice’ and the dissatisfaction becomes widespread, the firm risks failure.

Bauman (1995 p.285) argues that the difference between ‘voice’ and ‘exit’ is ‘between engagement and disengagement, responsibility and indifference, political action and apathy’. Lister (1997 p.112) introduces the concept that a person’s level of power in a relationship determines their ability to ‘exit’ or have ‘voice’. She finds that access to an independent income from either the labour market or the state is necessary in supporting women's voice, or opportunities for exit from spousal relationships. From this work, Lister (1997) developed the concept of ‘exploitable dependency’:

> Exploitable dependency is characterised as an asymmetrical relationship in which the subordinate party depends on the other party for a needed resource over which the latter has discretionary control. A key test is how easily the subordinate party can withdraw from the relationship. (Lister 1997 p.110)

Lister’s (1997) description clarifies the circumstances in which Hirschman’s concepts can be effectively utilised and suggests that situations of dependence limit the ability to express
dissatisfaction and affect change, through either ‘exit’ or ‘voice’. Therefore it is important in determining the relevance of these strategies, to establish the level of dependency present in the relationship. For example, a reduction in social welfare support and job security may mean that employees are increasingly dependent on their employers, therefore strategies of voice and exit may have declining influence in labour relations. These concepts are likely to be of particular relevance in the insecure and competitive youth labour market.

While young people appear to have little control over their working conditions, Greig et al (2003 p.189-190) contend that the ability of capitalist employers to be competitive is closely related to their ability to control the conditions under which they employ labour. The employment contract does not result from an equal negotiation, because the worker’s dependence on employment outweighs the employer’s need for any individual worker, thus reducing the worker’s voice and opportunity for exit, and commodifying their labour. Workers are further disadvantaged when demand for labour is low and supply is high, as workers need to engage in competition that will devalue the price of labour. These factors of dependence and competition are considered and found to be important in the analysis of participants’ opportunities for autonomy and influence at work.

While Lister’s (1997) description of the necessary conditions for the ability to exit or have voice are useful, there is little research into the specific circumstances of young working people in dependent relationships. Given the poor working conditions of many young people, an important question addressed in this thesis, is the ability of young workers to influence their working conditions and exit from dependent relationships. I explore young workers’ knowledge and use of traditional strategies for individual and collective voice and exit, utilising Lister’s (1997) concept of ‘exploitable dependency’ to investigate how the circumstances of exit and voice are constructed by job and employment security amongst young Australian workers.

**Rights and capabilities**

Young workers have less rights than adults in Australia, as in many other parts of the world (Bessant 2005 p.105). Even where they have rights, for example the rights to a minimum wage and safe work conditions, they may or may not have the ability to access them. This leads to a consideration of what supports may be necessary to ensure young people have access to their rights. Nussbaum’s (2006) theories are particularly useful in
considering young people’s power and agency. Nussbaum (2006 p.6) points out that a right does not just exist on paper, but requires ensuring that there is a ‘capability’ or real opportunity to exercise the right (Nussbaum 2006 p.8). The ‘capability’ to exercise a right is therefore an appropriate goal, enabling citizens to determine their own course in actioning their rights (Nussbaum 2000 p.87). The aim of a capability approach is not equality of resources, as this fails to account for the differing needs of individuals, but for resources to make the level of capability to exercise rights equal (Nussbaum 2006 p.3). Nussbaum (2000 p.81) believes it is impossible to make up for the absence of one capability by giving a larger amount of another one. For example, the absence of political capabilities cannot be compensated for by economic growth. Nussbaum’s (2000) theory led to an analysis of the participants’ ‘capabilities’ to choose different options in the labour market and the supports or barriers affecting their choices.

**Ecological systems theory**

As demonstrated by concepts discussed above, the environment in which young people experience work is dynamic, complex and has a number of influential factors in operation. The large number of factors reported by young people as influencing their experience at work required an overarching framework to demonstrate the significance and interaction of the various factors and their impact on the young person’s experiences. I use Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory to place participant experiences in context, uncovering relationships between structural factors and individual attitudes and behaviours.

Bronfenbrenner incorporated knowledge from psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics and political science in the development of his holistic model (Beyers 2008 p.147-148). I find this cross-disciplinary foundation useful to understanding the various important influences acting on young people’s experience. Ecological systems theory suggests four important levels of influence: micro, meso, exo and macrosystems (Bronfenbrenner 1979 p.22-26). The individual’s microsystem refers to the pattern of activities, roles and personal relations unique to that person. The mesosystem refers to the area of interaction between two or more settings in which the person actively participates. The exosystem includes one or more settings where events occur that influence the person, but over which the individual has little control. Finally, the macrosystem involves major influences that have consistent effects on the lower levels and reflect larger social beliefs, practices and processes. These levels directed analytical attention to environmental influences on the immediate personal setting or direct experience of the participants, even
when at times the young person seemed unaware of these influences. This also contributed to an understanding of structural influences on young people’s agency.

I adapt Bronfenbrenner’s model to help illuminate the complex nature of influences acting on young workers and the Youth Ecological Systems Model (YESM) is presented and explained later in this chapter. It provides both a holistic starting point for analysis as well as structure and focus for the subsequent chapters in the thesis.

An application of Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) work is found in Voydanoff’s (2004) close examination of the intersection or mesosystem between the domains of work and family. She demonstrates the effects that each domain has on the other, and develops the concepts of resources and demands resulting from and impacting on this intersection. Voydanoff (2004 p.398-399) defines demands as ‘structural or psychological claims associated with role requirements, expectations, and norms to which individuals must respond or adapt by exerting physical or mental effort’. Resources on the other hand are defined as ‘structural or psychological assets that may be used to facilitate performance, reduce demands, or generate additional resources’. These concepts can be applied to the intersection of any life domains forming the mesosystem in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory and are useful in understanding the complex environment produced by these interactions. I extend Voydanoff’s (2004) work by using her concepts of demands and resources in my analysis of participant reports on the effects of such interactions in both their immediate personal setting and in the wider institutional environment.

A Summary of the theory and conceptual framework

In summary, the theoretical framework used for the research, draws on a range of concepts and theories that relate to different aspects of the YESM (figure 2). They range from broad sociological processes, such as neoliberalism and individualisation that impact on all areas of life, to a narrower focus on processes which have specific effects on the labour market, such as transfer of risk, flexibility of working time and the commodification of labour. Characteristics of citizenship and particularly industrial citizenship are challenged by these theories. The ability of people to have voice may be a signifier of their power and agency given Lister’s (1997) work on exploitable dependency, and therefore theories of voice both individually and collectively are included here. The ability to exercise power is linked to structural supports that are more or less available to certain segments and individuals within the population. Nussbaum’s (2000) theory of ‘capabilities’ suggests different levels of support are necessary to individuals and groups to ensure equal access to rights. These
theories together contribute to a holistic perspective, were needed to address the research questions and are referred to where they are important to particular aspects of the analysis.

**Youth Ecological Systems Model (YESM)**

Considering the pre-existing empirical work described in the first section of this chapter and the concepts and theories identified in the subsequent section, which I return to throughout this thesis, I developed a model based on Brofenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory, termed the Youth Ecological Systems Model (YESM). As described in the methodology, the initial research agenda with the youth labour market as its primary focus expanded to include other institutions and influences creating complex interactions. In this section I want to go a step further and set out the model that arises as a guide to the analysis in the next four chapters. This model is useful because it highlights the four essential domains that shape the ability of young adults to sustain themselves as they transition to adulthood, draws attention to the ways they intersect, and also highlights the larger social and institutional context in which these experiences occur.

Using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979 p.21-26) levels of analysis (micro, meso, exo and macro), I construct the YESM model (Figure 2 pictured on the following page) of individual participants’ experience within institutions and broader social processes. The participants’ immediate personal setting or microsystem depicted in the YESM is their individual experience of family, friends, work and study. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) mesosystem is depicted in the model as those areas of the immediate personal setting where different areas interact or overlap, representing a relationship between these experiences. These experiences are then influenced to varying degrees by the key institutions of family, labour market, welfare and education in the exosystem. These are the institutions participants identify as important influences on the options available to them. Therefore there are two levels of experience of family for example, one in the microsystem and one in the exosystem. Experience of family in the exosystem refers to the social institution that has a broad function of reproducing society, and supporting dependent young people until they are capable of independence; experience of family in the microsystem is each person’s individual experience of his or her family, which may be more or less functional with regard to its institutional role. This is also the case with the other institutions. The next level working out from the institutional level of the exosystem (following Bronfenbrenner) is the macrosystem. This level contains influences that have consistent effects on other
levels. These larger social forces can influence institutions to change their policies and emphasis over time but individuals have little or no influence on them. For example, Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002 p.23-24) suggest that social institutions that create structured pathways for achievement of life goals, may be changing because of individualising social processes, resulting in increased dependence and risk. In the YESM, individualisation, commodification of labour and industrial citizenship are identified as key macro influences. Such influences are not static, growing or declining in societal importance and acceptance. Change can result from either growth or decline of these macro influences. Because of the dynamic nature of the macro influences the YESM terms these social processes.

I have found this model useful in guiding analysis and structuring this thesis as it provides a conceptual map of different factors influencing young people’s choices and abilities in the labour market, and in their transition to adulthood. It combines key elements of the literature review and findings from this study, and is referred to and further developed in chapters four, five, six and seven.

**Figure 2 –Youth Ecological Systems Model (YESM)**
Conclusion

In combination, the empirical research background and the theory and conceptual framework set out in this chapter provide focus and structure for this thesis. Existing empirical research provides information about areas of general agreement, such as changes in the labour market including increased insecurity, expansion of underemployment, flexibility of working hours and the intrusion of work into home life. In addition and possibly as a consequence, there has been increased participation in education and the youth transition phase is recognised as becoming more complex and lengthy. These areas of agreement are built upon through this thesis and theories of individualisation assist in explaining these changes.

Gaps were found in empirical research and knowledge, either where there is disagreement between researchers, or where there is little existing research. Findings in this thesis relate to these gaps in the following three areas. Firstly, there is a gap in knowledge about the adequacy and security of current patterns of intergenerational support and the functioning of institutions that provide support for young Australians. This is a broad area covering all life domains, for example the labour market, education and family life. This thesis focuses specifically on intergenerational support relating to young people’s power and agency at work. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological systems theory is used to develop the YESM, which maps the institutions, their interactions and the influences from participants’ perspectives. Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) theory is used because the participant data includes many references to the impact of intergenerational supports and the nature of the institutions that make up an ecological system. Such supports can provide them with the ability to organise their work and life in their transition to independence from parents.

Secondly, while there is agreement in the empirical research about young people’s extended dependence on parents, there is a gap regarding young people’s experience of and attitude to this dependence. In chapter six I identify the levels and kinds of support participants receive from parents, and how their flexible and precarious labour market engagement affects their ability to become independent. The theory of ‘exploitable dependence’ is useful in deepening the analysis of participant attitudes to, and agency in dependent relationships with parents and employers.

Lastly, given the precarious and individualised nature of much of the youth labour market, questions arise relating to young people’s ability to exercise agency over their working
conditions, such as hours and OHS. Chapter seven contains an analysis of young workers’ status as industrial citizens and the level of commodification of labour they experience. Worker strategies of voice and exit to exercise influence are investigated for relevance to participant experience. Also, the concepts of exploitable dependency and reciprocity in the employment relationship help explain other behaviours and attitudes reported by participants relating to strategies they use to gain influence in the labour market.
Chapter Four

Youth labour market conditions

This chapter is the first of four that analyse the empirical data collected in relation to young workers’ power and autonomy in the labour market and how this contributes to their transition to financial independence from parents. These four chapters present evidence arising from interviews with ninety young workers, to investigate the ways in which work, family, welfare and education systems interact to enable or not, choices and actions in their life stage.

In this chapter I describe and analyse participants’ employment conditions which provide the necessary foundation for subsequent chapters and their findings. The analysis includes findings that address research question one: what are the conditions of young people’s employment and what reasons do they give for being concentrated in casual employment, that is, does it reflect preferences and choice, or labour market opportunity?

The next chapter explores the three other institutions that participants identify as influential in their working lives, and argues that despite theories about fundamental changes in these institutions, they continue whether weak or strong to have a major influence on young workers’ opportunities. Chapter six focuses on the effects these interactions have on young workers’ economic dependence and in chapter seven I extensively analyse young workers’ power within the institution of the labour market.

In order to address research question one, this chapter provides the context for young workers’ ability to choose preferred labour market opportunities and optimise the support they receive from this institution. I examine the labour market more deeply than the other institutions because employment providing secure and sufficient income for independence is seen as a significant end goal of transition and a key to adult citizenship. This thesis explores the degree to which employment during transition assists in an outcome of financial independence from parents. The security and adequacy of the support young people receive from the labour market is directly related to the conditions under which
they are employed. Other institutions linked with labour market experience are significant in the analysis but are examined in the next chapter primarily in light of their relationship with the labour market.

In this chapter, I firstly explore the regulation of the institution of the labour market because regulation sets the formal conditions of young people’s work. Attitudes to regulation may explain young workers’ propensity to access worker rights, such as workers’ compensation. Secondly, I focus specifically on wage rates, the fairness of paying lowered rates based on age and the impact of wages earned on young people’s ability to become independent of parents. Lastly, I examine both the effects of casual employment and long hours and overtime, on achieving independence and participating in other life commitments.

**Labour market**

In the YESM (Figure 2), the labour market is one of four institutions influencing the inner immediate personal setting. The actual job a participant holds is represented in the inner circle of the immediate personal setting and is titled work. The difference between the two is that the larger labour market is a regulated social structure, whereas work is how the individual experiences this labour market on a personal and daily basis. This section includes both the immediate experiences of participants with work and also the institutional characteristics that influence these experiences.

Local working conditions take place in the context of international influences represented in the macrosystem of the YESM. Beck (2000 p.91) and Bauman (Smith 1999 p.148) identify a shift in the role of work in society as a consequence of the increasing internationalisation of labour markets. The ability of employers to move labour intensive industry to less regulated and cheaper nations, increases their influence in the labour market generally. This results in a lessening of the power of the state to regulate to protect work conditions and of workers in influencing local labour market conditions. In industrial countries, this shift has increased labour market precariousness, diminishing concepts of permanent and full employment. In the YESM (Figure 2) such international social processes in the macrosystem influence national institutions, such as the Australian labour market in the exosystem.
Regulation

In this section I provide a brief description of the regulatory environment prevailing in the period of the research. I then analyse participants’ perceptions and attitudes to regulation and the influence it has on their working conditions.

Participants in this research have experienced three significantly different industrial relations legislations. Prior to 2005, conditions were more regulated, collective bargaining was common and the Australian award system determined and reviewed rates of pay for most jobs. The introduction of the ‘WorkChoices’ legislation in 2005 emphasised Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) as the primary contract for employment (Australian Government 2005 p.13). An AWA is an ‘individualised agreement’ between the employer and employee about their rate of pay and conditions that only needed to exceed the statutory minimum determined by the Australian Fair Pay Commission (Donnelly 2006 p.7). In addition, WorkChoices removed much of the protection against unfair dismissal, the option for some casual employees to convert to permanent status after a fixed period, redundancy provisions for small workplaces and deregulated the concept of standard working hours (ACTU 2005 p.14-15). Overtime and penalty rates were used under the previous system as compensation to employees and a disincentive to employers requiring long, unsocial and/or irregular hours from employees. However, under WorkChoices, many workers’ compensation for unsocial hours or overtime was reduced (ACTU 2005 p.5).

WorkChoices allowed employers to refuse to bargain with workers (and unions) on a collective basis (ACTU 2006 p.5). Union involvement in bargaining for maintenance or improvement of working conditions was further limited by WorkChoices’ restrictive regulation of industrial action (A Group of One Hundred and Fifty One Australian Industrial Relations 2005 p.19). Prior to the Howard years (1986-2007), collective bargaining supported workers by increasing their power in negotiations of wages and conditions. Collective bargaining is considered to be a fundamental human right by the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation (1948; 1949).

With the advent of a new Labor government in 2007, this legislation was replaced by the Fair Work Act (Forsyth and Stewart 2009). While I do not describe the changes in detail here, the new regulation provides modest improvements for young workers. However it does little to address conditions in the youth labour market, such as low wages based on
aged and insecurity, that determine the nature of support available to young workers from this institution, and their power as workers.

The young workers I interviewed expressed a range of views about their current experience and/or knowledge of labour market regulation, but were consistent in their belief that they had little power to influence such legislation. Participants’ reactions to changes in labour market regulation and their inability to contribute to or control the conditions under which they participate in the labour market is explored here, and may have similarities to the degree of young people’s agency in their dealings with other social institutions.

A relative lack of work experience means that many of the participants’ ideas about the quality of current working conditions are informed by dominant discourse from, for example, parents, teachers and media reports. The Australian Democrats Youth Poll (The Australian Democrats 2006), found that a majority (56%) of young people did not believe that the ‘WorkChoices’ changes to industrial relations would affect them. I distinguish four types of views held by young workers to changing labour market regulation: positive, self-sacrificing, negative and marginalised. The first group are the only participants who see working conditions improving. The next two groups believe working conditions are deteriorating but have different responses to this situation. The final marginalised group has little knowledge or interest in regulation and does not see it as having any significant influence on their work experience.

**Positive views**

Despite the changing social and economic conditions globally and in Australia discussed in the literature review, some participants express positive views and believe working conditions are better today than in the past. For example a few young women in professional jobs think that conditions are improving for women in terms of flexibility in relation to family and children. Annie is typical, believing employers are now more receptive to female employee’s life responsibilities outside the workplace.

I think in this day and age, employers are getting a bit more flexible as to your work environment, so just say, if I was married and had a kid and I had to look after my kid one day a week, I'm sure nowadays that the employer would be like okay that's fine, you can have that day off as long as you make up your hours the other days. (Annie, 24, Property & Business Services)
Of significance here is that no young woman interviewed had negotiated any particular flexibility in her workplace, relating to carers’, or in fact any other needs. While women’s regulatory rights relating to child bearing and childcare is the subject of current debate, few employees outside of the government have significant entitlements in these areas. Obtaining the flexibilities described by these young women is primarily reliant on their individual bargaining power with their employer, rather than regulated rights. Existing regulatory rights to flexibility are modest, for example the right of parents of preschool children to request (not be granted) flexible conditions. Adult women’s capacity to negotiate working conditions is outside the scope of this thesis, but in chapter seven I explore in depth young people’s power to influence their conditions.

**Self-sacrificing**

Among the participants who believe regulation is negatively affecting working conditions, there is a distinct small group, who believe it is necessary for them to accept these conditions for the good of the country as a whole. They do not think employers are profiting from their deteriorating situation, but rather that global pressures are forcing workers to accept worsening conditions or lose their jobs altogether. Kaz is explicit about this situation.

I have a conflict in my head. Like as a casual employee I know that I can get fired unreasonably. I have heard all those campaigns, but I’ve also heard the other side of it. Like making us more marketable overseas, so we can get, you know, more trade and all that kind of stuff. So I guess I’m kind of confused. …if we can’t sell stuff overseas, then everybody is going to be losing their job anyway. So, I can kind of see the long-term goals of it as well. Like I can see it from both sides. (Kaz, 21, Retail, Health and Community Services)

Most of the young people interviewed in this research perceive that they are living in a time of major change; that they are ‘eyewitnesses’ to a major shift in the role of work in society, whether positive or negative for individual workers (Beck 2000 p.55-56). It is interesting that some young people like Kaz feel a sense of personal responsibility to accept poor conditions to ensure the survival of business in Australia.

**Negative**

Participants who seem more informed and therefore more engaged, are often more negative than self-sacrificing, about changes in industrial relations regulation and the effect these changes might have on their future. They see the impact of social processes and changing institutions reducing their security, but don’t perceive any power themselves
to influence such forces. These participants describe futures with a growing imbalance
between those with power and those without. Unlike the ‘self-sacrificing’ group, they
believe that these imbalances will cause greater class disparity, and that employers are
profiting from their deteriorating situation.

Sarah’s casual employment is becoming more insecure as her employer’s power has
grown. Insecurity makes her fearful and powerless:

[I]n the casual [retail] work, I don’t feel like I can stand up and say
something about certain workplace practices or about management, for fear
that I might get sacked, because there isn’t any sort of laws now to protect
workers. I guess I’m really scared in my other workplace and definitely a
lot of the other casual workers are. (Sarah, 24, Health and Community
Services, Retail)

Sarah attributes her deteriorating working environment directly to changed industrial
relations legislation. The increased imbalance in power has effectively removed any voice
she may have had. She certainly does not perceive she has any power to change her
situation or increase her security. Other young people also discuss how the work
regulation changes have increased the power of employers.

They are just giving bosses choices a lot more, I think, on how they can fire
you, how they can pay you, and all the conditions. …I think the bosses will
keep getting better off and better off. …they are the ones that are already
rich …it is just making it harder and harder for the common Aussie. …I
think it is going to be a bit harder, for my generation. (Steve, 24, Building
and Construction)

These young workers see the institution of the labour market with its regulatory protection
as deteriorating and hazardous, allowing employers to set the terms and conditions of
work. Sennett’s (2006 p.183-4) theory of fragmenting institutions resulting in people
feeling ‘they have no voice’ is a very good description of the participants’ statements
above. In this situation, observation of a weakened institution by young workers may lead
to the perception that the institution and any regulation associated with it, is irrelevant to
their experience.

Marginalised
The final, largest group of participants are termed marginalised, because while they feel as
powerless as those who held negative views, but they are less angry because they distance
themselves from the issues through an apparent disinterest in regulatory functions and
changes. Bessant et al (1998 p.197) argue that the term, marginalisation, is often used ambiguously and clarify the term by identifying four main areas of exclusion from: arenas of decision-making, access to information, a level of income that would allow access to other social arenas such as the housing market and a framework of social esteem and mutual respect. These areas are useful in considering participants’ responses relating to the institutional level of the labour market as depicted in the YESM (page 57). Although Bessant et al’s (1998) description encompasses more than the labour market, it is pertinent to this research, in that it may explain the lack of interest and knowledge exhibited by many of the young workers about changes that could have significant effects on them. The areas of exclusion from decision-making and access to information are explicitly identifiable in the data and evidenced in the quotes below. The other two areas are also present in the data and are further explored in the following section regarding youth wages.

The new modernising and individualising processes discussed by Sennett (2006), Bauman (2007) and Beck (1992) are likely to increase the experience of exclusion. Sennett (2006 p.164) argues that ‘good polity’ involves all citizens believing that they are ‘bound together in a common project’. However, he warns that this is made difficult or even impossible in the new institutional order, which ‘eschews responsibility, labelling its own indifference as freedom for individuals on the periphery; the vice of the politics derived from new capitalism is indifference’. Sennett (2006 p.171) sees democracy as requiring citizens to be involved in finding out about the world around them and how it works. The new style of economy creates a political climate in which citizens have great difficulty in doing this.

The participants quoted below do not appear to believe there is any point in being ‘bound together in a common project’. They see no point in informing themselves about issues over which they have no influence. Lauren and Tommy exemplify the comments of this group.

I don't know much about it [WorkChoices] and know that I'm probably not the only one, like there's probably a lot of people out there who have sort of just gone along with it, like oh yeah, it's good you know, and don't really know the stuff behind it. (Lauren, 20, Hospitality)

I am not really into politics… That is just headache to me, I don’t understand any of that stuff. I know how to hammer a nail, not all that stuff. …Aren’t they [the changes to IR] all bad? I don’t know. I just
assumed they were bad. If it is not affecting me, I don’t have anything to complain about. …I don’t know, because anything that those blokes bring out is going to bad for someone, isn’t it? …As long as they are making money, they don’t think of anyone else. …So obviously we are losing out, I suppose. You hear on TV, people complaining about it, don’t you? (Tommy, 20, Building and Construction)

In considering why Lauren and Tommy made no attempt to improve their knowledge, the characteristics of exclusion identified by Bessant et al (1998) are relevant. These young people do not have a source of knowledge about industrial issues other than television advertisements, and have not been involved in decision-making on the issue. Young workers are generally poorly paid and often not as respected as adult workers. These are examples of the four criteria for exclusion, and Sennet (2006 p.164) argues that not being an engaged citizen can lead to indifference. Those that express indifference to the major changes taking place in the work environment are therefore likely to be those who lack voice and the capacity to affect change. The indifference may protect them from realising the full extent of their powerlessness, functioning to pacify them.

There are other participants, for example Rachel, who tried to influence decision-making in the labour market and other areas. She failed and seems unlikely to try again. Rachel’s experience exemplifies movement from engagement with political and social issues to feelings of powerlessness, finally resulting in disengagement.

These new work laws have been put in place and generally it’s to benefit employers, I think it’s pretty terrible, what’s going on. That’s also when I feel the most powerless, when these kind of laws can just be introduced without any consideration to the people that have been protesting against it and people marched against it. …[I]t kind of means less rights for younger workers, it means less rights for casual workers and you know more opportunities for bigger people to make money and it just seems very unfair, but then you think, I bet it’s going to get to a point in a year when everyone’s going to just accept it, and it’s just really disappointing that that’s going to happen.

…over the last four years were for me the protest against sending troops to Iraq, the protest against VSU [Voluntary Student Unionism] and the protest against WorkChoices and all three of these have effectively failed. …the Vietnam War was stopped by protesting and I can’t see that happening anymore. I think that’s really sad because it’s got to a point where I effectively think there’s not much I can do about it. As much as I want to stop a lot of things, even getting involved, you know, what’s it really going to do…? (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)
Rachel is one of a few young people who did not readily accept the powerless role allocated to her. She tried to become involved in decision-making and influence events. Her failure has resulted in the same attitudes of disengagement and powerlessness as the three earlier quoted participants, who never attempted to learn about and/or influence events. Rachel may be encouraged by the election of a new government with a mandate to change the work laws that she protested against. If Rachel continues to fail in her attempts to influence events, it is likely, as Sennett (2006) proposes, that she also will eventually become indifferent.

As illustrated in these accounts, the majority of young people who are aware of legislative change in the regulation of the labour market believe the changes are detrimental. Some accept legislation reducing their conditions and security as necessary in terms of global competitiveness, others believe the changes are made purely to benefit employers and increase their profits. There is a significant sense of powerlessness to challenge legislation. The marginalisation that these young workers experience in relation to labour market regulation may threaten their development as engaged citizens. Their status as industrial citizens and ability to influence labour market conditions through non-regulated means is analysed in chapter seven.

The Fair Work Act, enacted from June 2009 (with some provisions effective from 1st January 2010) has overturned significant segments of the previous legislation identified by some young people as concerning, but does not tackle the main issues identified by young workers, such as lower wages based on age and precarious hours that limit the sustenance available from this institution. These issues are explored in the following sections.

**Wages**

Rates of pay in the labour market are regulated by the state at the institutional level. In this section I present participant experiences of direct relevance to the rationale for the regulation of lower pay rates for young people. The lower rates themselves are a concern to many participants and are exacerbated by precarious conditions of employment. After introducing the rationale, I demonstrate the financial insecurity experienced by many of the participants. Clear examples of how some participants’ pay arrangements transfer market risks from business onto workers, which affect income negatively, are provided. Lastly, because of the wide range of examples provided by participants I include a section on wage exploitation, where young people do not receive even their legal entitlements.
Youth and training rates of pay - rationale and participant experience

As indicated in chapter three, there are two major justifications for lower rates of pay for young people. The first is that young people’s labour is of lower quality than that of adults; therefore lowered youth wages are an incentive for employers to employ them. The second is that since most young workers are supported by parents, the benefits of low wages and higher employment for the group outweigh the potential risk of poverty for a few. This rationale is challenged by theorists such as Jones and Wallace (1992), Bessant (2000) and White and Wyn (2004). They have linked these lower wages to significant poverty experienced by young people. Bessant (1993) has identified that this disadvantage now applies to a much larger group than in previous generations; as the age of ‘youth’ has in recent times been extended to include young adults up to the age of twenty-five. With young people's economic status largely determined by government legislation relating to social institutions of the family, education and employment, young people are increasingly experiencing an ambiguous financial status, where they are neither totally dependent or independent economically, for a significant period of time.

In addition to living in poverty and/or lacking economic autonomy, low wages construct young people as deficient, and detract from the things that young people are doing competently; such ideas reduce young people’s status and worth as workers to something of less value than an adult (White and Wyn 2004 p.176). This lowers the social esteem of young people, which further contributes to their social exclusion, as described earlier by Bessant et al (1998 p.197).

Despite White and Wyn’s (2004) argument and Bessant et al’s (1998) work on exclusion that might indicate that the labour market contributes to young people’s social exclusion, participants in my research seemed to see the labour market as a source of social esteem and approached employment with enthusiasm. Many of the early experiences described by the participants in this research demonstrate how keen they were to start their first job, and at times they were so willing to enter into paid work, that they did not discuss their rate of pay prior to starting. They were grateful to be offered work and they were willing to take whatever was offered. However with experience a significant number discussed feeling angry and used, possibly an indicator of exclusion. For example, the first employment experience Johnny had was labouring. He did not ask his pay rate before starting work. He only worked it out after he was paid. In this instance the employer had complete power
and decided after the work was completed, what he was willing to pay. The value of
Johnny’s labour was totally dictated by his employer.

…mine was pretty bad, like I worked out for the hours I worked, it ended
up being $3.00 an hour. I was pretty pissed off about that. (Johnny, 17,
Building and Construction)

Other participants describe their pay rates and income below. They state their low levels of
pay are not only insufficient for the work performed, but also personally demeaning.

[T]he pay is really, really bad… I get $6.51 an hour and I hate it. [Junior
rates are] understandable, but I think $6.51 is a little ridiculous. (Jill, 16,
Hospitality)

It is, it really is like slave labour and I reckon the pay is awful for what we
do. (Lucy, 18, Retail, Hospitality)

The participants above do not compare their wages or work to older employees although
comparison may be implicit in their comments. They simply expressed disappointment at
their low level of pay. Other participants emphasise the injustices of paying young people
lower rates of pay when they are working at the same level as an adult. Describing the
junior rates system in place in the 1990’s, which remains intact over a decade later, White
(1997 p.69) argues that the youth wage system makes it possible and legal to have young
workers doing exactly the same work as adults; receiving ‘much less’ pay. Jacinta
describes just such an experience:

…with the pay rate there's about three juniors, but when we get paid we're
being paid differently and it's going on our age, even though we're doing
exactly the same thing, working exactly the same amount of hours, one's
getting paid less than the other. I don't think it's fair, I think that it should
be that if you're doing exactly the same work, and you're both casual and
juniors, you should be getting paid the same. (Jacinta, 17, Retail)

Sometimes young workers believe they are doing more work and have training
responsibilities for older workers who are being paid more than they are, solely on the
basis of their age. Employers’ allocation of training responsibilities to younger workers
indicates recognition of competence and skill that is superior to that of the older trainee
receiving a higher pay rate.

…I think like, when a 20 year old comes in and can't do what I am doing,
when I am only 16, it is frustrating, especially if I am teaching them, and
they are getting paid more than me as well. I am like, oh god. (Lee, 17, Health and Community Services, Hospitality)

Lee says she would feel better about the disparity if there were any level of recognition that she was doing equal work and at times even training older workers. Lee remains on the minimum rate for her age regardless of her competence or duties performed.

Barbara also compares her wages to her older colleagues and is explicit about the consequence of low youth wages in terms of the potential for independence from other supports.

…you feel a bit unappreciated... You are doing the exact same work, the exact same job, if they go away for the day, you are doing their job as well, sort of thing. ...the same work, the same hours, but for peanuts. And once you do turn 17 or 18, and you finish school, and you want to get out by yourself, you want to move out and just be with your friends and have a bit of a social life. But you can't because you are just working for peanuts. (Barbara, 20, Retail)

While Jacinta, Lee and Barbara are unhappy with their inequitable rates of pay compared with older workers, they have no expectation that employers will recognise their level of competence by paying them equally with similarly competent adult workers. They believe employers will never pay more than the minimum legal rate. Only one participant reports the experience of being paid an equal rate for equal work, regardless of age. Keith points out that with physical work, being younger and fitter can be an asset:

When you work up in shearing sheds, they've got wages that change when you turn 16 up to 18. Whereas all my bosses have said you do the exact same work, so they just pay you, I've been paid full rate. Even all the bosses think it's just stupid. Yeah well you're doing the exact same work, if not more, because you're younger and fitter sometimes. (Keith, 16, Agriculture)

Clearly it is at the employers’ discretion whether ‘equal pay for equal work’ applies for young workers. Keith’s case is rare and the vast majority of the employers of the young people interviewed paid the minimum rate for the job or a lesser illegal amount. It is interesting that young workers in general have no expectation that an employer will exercise discretion and pay above the legal minimum rate, no matter how competent they are. Even when they use words like exploitation, they blame the institution regulating pay rates, rather than the employer’s desire to maximise profit through paying the lowest rate possible. They have internalised the value of maximising profit as totally acceptable, even when it disadvantages them.
The quotes above demonstrate that participants believe that productivity is not always related to age. Further evidence for this is available from employment patterns in industries with a high number of young employees. Busy times in retail and hospitality are usually outside school hours, which is when young workers are employed. Workers must work at maximum productivity during these times, indicating that young workers are no less productive than others. On this basis, White and Wyn (2004 p.177) argue that youth labour is used by employers to maximise profit. White and Wyn (2004 p.176) state that in the industries and occupations in which most young people are employed, that is the retail and service sectors, young people are able to perform duties to the same level as adult workers.

The above quotes highlight the issue of ‘equal pay for equal work’. Bessant (2000 p.237) points out that the Federal Arbitration Court decision of 1972, that granted ‘equal pay for equal work’ to women and indigenous citizens, allowed arguments that young workers were worth less than adult workers, due to them being ‘less mature, less skilled, less reliable and less knowledgeable than adult workers’. This is clearly not the sentiment of the young workers cited above. The widespread segregation of young workers into specific jobs in the youth labour market may make direct comparisons difficult, because some young workers do not work with adults doing exactly the same work.

A small group of the youngest participants are supportive of the junior rates system. Their opinions represent the arguments underpinning the legislative approaches of 1972 and described further in the Junior Rates Inquiry (Munro et al. 1998). The first argument relates to their acceptance that parents can and should subsidise young people; that young people do not need equal pay. The Junior Rates Inquiry stated that most young workers lived in middle to high income households, with employed parents, and so would not be living in poverty, regardless of their pay rate, and that other young people have the benefit of a ‘safety net’ welfare system (Munro et al. 1998 p.87). It said that few young people lived independently, and therefore very few needed the same rates of pay as older workers. My data suggest that the small number living independently is not surprising, given their financial inability to do so. Anna’s statement below demonstrates the view that young people do not need the same pay as adults because parents subsidise them.

I think it is okay if the younger people get paid less than the older people, because the younger people, like most of them live at home still and they
don't have to pay bills and that kind of stuff. Like with the older people, have their own house, pay bills and stuff like that. So I think it is kind of alright. (Anna, 15, Retail)

In the 1972 Federal Arbitration Court decision and the Junior Rates Inquiry of 1998, a further justification for lower wages related to young workers being perceived as less useful and responsible than older workers, and therefore less employable. This is supported by Ashley’s comments.

I think it's like, if you work harder it's unfair… but then sometimes it's like there, because they have to be a bit more responsible, because they're the senior and they're looking after everything, so it depends on the situation. (Ashley, 16, Hospitality)

Anna and Ashley are representative of the few participants who agree with justifications for youth pay rates, in terms of parental support and young people’s reduced work performance relative to older workers. Anna’s acceptance of lower pay rates because of parental subsidy is reminiscent of the discredited justification of lower pay rates for women on the basis of spousal support. Ashley’s thinking that higher levels of responsibility result in higher levels of pay, is not supported by evidence in this research, for example the case of Lee cited above, where a younger worker had the responsibility of training an older worker without any increase in pay.

In addition to the perceived injustice, many participants describe feelings of powerlessness to change the junior rates system. James is typical of these young people.

With the whole juniors issue, like younger getting paid less. I mean I can understand why they do it, but I put in or I feel as though I put in a lot more effort than some people. So yeah in that way, I guess it is sort of a bit unfair, but I mean I just go along with it... It is not like I can change anything or I don't feel as though I can, and if everyone gets paid according to their age, I guess it is fair in that respect. (James, 16, Retail)

In this quote, James takes comfort in the equal treatment processes of junior rates, although feeling it is inequitble with regard to adult rates. He does not feel as though he has any influence and copes with the feelings of injustice and lack of power by disengaging from the issue. As discussed in the section on regulation, political and social marginalisation can result in powerlessness and indifference, which may explain James’ sentiment. The higher adult rates may also appear as a light at the end of the tunnel and an incentive to get through this temporary phase.
White and Wyn (2004 p.177) argue that one of the ideological supports for youth wages has been the assumption that young workers lack skills. Historically youth wages have been linked to the apprenticeship system, which provided security of employment and a legal requirement for the employer to provide formal training to address the young person’s assumed lack of skills (White 1997 p.68). The link between low youth pay rates and the provision of training no longer exists. Currently, a lack of skill is sometimes addressed through structured training provided on the basis of lowered ‘training’ wages, in other cases there is no training, but a low youth pay rate still applies.

In general, training wages also need to be subsidised by parents and do not allow one to live a healthy independent life. Some participants reported they do not have parental support but are living on their low training wages. This may indicate there are a number of young people who are at risk of poverty because of these low rates. For example, Garfield started an apprenticeship at a young age, working long hours for a low wage.

I entered an apprenticeship as a trainee butcher and that exactly wasn’t my ideal, I mean doing 75 hours of work a week for $170… To begin with it was really disappointing because I was basically financially better off living on the dole! …because of all the extra costs of coming to work… (Garfield, 23, Property and Business Services)

Garfield’s experience of training wages is a disincentive to structured training in employment. Apprentices and trainees take on responsibility for the cost of their up-skilling in the form of lowered wages. It is an investment that they hope will pay off in the future. Like other young people combining work and study, they make considerable sacrifices in order to prepare for future employment. The major advantage enjoyed by young people in this formal combination of study and work is that, despite the low wages, their income is regular and predictable.

In summary, participants believe that youth rates of pay are not justified by the work they perform. A significant number of participants are unhappy with their situation and do not think they are being treated fairly. They are excluded from the principle of ‘equal pay for equal work’ using a utilitarian justification that the potential benefit of increased employment opportunity outweighs the actual disadvantage of not having enough income to support themselves. Further exploration of the moral and ethical implications of this situation is warranted.
**Precarious wages**

In addition to low youth rates of pay, participants spoke of the difficulties associated with the precarious nature of their work and consequent fluctuating incomes. Casual work predominated amongst participants with commitments to school or further education. In accord with ABS statistics (2006b), (see Table 2 page 23) relating to the industrial profile of young workers, most of the young casual workers interviewed for this research were employed in the retail and hospitality industries. The work was reported to be precarious because of shift rosters, with number of hours and times of work varying from day-to-day and week-to-week, due to market demands. Much of their work was consistent with Beck’s (2000) description of individualised, precarious and hybrid employment.

Some participants told me they took on multiple jobs to attempt to secure a liveable level of support, sometimes in addition to full-time study. The quotes in this section describe the effects of precarious rostering on the lives of young workers. Delores comments on the lack of secure hours in her work and consequently, her inadequate income.

> [T]his sort of work is not reliable. You don’t know when you are going to have work. You can have stacks of work and then no work and so the work here is kind of like a second job, you need a first job. Currently I don’t have another job and so money is pretty low. I’m looking for another job that can support me, so that I know that every week I’ve got fixed income.
> (Delores, 20, Health and Community Services)

Delores, like many other participants, is expressing a strong preference for secure part-time work to provide for her living needs while allowing her to continue studying. Finding such a job is rare amongst the participant group. On the other hand, Lily is not studying and wants to work as many hours as possible. She tried to ascertain the reasons for her few and varied hours. Lily was given little explanation but was reassured that she was a good worker.

> I have to live week to week, because I just don’t know how many hours I’m going to get in a week. I’ve gotten as little as 3 hours one week, then gotten as many as 20 hours the next week. …it just depends on what time of the year it is, and what’s going on and what kind of sales we’re having. [If I get few hours] I have to live much more frugally. I have to be dipping into the savings. …it’s really hard …I have to pay for pretty much everything. …I’ve had disagreements with bosses like not getting enough hours, and then like, they’re never calling me back, even though they’ve said that I’ve been a good employee. (Lily, 22, Retail)
Young workers like most other workers are working to earn an income. The quotes above show that work in the youth segment of the labour market often does not provide secure and dependable support, even when it is their main activity (in the case of Lily). Work that is available at a reasonable hourly rate of pay is highly precarious when it comes to rostering. Casual youth jobs are seen as a ‘second job’ and not sufficient as a primary source of income. Participants needing to support themselves through their engagement with the labour market expressed a desire for a ‘fixed’ and reliable income. As casual employees many participants are feeling the effects of the transfer of market risks from business onto employees and did not like the resultant precarious wages. This was experienced more often at periods of high and low demand, for example Christmas.

The participants described other ways in which market risks, that could affect the profitability of business, were transferred onto individual workers. Pay arrangements sometimes include significant costs in earning the income, which might normally be seen as part of the expenses of running a business. Two participant examples of this are in pizza delivery. In this work the base rate per hour is low, and is supplemented with a payment for each delivery. This part of their pay is completely market driven and removes employers’ risk associated with low demand, and places this risk onto workers. Deliveries may or may not occur in any particular shift. In addition, vehicle costs vary enormously according to the size or other geographical features of the area in which the deliveries had to be made. More petrol used means less income received.

The wage at [the fast food place] is pretty low, it’s about $8.09 an hour and then about $1.50 for every delivery. To make a wage you have to do about 2 deliveries an hour for your shift. And sometimes you get that and sometimes you don’t. (Raj, 19, Hospitality)

There's not a [franchise] in every suburb, so up where I was, there was about three suburbs surrounding it. A neighbouring store has closed down, so we've adopted some of their areas, but it's very inconvenient. It's very far away and it kills on petrol. …I get about $8.07 per hour plus $1.47 per delivery. These deliveries are across the main road and it's hard to access that road, so you have to play around back streets, go onto that road, go out to this whole other area, which is several kilometres away. When you do the math doesn’t really work well with the car allowance. You're losing money. (Liam, 20, Hospitality)

Liam and Raj receive very little income after costs are taken into account. Liam describes attempts made to reduce this wage even further by extending into what are ‘unprofitable’ areas for him. In this situation, employers are not required to maintain vehicles for their
pizza delivery service. They are able to have a vehicle and driver on standby for just over eight dollars an hour and do not have to guarantee any amount of deliveries. Whatever the distance covered, the payment for delivery is capped at less than one dollar fifty per delivery. These are examples of risks and costs being shifted from business to workers.

Many young workers do not perceive employers to have any responsibility to bear the wage costs of variations in market demand and thereby provide a level of stable employment. They see it as a natural arrangement that they should bear the costs of demand, receiving wages varying from nil to full-time. The participants’ discussions around these issues indicate that they have internalised and accepted this shift in responsibility, a feature of individualisation.

**Further wage exploitation**

Participants highlight a number of other wage issues, where they describe themselves as powerless to redress their problems. In legal forms of employment these issues include late payment of wages (without due notice) and holding back junior rate pay rises earned due to a birthday. In illegal cash work, wage levels and pay dates are set at the whim of employers, with workers fearful of the repercussions of challenging their employers about pay. At times employers use their considerable power to manipulate the pay of their young employees to their benefit.

Both Jenni and Wendy discuss examples of their large international employers’ wage practices that disadvantage their young workers. Jenni’s employer has not given her the pay rise she should have received on her birthday. After asking for it, Jenni still has not received it weeks later. This demonstrates her lack of voice and power within the workplace. Wendy’s pay is sometimes late. She is given little notice, which means she has to survive without the pay until it comes through.

I get paid $7.35 an hour and like I have already had my birthday, so I should have gotten a pay rise and they haven't given me one yet. I have asked. They said I would get one, but I haven’t yet. (Jenni, 16, Hospitality)

I'm part of a bigger corporation, a takeaway shop I work my arse off... We get paid by head office in Melbourne, and Melbourne is pretty dodgy, sometimes they just won't put our pay through. We get paid fortnightly, so you get to where I am right now, which is half way and you think I'm going make it, great, and then you get to the Monday when you're meant to get paid and they're like oh it's going to be three days late, and you just think, well, not going to eat for the next three days then. (Wendy, 19, Hospitality)
The above quotes show anger and a lack of power regarding underpayment and late payment of wages. The practices described above increase the precarious nature of youth wages, are examples of hazards encountered by young people receiving support from the labour market and are evidence of employer abuse of power even when employment is within the legal regulated labour market.

For the participants involved in the illegal cash-in-hand labour market, the power differential between employer and young worker is heightened. Two participants quoted below discuss the nature of their relationship with their ‘cash-in-hand’ employers. They see their relationship as different to that of legal employment. Charlie is so fearful about her ‘cash-in-hand’ job and the security of her shifts, that she feels unable to ask for her pay when it is late. Rachel describes similar experiences in her past employment with a small employer.

I'm working for $9.50 an hour which is nothing, I don’t make enough and I'm getting cash in hand so I get no super... It's such a weird relationship, like I think it puts a little strain on it, especially if I'm not getting paid, like they don’t pay me each week sometimes and it will just be like, I'll be putting all this cash in the till and they'll come and collect it all, and it's like, well, hold on, that's mine, what about me. …I'm a bit dodgy about going on about it, because I don't want to lose the job, because I haven't got something to back me up if I quit and it's all those little things that I need the money, that's why I'm still there. (Charlie, 19, Retail)

...at the fish and chip shop and at the restaurant I worked at, both were cash in hand and that was a really different way of approaching it because you feel obliged to not ask any questions when you get cash in hand. …if there was a discrepancy and you thought you should have earned more that week, oh well, you know, you did eat such and such during the week, so we had to take that off and there’d always be, kind of, excuses… some weeks I worked the same amount of hours and there would be a difference of maybe $100 in the pay... (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)

Working in the cash economy was not in the interests of Charlie and Rachel and they would have preferred to be legitimately employed. Both young women emphasise the powerless nature of their relationship with their employer, and their fear associated with discussing pay matters. Clearly cash employment does not guarantee even agreed rates of pay, or even on-time regular payment of wages, and involves the loss of other entitlements such as superannuation. When discrepancies arise the young workers often simply forgo the pay rather than discuss it with their employer.
Cash work is not a preference for most participants and they report considerable fear and anxiety associated with it. White’s (1997 p.72) study of young people in Melbourne in the mid nineties found that a large proportion (39% of those employed) were part of the informal economy of work. Approximately 30% of participants I interviewed are in informal cash employment. In the Melbourne study, cash work was primarily found in small service or retail businesses. The young workers in the Melbourne research had mixed feelings about their experiences with informal work and emphasised that attaining a job, whether formal or informal, was their first priority (White 1997 p.73). The Melbourne young people from White’s (1997) research saw fewer differences between formal and informal work than the participants in this research. The common issues in White’s (1997 p.73) research and my own included: complaints about pay rates, hours worked and high levels of competition to obtain work. Other significant anxieties about informal work were added by the participants of my research. These include lack of entitlement to superannuation, no recourse to standard structures, such as workers’ compensation and unions, and unexplained and/or unexpected deductions from wages. Participants in this situation state they feel powerless and are fearful of negative repercussions from their employers.

In summary, low youth rates of pay may not be justifiable on the basis of parental support or lowered youth competence. A re-examination of the exclusion of young people from the principle of ‘equal pay for equal work’ is necessary. The predominance of casual work amongst participants does not reflect their preference but rather an employer initiated shift in business risk from themselves to the young workers, in the form of major variations in hours and consequent income in response to market demand. These poor work conditions are legal, common in the youth labour market and result in insecure support for young workers. Other common practices in the experience of participants are not legal and include withholding pay rises, delays in payment and cash in hand employment. Participants express a preference for legal part-time or full-time employment and are aware of some of the entitlements they do not receive as a consequence of their informal ‘cash-in-hand’ status. Whether participants were in formal or cash employment, they had similar concerns about rostering and issues of working time. These are analysed in the next section.
Working time ‘and having a life’

Participants express two major areas of concern about their work commitments relating to time. The first issue is to obtain sufficient predictable and secure hours of employment for their support and income needs and was addressed in the previous section on wages. The second issue is the difficulty of meeting multiple demands on their time and is the focus of this section. Participants say conflict arises because of competing inflexible demands from institutions, most commonly between the labour market and education, which also impact on time for family and social activities. Those participants with strong family support or access to additional income from welfare are better able to reduce this conflict because of their lesser dependence on the labour market for support. I provide examples of young people who are able to reduce work commitments when they have too great a negative effect on other aspects of their life. I also provide examples of young people whose level of labour market dependence results in threats to other life domains, even at times including their health.

Predictability and security of time

In this section the flexibilities in working time required by employers of participants in casual work and their feelings about these conditions are analysed. Many participants relate that they are unable to plan their lives because of unpredictable work demands. The few participants who are given more regular hours unanimously express positive views about this arrangement. There is a diverse range of participant experience in the unpredictability or regularity of rosters in the same jobs and industries. Therefore it appears that employers’ discretion may be a major factor in predictability of hours.

A number of authors considering the relationship between work and time have emphasised the nature of time as both a finite resource and a socially constructed and manipulated concept (Epstein and Kalleberg 2001; Hearn and Michelson 2006). The social conventions that govern time patterns in relation to work at any given point in history are influenced by constraints such as environmental factors and physical human limits and capacities, but are also shaped by pressures from powerful groups and individuals who require labour (Epstein and Kalleberg 2001 p.5). Hearn and Michelson (2006 p.17) highlight that any investigation of work and time will encounter a tension between simultaneous demands of ‘strictness’ on the one side and ‘flexibility’ on the other. The introduction of the ‘WorkChoices’ legislation and its subsequent revision, described in the regulation section of this chapter, is a good Australian example of different power elites changing legislation.
that governs workers’ conditions and wages. This legislation was complex and highly prescriptive regarding how employment contracts could be made, excluding content that may enable workers to improve working conditions collectively, and emphasising individual negotiation by workers and employers. In this sense it was more ‘strict’ as it had more regulations and at the same time more ‘flexible’, allowing more employer freedom to set desirable conditions for themselves.

Rostering practices, sometimes in order to minimise paid working hours, impact significantly on participants’ non-working lives. Lily’s work commitments are a good example of employer ‘flexibility’, but ‘strictness’ for Lily. She is on-call four nights a week for a large retail employer and needs to be available and not make plans, unless she tells them in advance that she cannot work. Lily is sometimes called up at very late notice and if she refuses or is unable to work, her hours are cut the following week.

I am available to work 4 out of 5 of the weeknights, and I have to work all of Saturday. I’m on call, so I might get a call somewhere between 9.00 and 5.00, and I can’t make any plans for the next night because, like I have to tell them if I want a night off. [If they call me] I have to start at 7.00 so the latest I’d get a call is probably, I’ve gotten 5.30 which really frustrated me, because I’d already arranged stuff, and I tried to get out of working, but then you don’t get any hours for the next week, like you only get the one shift for the next week. …I’ve done this for 2 different bosses… They both, if I said no, I lose all of my hours… with my other boss, he kind of like, guilt-trips you into working some nights. I’ve been guilt-tripped into working. And like, I’ve been called up on a Saturday …he rang me up, going, you have an hour to get to work. Which is horrendous. (Lily, 22, Retail)

Lily is not paid an on-call allowance and is never rostered on in advance. Therefore she never knows which nights she will actually work. The employer is avoiding the risk that Lily might be underutilised, if she is rostered on in advance. The avoidance of this risk results in complete disruption of Lily’s other life activities.

Split shift scenarios are also reported as providing a great deal of flexibility for the employer while causing difficulties for workers. Barbara prefers the standard hours in her current job, in comparison to the split shifts that she was required to work in her previous hospitality position. Barbara also feels that she was being exploited due to the low cost of her labour compared to the adult workers.

Split shifts are just way too hard to work and they interfere with your family. I used to work split shift, which is why I left my other job and that
was say, 10.00 till 2.00 or 10.00 till 3.00 or 11.00 till 2.00. It can vary, like that is over lunchtime, and then it can go from 4.00 or 5.00 till 10.00 or 12.00 at night. That made it really awkward, and that was Monday to Saturday. That was on an apprenticeship wage. So that goes back to doing a lot on piddly peanuts. I would be the only one on say, for example a Monday lunchtime and Tuesday lunchtime and Saturday lunchtime, just for the fact that they could use me for that, that I was capable of doing my job, but weren't prepared to pay me more to do it. They saw it is an opportunity and they used it. (Barbara, 20, Retail)

A two or three hour unpaid break in the afternoon does not make up for work commitments commencing at 10 or 11am and finishing between 10 pm and midnight. This is a method for employers to minimise wages, while effectively requiring a worker to be available for up to twelve hour shifts. Additionally, while being paid a very low wage as an apprentice, on the basis that she needed and was receiving training, Barbara was at times working completely alone and unsupervised at periods of high demand, for example, lunchtime on Saturday. Clearly she was regarded as a competent worker, but her apprentice status allowed her employer to pay her much less than any equivalent qualified adult worker. These examples challenge much of the rhetoric about the benefits of flexible work for better work-life balance. Discussions with participants about flexibility at work demonstrate significant benefit for employers, with little or none for the young workers.

In rural areas many of the participants work fairly regular and steady hours and are not on call. These jobs are also casual and in the same or similar industries as Lily and Barbara. Therefore it seems to be a matter of employer choice, how predictable rosters are for employees.

I work four to five hours, Tuesday and Friday nights, every week. (Mick, 16, Retail)

I stayed after school [to work], I suppose the good thing is you only work for two hours a night. (Leah, 17, Property and Business Services)

The regular hours worked by Mick and Leah provide the opportunity to organise and participate in other life activities. There are a few examples of predictable shifts in metropolitan locations, although less prevalent. The participants with regular hours appreciate them as they enable workers to plan their time and expenditure.

Rostering is a major theme of discussions on time and notification of the requirement to work varied from one hour to more predictable ongoing rosters. Generally, the shorter the
notice, the more disruptive it is to workers’ other life domains. Declining short notice offers of work is often dependent upon access to other resources from family and welfare because refusing offered shifts can be punished by reduced work in following weeks, exemplified by Lily’s experience quoted earlier in this section. Where there is no access to other resources, participants need to comply with employer demands. The consequences of such compliance on other life domains such as study, social life and health are described in the following section.

There are stark contrasts between young workers’ experiences, in the same job in the same industry between young people in rural and metropolitan areas. It appears that workplace cultures vary in their valuing and respect of young people’s life commitments, to the extent that some employers make an effort to regularise their requirements, and others know that the young people’s need for work means they do not have to make this effort and therefore make arrangements on an ad hoc basis. Lack of planning and commitment in rostering allows the employer to exhibit favouritism or punishment very quickly, should they so choose: shifts can be cancelled, favoured employees can be given time off at the last moment or increased shifts on request. The positive and negative effects on young people have consequences for their behaviour at work and this is further explored in chapter seven, in the section ‘dependent relationship power’.

*Difficulty balancing work and other aspects of life*

In the preceding section, I described precarious and unpredictable rostering for the majority of participants engaged in casual work. In this section, the effects of participants working unsustainably long and/or unsociable hours on their study commitments, social life and health is analysed. At times working hours are onerous because they are combined with study commitments, in other instances work hours are long because of multiple job holding or overtime.

In chapter three I identified a number of researchers reporting on changes to working conditions and worker demographics of relevance to participants. Some of the significant findings related to increased working hours (Schor 1992; Pocock 2003) and the ‘invasion’ of home-life by working hours (Hochschild 1997). Schor (1992) identifies that increased numbers of young people are working while studying and Epstein and Kalleberg (2001 p.6-8) describe these young people as a vulnerable group, having less power over what work they perform and when they work, than other workers.
Pocock’s (2003) work-life collision and Hochschild’s (1997) time bind are particularly relevant to the experience of participants. Hochschild (1997 p.46) identifies one of the strategies being used to deal with this new situation of long working hours is having an efficient and highly structured home-life. But the participants in this study are unable to adopt this strategy because of the highly unpredictable nature of their work and their dependent status in the home. These young people have little or no control over the structure of their life in the parental home.

**Work and Study**

A major issue identified by many of the participants was the problem of sustaining successful study while working. A large number of participants believed their work interfered with their capacity to study. Given the competition for work reported by participants, it may be that jobs were not seen as easily replaceable. Places at school are guaranteed and performance issues only become important in the final years, as entry requirements for further study, should that be desired. Reduced performance may not seem an issue if students continue to pass subjects. Unfortunately it can be problematic when prerequisite groundwork is not completed or subject choice is restricted by less than optimal performance. The participants often discussed ‘priorities’ in relation to the choices they make about conflicts between work, study and other aspects of their life. Many of the young people give the highest priority to their work. Anna states:

> Probably work would be first, because you can't say no to work. (Anna, 15, Retail)

Many focus group participants agreed that their paid employment negatively affects their schoolwork. Feeling tired and finding the time for homework are particularly difficult issues for young people who work at night.

> …sometimes it can interfere with our schoolwork and homework because we work late some nights... (Richard, 16, Retail)

When I first started my work it was affecting my school because I used to work on weekdays after school. So I have to start from 4 to 11....I have to walk home and I don’t have any ride to go home and do my assignment. (Anne, 18, Hospitality)

> [W]hen you get home from school, you just don't feel like going to work because you know you have to come back and do homework. And when you have got a whole lot of homework due, you don't know whether you will get it in on time because you have to go to work. …it gets hard
sometimes, …then you have to work on the weekends as well, it is kind of hard to see friends and stuff. (Emily, 16, Retail)

Late last year I had no time at all to do anything. That is why, I can admit now, I was wagging school. I was wagging a lot because I used to work, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. Given the late hours, sometimes it would be until 12.00 or 12.30 am and then the next day, you just don’t want to get up. You just need to sleep in. (Jason, 17, Retail)

The only thing my work affected was school, because I used to work late in the night. So I have to come out from 1 o’clock [in the morning] and I just have few hours to sleep, so I have to get up earlier in the morning again and go to school. So sometimes I used to sleep in class. So didn’t used to catch up with friends. It used to make me get poor marks. (Edmund, 20, Hospitality)

The quotes above are a few of many similar reports demonstrating how work commitments can have a negative effect on school achievement through absenteeism and fatigue. Edmund’s experience was reminiscent of American research (Schor 1992 p.27), which cited similar cases of students sleeping in class because of work commitments. A number of the experiences quoted above support Epstein and Kalleberg’s (2001 p.7) contention that when hours are worked is as important as how many hours are worked, in terms of affecting other life activities. All the above students are in high school, which makes it surprising that a number are working until the early hours of the morning. Given the inflexibility of school hours it would seem that these late shifts are incompatible with successful full-time school attendance. A number of these young people are working to support themselves and are unable to find work that pays well enough at more suitable hours.

The economic necessity of work, for some young people, means that family, social and recreational time is sacrificed first, followed by study and training. Bob describes how his days were full with study and working two casual jobs.

I have no choice, I’ve got two jobs and my study. Sometimes I have to sit in lectures and feel there’s only more work. And this part-time thing… I live in [north-west] of Adelaide and I go to university [in the east] and my other job is in the city and my second job [is south] so I’d be running all the time… sometimes I have a sandwich when I’m driving all day and sometimes into the night. So my social life, I gave it up ages ago, since I started university. So basically I have no social life… I concentrate on my study and my work… (Bob, 21, Health and Community Services)

Travelling time is a significant issue for Bob, who needs to drive between two casual jobs in different parts of the city from his home or university. Where participants have multiple
commitments, travel time can be a significant component of the day’s activities. While Bob’s situation is extreme, there are many other participants juggling commitments to study and more than one workplace. Access to transport or transport assistance often determines whether and what job opportunities can be taken up, particularly for school aged young people.

Given the negative effects from combining work and study, it would be unfortunate if student potential was limited or reduced because of employment. High achievers may maintain passing level grades, masking the effect of the conflict but reducing future opportunities. Also, access to transport may be important in gaining and maintaining employment and in minimising time spent in travel, on top of study and work commitments. In addition, part of wages earned may need to be spent on transport, as a work related expense. A number of the young people quoted above are in full-time study and independent of their parents, supporting themselves through work or a combination of work and welfare. The amount of working hours necessary to sustain this lifestyle may be considerable and the time of day worked may have a disproportionate effect on other life activities. As the examples above demonstrate, the result of these factors combined with youth rates of pay and conditions can make this a risky existence.

**Social life & unsociable work hours**

Young workers participating in this study report social time to be their lowest priority. A number of participants comment on their inability to socialise. They identify two major reasons for this difficulty: the first is fatigue after meeting study and work commitments, the second is that work commitments are frequently at the time other people socialise. Referring back to the YESM (page 57), these are examples of the influence of the institution of the labour market on the young person’s work conditions and the interaction this has with other life domains in their immediate personal setting, in this case their social life.

Charlie and Lee are typical of participants who are too tired to engage in social activity after they finish work. Charlie is studying full-time at university and working in retail. Lee attends school full-time, as well as having a school-based traineeship, and extra paid work in hospitality in the evenings and on weekends.

> My social life has gone, besides having a chat with the people in the stores across from me, that's about it, and Uni... I'll finish work on a Saturday and
Sunday and Friday night and I'm too tired, I fall asleep after eating.
(Charlie, 19, Retail)

[It] definitely does impact on all of those things …my waitressing, it is at
night time, so night times is usually when I would be doing homework sort
of thing, you get home from school, you just relax and then you go work
and when you get home, you don't feel like doing homework. Same as
weekends, my social life really gets put to the side, working Friday and
Saturday night and then Sunday, you don't want to go out. Cause if you go
out after work, you are tired for work the next day. And like that has a lot
to do with why I don't play netball or anything like the other girls do,
because I wouldn't be able to get it off work. (Lee, 17, Health and
Community Services, Hospitality)

In addition to fatigue, social life was reduced by the unsociable times of work
commitments. Most university and school studies are during the day; meaning work must
take place primarily in the evenings, at night and on the weekends. This is an example of
how the institution of education shapes young people’s experience at work. Participants
often see these arrangements as a temporary and/or intensive investment in their future.
Their expectations of lessoning demands on their time as they age may not be met. The
work of Pocock (2006) and Hochschild (1997) suggest long and intrusive hours are
increasing in the adult labour market and the experience of ‘older’ participants supports
this, as described in the next section.

**Overtime & long work hours**

Those ‘older’ participants, who are supporting themselves through work in full-time
positions, report ‘out of hours’ work, long hours and overtime as issues of concern. Dembe
(2009 p.195) points out that there is abundant evidence that long hours of work result in
higher rates of injury and disease. For a few participants there is some advantage in long
hours because they are paid for overtime. Those few state that while they are making
considerable sacrifices in terms of their social life and other commitments, they believe the
money will support them in achieving some of the highly desired characteristics of
adulthood, such as home ownership. In a number of other cases overtime is unpaid, and
participants express fear about the future and their ability to maintain these hours should
they form families or acquire other obligations. Participants who are paid for overtime and
some who are unpaid, express fear of the consequences of refusing to work the overtime.

A number of participants describe how they regularly work unpaid overtime due to heavy
workloads. White and Wyn (2004 p.177) call this ‘above average’ exploitation, where
employers maximise profit using this technique. It is a complex situation, where the
workload requires more than the stated hours of work, but the employer requires the work to be done and states they have a policy of no overtime.

Probably between 50 and 60 hours a week but I only get paid for 40. (Jean, 22, Hospitality)

I didn't have a life basically outside work. I was on call 24 hours a day, more or less and if there were any issues, I would be the first point of call to go back to work to fix things and covering shifts for other staff members who were sick or on leave and stuff like that. Working overtime, yeah I didn't have a life much. If I worked that overtime, I wouldn't get any time off in lieu or anything like that. (Louise, 22, Health and Community Services)

These young people are not paid for significant amounts of work every week. The work is expected but is unable to be performed within the contracted working hours. This is of financial benefit to the employer. Some unpaid overtime includes considerable responsibilities, for example Louise is required to shield more senior management from the day-to-day staffing problems of a medium size business. When other staff have problems at work or because of absenteeism, Louise has to go to work, resolve the problem and/or perform the duties herself. She is not recompensed either financially or by time off for this level of commitment. Besides protecting themselves from call outs and staffing problems, more senior management actually save money on wages for jobs Louise does as an emergency relief. Louise’s level of responsibility is high given her low level of pay. The time commitment expected seriously affects her other life activities.

Jean identifies other implications of long working hours and unpaid overtime. She describes fears about her ability to maintain personal relationships given the level of commitment expected of her.

My partner, he wants me to quit because I don't spend any time with him, seriously I’m here, like, all the time and if we get a phone call and something's wrong, I'll come straight up here. So, if anything, probably the job seems to be more important than him, when it actually isn't. But of all the pressures that I have, I know that I need to put it first, so yeah, my partner's wanted me to quit, my friends have said, yeah, you just work so hard not for the money. It's just not worth it. I see my family maybe like once a month. (Jean, 22, Hospitality)

Jean’s concerns that the level of commitment expected by employers may not be sustainable in the long term are valid. If these hours are becoming a common feature of the adult labour market they will be facing issues of work/life conflict (Pocock 2006) and a time bind (Hochschild 1997) in the future, and there may be no easy resolution.
Paid overtime and long working hours are particularly common for participants working in the construction industry. Not all of the extra hours are required by their employer, as some participants are able to obtain extra independent work at weekends. They note that many other older workers, with more personal commitments, are unable to work these hours. They also comment that some bosses expect these hours and fire people who are uncooperative. Unlike a number of the other young workers interviewed, the fact that these young men are paid, and sometimes paid very well because of allowances, makes them more willing at least for the moment, to work long hours and sacrifice other activities.

Usually, if I include all my overtime, we normally do around 56 hours a week… I guess the hours would be a bit of a downside to it because you don’t get much of a social life and that sort of thing. (Mike, 20, Building and Construction)

It ranges from around 40 to 60 and sometimes a little bit more, yeah, depending on how busy we are. ...You become a bit like a zombie, you do. But that is what you have got to sacrifice, sometimes, if you want to buy something, if you want to save up your money, you have got to do that. And the money is good when it is like that, because you are getting into your double time brackets and things like that, so you can earn some alright money there. I am young and I don’t have kids and a wife and all that. Whereas a lot of the older guys say, “No, no, I am going home, I have got kids at home”. Whereas someone like me, yeah I will do it. But some of the bosses don’t like it when you say no. So some don’t last and some end up getting the flick. (Steve, 24, Building and Construction)

I work 40 hours for the company and then about another 20 hours in my own time. ...Because I am working Saturdays and Sundays, I can’t really have a big weekend, like going out and stuff. ...it definitely cuts in on that. I try and balance it. But at this time of the year, it is pretty busy. So I sort of try and plan it to work a couple of weekends in a row and then take one or two off. I have worked nearly two months straight now. (Tommy, 20, Building and Construction)

There is a considerable difference in attitude between these young men in the building industry whose overtime is mainly voluntary and always paid, and the young workers who are required to work unpaid overtime. The voluntary, paid workers see opportunity in the quite significant amounts of extra money they are able to earn. The unpaid workers see no such benefit and fear for the effects on other life pursuits, such as partnering and family formation. Among participants in this research there is a marked gender difference between males earning significant overtime and females working unpaid overtime. The young men above seem to be building an asset base from their extra effort. They are also consolidating skills in their trade, which will offer them well-paid work in the future. The
young women above are not accumulating any financial assets as a result of their extra work. In addition, should they reduce their hours and only work those for which they are paid, it is likely they would not be seen as valuable employees. They may even be replaced by younger women without external interests or responsibilities who are willing to work unpaid overtime. The gendered differences on this issue are striking.

Information about the large amounts of unpaid overtime worked was volunteered by participants with full-time employment in the adult labour market. These young workers are all in ‘adult’ workplaces, which may indicate that these conditions are a feature more of the adult labour market than the youth labour market. They spoke about the amounts of time involved because it has a significant impact on their lives. Younger participants in casual positions, possibly subject to ‘above average exploitation’ as described by White and Wyn (2004 p.177), did not volunteer the same information about being required to work overtime or long hours. Given that the weekly work commitment for many of those casual workers is often less in total than the unpaid overtime worked by this ‘older’ group, the scale of any unpaid overtime is also less, and therefore may not have been discovered in the data collection.

The majority of the participants in this research are concentrated in one or other of two extremes in terms of their patterns of work; the first were casual workers who often wanted more hours, more regularly, the second were in full-time work but were expected to work overtime, sometimes unpaid. These are two types of flexibility afforded to employers in contrast to employees who need to strictly adhere to employer requests and have little choice in the amount of time or when they work.

**Health Issues**

Some participants report health consequences of long hours such as those described in the previous section, and managing multiple jobs. In these cases, work time cannot be reduced because of the substantial financial commitment of purchasing a home. Five participants had made this financial commitment and all are working more than full-time to meet mortgage payments. As evidence of the difficulty of maintaining an independent life with adult commitments and aspirations, two of the five report their health is suffering as a consequence of their work and life arrangements. Both young women are working two jobs because they are unable to gain adequately paid full-time work in their feminised professions. Unlike the young male construction workers in the previous section, they have no opportunity to work well-paid overtime in their primary jobs. Their experiences may be
exacerbated by gender and reflect the reduction in permanent full-time work and the increase in insecure part-time and casual work that has been described by Beck (2000). Sarah describes her situation:

Like having two jobs at the moment, oh it’s hard. I’m sick, I’m getting sick quite often because I’m run down. So having to kind of juggle time, and I guess a personal life and home life as well, is a little bit tricky. …my personal life, definitely, that’s the first to go. And I guess then your home life, cause I mean, you know, work’s the most important thing in terms of finances, because that’s what keeps you afloat and that’s what keeps your house and pays the bills. So you have to have a job, otherwise you’re not going to be able to do anything else. (Sarah, 24, Health and Community Services, Retail)

Sarah is working full-time with a supplementary part-time job in order to pay her mortgage. Little time remains for any home or social life. Despite her frequent illnesses she believes she must continue both jobs to pay her bills.

The financial commitment of purchasing a home precludes work-life balance and seems unsustainable. A mortgage requires this level of income over a long-term, possibly twenty-five to thirty years. These young women are already using skills and professional qualifications in their current work. To continue their mortgage payments without their current level of stress, they would need a significant improvement in pay rates at their professional jobs. Neither the young professional women nor the young skilled tradesmen could afford mortgage payments without considerable additional work. Young women seem particularly disadvantaged because they are unable to access advantageously paid overtime in their professions. This may be contributing to a gendered experience of health consequences due to inequities in the labour market.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has described the conditions of young people’s employment and the reasons they give for being concentrated in casual employment which, in answer to research question one, is clearly not their preference. The conditions of young people’s employment are formally determined by labour market regulation, which has undergone significant change during the period of this research. The majority of participants perceived changes in the regulation of the labour market to have generally negative effects on their conditions at work. Most do not believe they can influence change in this area and therefore are disengaged from this process. Lower youth rates of pay, precluding young people from the principle of ‘equal work for equal pay’, cause considerable hardship for some young
people, many of whom need to make a substantial contribution to their own support. There is evidence from participants that when they perform the same work to the same standard as older employees, they continue to be paid less solely on the basis of their age.

Precarious, unsociable and long work hours have significant effects on participants’ immediate personal settings, including their study, social life and health. Employers’ requirements for flexibility and/or a heavy work commitment contribute to academic underachievement, particularly in younger age groups. The effects of these labour market conditions can be mitigated by access to considerable resources, other than wages, from the institution of family. However, students who lack strong family support may be more vulnerable to employer demands infringing on educational commitments. In the older age group, participants are willing to sacrifice some or all other life domains, in the attempt to gain adult milestones, such as home ownership. However, even those with substantial tertiary qualifications have not obtained jobs that are financially rewarding and secure enough to underpin such financial commitments without supplements from additional/other employment. There may be an industry and gender bias in opportunities for paid overtime that affects young people’s ability to take on such commitments.

The majority of casual workers in the sample expressed dissatisfaction with their conditions of employment particularly the precariousness of the hours and the effects this has on their income. Where they want part-time work because of their educational commitments, they find the ‘flexibility’ of casual work accorded the employer in determining their hours day-by-day very disruptive and difficult to manage with fixed study times. When casual workers are available for full-time work, they find major fluctuations in hours and pay precluded the achievement of many social and economic goals. These young people did not express any preference for casual work. Those with other commitments would prefer regular secure part-time employment and those available for full-time work express a preference for permanent full-time employment. The only reason most of these young people are employed in casual work is that this is the only work available to them.

Participation in the youth labour market does not provide secure economic autonomy for young workers. Participants identify other institutions with which they are engaged, that provide support in the short or long term. In addition to the labour market, the institutions of family, welfare and education are depicted in the YESM (page 57), and will be analysed
in the next chapter for their contribution to the support of young people in their transition to independence from parents.
Chapter Five

Institutions influencing labour market experience

The previous chapter described the conditions young people experience in the labour market and how these conditions affected other life commitments. In relating their experiences, participants drew attention to three other institutions they considered had major influences on their labour market engagement and transition to independence from parents. This chapter analyses the effects the institutions of family, welfare and education and their interactions have on participants’ experience of work and transition. I explore participants’ dependency on resources from these institutions and their ability to accommodate the demands made by them. This chapter describes each institution in turn with a final section analysing the complex interactions between these three and the labour market. In terms of the YESM (page 57), the focus of this chapter is on the overlapping effects, intended and unintended, that these institutions have on the immediate personal setting of participants.

Family

In this first section, I examine the family as a support institution for young people in the period of transition from childhood dependence in the family home to adult independence in the community. In the YESM (page 57) the family appears both as an institution with societal functions and norms, and as a domain of individual experience in the immediate personal setting, where individual experience may vary. In Australia, families are expected to support their dependent children until at least the age of sixteen. This is evidenced by the conditions of the welfare system. Where families do not have independent means to support their children, they are provided with funds from the welfare system for this purpose (Centrelink 2010 p.2). After the age of sixteen, young people from such families can obtain independent payments in specific circumstances. However, there continues to be an expectation of ongoing subsidy from the family, until they have completed their transition to independence. It was not until the age of twenty-five that family income is no
longer taken into account in determining whether young people will receive welfare support and how much they receive (Furlong and Kelly 2005 p.212; Centrelink 2010 p.20). As mentioned in the literature review chapter, recently these policies have been modestly reduced.

Families support young people’s engagement with the labour market in two major ways. Firstly, under current arrangements in Australia, it is assumed that ‘ normally’ functioning families will pass on the necessary moral dispositions and skills that enable individuals to participate effectively, subsist and be citizens. In neo-liberal thought, ‘ participation in the market becomes the condition of being an effective individual’ (Yeatman 2000 p.187-188). Such skills need to be learnt during the dependent child and youth phases of the life cycle. However participants do not identify family provision of general employability skills as a significant issue. This may be because all the young people participating in this research had been successful in obtaining some form of employment. It is likely that if these skills needed to be learnt at an early age, then this group has acquired at least some of this learning.

The second way that families are expected to support young people’s engagement with the labour market is by passing on adult economic benefits to dependent young people, supporting the rationale for lowered youth wages and welfare benefits to this group (Yeatman 2000 p.188-189). Jones and Wallace (1992 p.151) state that there are problems regarding this assumption due to a lack of evidence. The evidence in this research demonstrates that for some young people there has been a breakdown of the traditional family unit with regard to this function. Some of the participants worked and contributed at least in part to support themselves from a very early age, as the following examples demonstrate.

I worked at the hotel, I basically started when I was really young, I was only 12 or something, 13 or something, I was really young. I worked there for about eight years. (Carly, 23, Retail).

I first started in hospitality and kitchen work when I was 13… So I have been doing it for quite a few years. (Barbara, 20, Retail)

I started mid 13. (Liam, 20, Hospitality)

Bob has also been working and somewhat financially independent from an early age. He feels he has the ability, developed out of necessity, to negotiate the precarious youth labour
market and seems to be content with little external support. He takes some pride in his abilities, but knows he must continue to earn money:

…since I was 13, so I was forced to come up with the money wherever I can… so I think I’ll do fine… I earned my money wherever I could, you know, because I had no choice. (Bob, 21, Health and Community Services)

A number of young people report supplementing parental support through paid employment at very young ages. This is an unexpected finding, particularly as the employment they describe was not in family businesses and therefore is not legal in South Australia. The research did not aim to investigate underage employment and this information was volunteered without direct questioning related to this issue. More participants may well have had similar experiences.

Despite this early to very early engagement with the labour market, most of the participants aged fifteen to twenty-four remain primarily dependent on their parents. Where there are potential limitations on parental support, young people anticipate barriers in pursuing some pathways. For example, Paige and Lee are very aware of financial barriers and risks of their financial dependence on parents.

Family issues [mean] that I might not be able to go to Uni or something... just financially, something like that. (Paige, 16, Retail)

I would like to go out into the workforce and earn some money and get that behind me rather than go straight into uni. I thought about it, because my parents, my mum isn't that wealthy, she is not just going to fork out all the money for uni and things like that, and then you have got to move to the city and I haven't just got a house to stay at. I would have to pay and everything. (Lee, 17, Health and Community Services, Hospitality)

For this group of young people with families with fewer resources, assumptions about families enabling young people to maximise their vocational potential, are not upheld. Participants tell of how their parents’ lack of financial resources cause them to become independent of family support, at different stages of their educational or labour market transitions. Sarah is one example of a number of young people whose families are unable to support them during late high school and/or university study. Sarah’s access to government welfare did not make up for the lack of family support and she was reliant on precarious work throughout her studies:

I supported myself all the way through high school, so I paid for all of my stuff that I’ve needed. And then through my 2 university degrees... So, without being able to get family assistance, I’ve had to use Centrelink help.
So that’s been really beneficial for me and at times I was working 2 to 3 jobs as well as going to uni… There was just, they were not financially able to, I guess provide me with any assistance. I didn’t have a choice. (Sarah, 24, Health and Community Services, Retail)

Assistance from welfare (Centrelink) enabled Sarah to gain her education, but was only a supplement, as she needed other income from employment. The complete lack of family support made it very difficult for her and could have placed her chosen vocational goal in jeopardy.

The assumption that families provide a secure underpinning for young people’s early engagement/s with the labour market is not confirmed by participants and supports Beck and Beck-Gernshiem’s (2002 p.22) argument that institutions such as the family have become less secure. Rick’s experience highlights that there is risk and sometimes anxiety, attached to the dependence of adult youth. Rick hopes to, but is not sure that he can, stay at home until he finishes his trade training and can earn a skilled wage.

It depends, I think. I might get kicked out or something. No, probably [I’ll leave home] after me trade. (Rick, 18, Retail)

Rick’s apprentice wage is based on the assumption that he will be subsidised by his parents, and is well below the minimum wage and poverty line. Rick’s family acknowledges this need for support, but does not guarantee its provision, should emotional or financial resources deteriorate in the household.

Some young people have complex dependency situations because of separation in families. For example, Lucy lives with her grandparents, who supplement her living expenses. Her parents pay her education-related expenses and she covers her personal items. Lucy works at two casual part-time jobs, in addition to school, to subsidise her costs:

I pay only $50 a fortnight in rent, cause, I live with my grandparents, but my parents pay for my schooling and I pay if I go out for a meal. ...I work two jobs, I work probably nearly more than anyone here (in the focus group) and I find I don’t have enough money to support myself. (Lucy, 17, Retail, Hospitality)

In another example, Jason describes his friend who lives alone, as his mother lives with her boyfriend. The lease of the house is in his mother’s name and she helps by supplying some food:

My friend, he lives at home, but his mum, you could say that she lives there, but she doesn't really, she lives with her boyfriend. She comes every
two days and drops off some food and leaves. But the house is under her name. (Jason, 17, Retail)

These examples demonstrate diverse family support arrangements, despite an assumption of a minimum level of support implicit in lowered rates of pay and social security income for young people. The likelihood of a marriage ending in divorce increased from 28% between 1985-1987, to 33% between 2000-2002 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007 p.45), resulting in a variety of living arrangements for dependent young people. There is no standard or reliable amount of support, emotional, financial or material provided by parents, based on the evidence of participants in this research.

In addition, some young workers believe they have the responsibility to actively contribute to their family. Jackie believes she is indebted to her parents for the assistance she and her boyfriend received while studying and working. When she secured a stable and well paying position and was living independently, she took on the responsibility of caring for her younger brother, who is in high school. Jackie’s situation exemplifies the way the financial burden on parents of caring for ‘adult’ youths is understood by some young people and parents. In this case, with no ill feeling, some costs associated with her upbringing were understood to be a debt (or favour) that should be repaid:

I was living with my parents, well, I had to move away for uni and then I came back and stayed with my parents, but then they moved away and my boyfriend stayed, so we bought a house, so we have had a house for three years or something. So we are still there, paying everything and my younger brother lives with me too. We pay for some things for him, I try not to, but there are always those little things that you go out to the pub for tea or something and you can't make him pay for it, because he only earns $50 a week or something. So mum and dad pay rent for him to us. And yeah, well we didn't get them to give us much because my boyfriend actually lived with my parents for four years and they charged him not much. So yes, and they give him a certain amount of money each week as well, that he spends in the first three days. (Jackie, 24, Health and Community Services)

This example not only demonstrates a belief on the part of a young person that the family does them ‘a favour’ in supporting their child but also that a sibling can be given responsibility for the social, and part of the financial, support of another younger sibling.

These notable examples illustrate that complex mutual dependencies exist within families. Many participants are receiving some level of support from their parents. However there is often a need to supplement this through employment. In some cases young people were contributing significantly to their own costs and even sometimes making contributions to
their families. While there seemed no minimum standard amount of support provided by families to participants, it is likely that there is a minimum level of family support needed to provide equal opportunity in education and the labour market. Levels and types of family support are analysed further in the next chapter. To satisfy intergenerational social responsibilities as described by Rubery (2004), the amount and elements of this support would need to be identified and provided to all young people. For some participants who are not receiving adequate support from their family, the institution of welfare is significant.

**Welfare provisions**

Approximately 20% of the participants are recipients of income from the welfare system. The conditions under which welfare is available are strongly influenced by other institutions, for example, family and education. In the case of young people, where the family is deemed by welfare authorities to be unable to support dependent youth, a minimum level of income is provided by the state to the family or individual for this purpose. This income can be received while the young person is in approved education; otherwise they must be seeking employment. Most of the participants receiving welfare and who are receiving little or no family support state they are working because the welfare payment is insufficient to meet their daily needs. Young people’s entitlements to welfare are lower than adult entitlements and are often tied to the income of their parents. Some young people are unable to access either welfare or family support, up until the age of twenty-five, because of strict eligibility criteria and the discretionary and private nature of familial support.

Esping-Andersen (1990 p.21-22) and Shaver (2001 p.286) describe how, in the past, access to welfare has lessened citizens’ dependency on the labour market, assisting in the de-commodification of labour. However, Shaver (2002 p.286) argues this support for decommodification is declining in Australia. Current policy reflects a neo-liberal approach, only providing ‘conditional’ welfare at a residual level. Recipients must lack the skills or dispositions that allow effective market-participation to receive this assistance. The state is then seen to have the responsibility to fund services to help these individuals acquire the necessary discipline and skills (Yeatman 2000 p.188-89). Current welfare, education and labour market policies imply or require young people to be dependent on their parents.
Evidence from participants shows that the current welfare system works for some people and not for others. One young man who received a welfare entitlement, while living with and receiving some support from his parents, found it easy to claim a higher payment when he later chose to live independently of his family. Garfield’s experience exemplifies the ideals of choice and autonomy, in that he was able to move from dependence/reliance for support between family/welfare and the labour market at times that he felt were appropriate. He reports receiving adequate income to support these choices:

I’d say it was about, oh for myself probably a year and a half, two years ago. It was just time for me to move out of home, so I did move out of home and was unfortunately on the dole at the time and I’ve now gotten a job so that’s made me you know, financially independent. (Garfield, 23, Business Services)

Garfield’s situation, where he could move at his own volition between family support, welfare support and the labour market, provides the basis for a progression towards full citizenship and decommodified labour market engagement. However, Garfield is the only participant amongst the ninety interviewed who speaks of his involvement with welfare in such a positive way.

Most participants who rely on the welfare system find it limits their choices and level of independence in various ways, providing incentives for some behaviours and disincentives for others. For example, Melanie’s need for regular, reliable income from the welfare system restricts how much she can work and earn. If she earns over a certain amount her welfare income is reduced proportionately. She states that it is not in her interest to jeopardise her regular income from welfare by working ‘too much’, as her work is casual and precarious and she is not able to depend upon it:

[I]f I earn over a certain amount then Centrelink will punish me for it, so I’ve got to, yeah, keep it down a bit. (Melanie, 23, Administration & Business Services)

Melanie’s study commitments are supported by the welfare system but the self-limitation in engagement with the labour market, because of the welfare system’s conditions, may have negative consequences in terms of her opportunities for training, skill enhancement and promotion. Melanie’s perception that Centrelink is ‘punishing’ her for earning extra income focuses only on Centrelink’s policies. She does not recognise the negative role of the labour market in requiring working hours on demand, and not providing regular income to supplement her welfare income to enable her to study. Therefore the welfare system, the labour market and the way they intersect, negatively impact on her autonomy and choices.
For Corinne, the higher rates of entitlements she would receive if she moved out of home functioned as an incentive to do so. While increasing her income, she reports that this placed her in a precarious living situation. Corinne believes this extra income was necessary for her continued study:

I moved out of my home and into my boyfriend's father's house and was living with him for a while, so that I could get the away from home allowance, to help to pay for studies… I ended up moving out because my experience with him wasn't that pleasant at times, because he had alcohol illness, so when he was drunk, he wasn't a very pleasant person, so I moved in with a girlfriend from church and was paying my way there. (Corinne, 24, Health & Community Services)

Corinne left home as a result of the welfare system’s conditions around payment levels and her desire to increase her level of income to an amount she felt necessary for continuation of her study. In her experience it was difficult to secure appropriate and safe accommodation within her income limits.

Eligibility and definitions of dependence and independence that determine the level of income a young claimant receives are confusing for some participants. A number of interviewees feel that the definitions are not consistent, fair or logical. For example, in the first quote below Jamie explains that she receives an ‘independent’ rate of entitlement, although still dependent on her parents. Similarly, Jane in the second quote explains she was considered as independent by Centrelink due to her earning above an eligibility threshold. This meant that she was deemed independent, although still living at home. In the third quote, Rachel highlights her perception of the inconsistency and injustice of this ‘earning threshold’ eligibility condition, which enables her brother to receive entitlements and still live dependently, while she receives nothing in the same situation:

I am [independent] according to Centrelink. …I don’t really think Centrelink’s definition of independence is particularly good. So I’m still living with my parents and I have very little expenses. I don’t have to pay board or rent or food mostly. (Jamie, 19, Retail)

I did have to get Youth Allowance for a little while and I was on the full rate of that because I was on the independent allowance before I moved out of home. You know what I mean, because I earned enough before. (Jane, 24, Health & Community Services)

[I]f I had to be completely independent, I wouldn’t be able to do that. …I look at my brother who has got a Centrelink independent living Youth Allowance and I think it’s ridiculous because he lives at home like me, he
doesn’t have to pay for anything and sure he earns his own money and he pays for his own clothes and things, but I think there’s a real flaw in that.

…I think independent living should be whether or not you live out of home, it shouldn’t be, how much you earn and whether that makes you as though you could live out of home. In the end he earns an extra $200-$300 a fortnight for absolutely nothing and I think that could be better spent on someone else, who’s probably a bit less fortunate that him... (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)

Participants whether receiving or not receiving welfare income assistance, because they are defined as ‘independent’ by the welfare system, did not see this system as logical or fair. They said independence should be related to living outside the family home. Some young people receive full ‘youth’ welfare benefits because they had earned a certain level of income (roughly equivalent to welfare income support) in a defined period. This did not relate to parental income, parental subsidy, amount of board paid, if any, or whether the young person continued to live in the parental home. The example of Rachel and her brother, cited above, results in perceptions of injustice. They are both receiving the same level of parental support and are both working, but because Rachel was unable to earn the same amount as her brother in an earlier defined period, he reached the eligibility threshold and now receives welfare income, while Rachel does not.

Daniel identifies that some young people excluded from the welfare system could be unable to find employment, and their parents may not have discretionary income to provide them with economic support at a sufficient level. The welfare system does not look at expenditure but rather takes gross income into account when establishing entitlements. This means that high mortgage payments, for example, may preclude parents providing cash and other support to young dependents. Peers may be receiving ‘pocket money’ from wealthier parents, or wages from part-time work or their own income from Centrelink if their parents are eligible for support. Daniel identifies a group of young people who may miss out on support of this kind from all the sources expected to subsidise young people’s transition to adulthood:

Some kids pay board and stuff … some people have to pay for their own schooling. If their parents earn too much and they don't get Centrelink benefits and stuff, it can be hard. Especially when you are still at school and you don't have a job and you don't get any money at all. Some parents do obviously [give pocket money], but if you have got a poor family and someone is paying off a house or whatever, there is not always enough money to give to the kid. (Daniel, 18, Hospitality)
This is an example of the lack of integrated functioning of institutions, such as the family and welfare system, to address inequities in income support of young people. Where parents cannot or will not provide income, and their gross income precludes welfare assistance, the young person has no economic autonomy unless they can obtain employment.

The youth welfare entitlement available to a young person to live independently, is lower than that of an adult and insufficient to live on, according to research participants. An example of this is a twenty year old refugee, Edmund, who came to Australia independently and with no other supports. Edmund struggles financially to support himself on full ‘youth’ welfare entitlements. Having no family to subsidise his costs, he finds it difficult to cope as a single person, on a low income, living independently:

   It was not enough for me, because I live by myself. I studied as well. So I have to deal with problem at school, so you know, the money the government give us, it was not enough. (Edmund, 20, Hospitality)

Edmund lives in a state of considerable anxiety about meeting his day-to-day needs. His options are limited in regards to any major change in the foreseeable future, given the requirements of his study, and the conditions under which he receives his welfare entitlement. Edmund had attempted to supplement his welfare payment with wages from employment, but found the only job he was able to obtain jeopardised his education because of the late hours, causing him to sleep in class. Edmund’s experience is a good example of environmental factors limiting capability, as described by Nussbaum (2000). The insufficient nature of Edmund’s welfare payment compelled him into the workforce, which affected his educational capabilities and future options.

The above discussion illustrates how the institution of welfare interacts with the other institutions of family, education and the labour market and influences the immediate personal setting of the young person as set out in the YESM (page 57). Unfortunately, in some cases the interactions or relationships produce a reduction in capabilities, choice and/or a limitation of benefits, which can have negative rather than positive impacts on the experience of the young person. While the expectation is that welfare benefits will support people without alternatives, and will foster employment and study opportunities, I have provided examples where young people choose to leave home to increase allowances, reduce potential work opportunities to maintain stable welfare entitlements, sometimes receive full youth entitlements when in subsidised dependent family situations, and
independent young people struggling to survive on ‘youth’ entitlements. These are examples of the complicated decisions young people have to make, and the complex interactions between welfare, their family and/or the labour market. Conditions for receipt of welfare have at times required sacrifices in support received from other institutions. This evidence suggests that some young people who have inadequate family support, do not receive sufficient or consistent support through welfare to promote effective engagement in work and study, that would enable a safe transition to independent adulthood. Therefore current welfare arrangements do not provide an adequate substitute for secure family support.

**Education System**

The third institution of education is identified as important for the participant group’s engagement with the labour market during their transition and in contributing to achieving financial independence from parents when they have achieved educational or training qualifications. Two major themes emerge from the data. The first relates to the inflexibility of education provision in terms of attendance times and the amount of time commitment required. This causes considerable difficulty when participants need to earn substantial amounts from the labour market, as the two sets of institutional requirements are frequently in conflict. This was described in the labour market chapter under the subsection on working time. The second issue relates to the role education is perceived to play in reaching desired vocational goals and is the focus of this section. It includes discussion of credentialism, vocational traineeships (both workplace based and school based), the substantial costs of education and the risks of investing in particular educational choices. The availability of financial and other supports for specific pathways and the influence this has on young people’s decision making is also addressed.

**Credentialism**

Current educational policy encourages young people to engage in increasing levels of education to equip them for work in a highly skilled ‘knowledge economy’. White and Wyn (2004 p.124) argue that predictions relating to job growth are not always accurate and young people’s increasing levels of education have not resulted in better employment outcomes. The implication of this is that vocational training and education does not always result in secure employment. Despite this, many young people interviewed stated that they consider education or training as the major pathway to secure employment and adulthood.
‘Credentialism’ is defined as a situation where employers demand higher levels of qualification from employees than may be required by the job tasks (White and Wyn 2004 p.125). ‘Credentials’ are used as signals about their holders, rather than genuinely linked to actual or necessary job characteristics. Quintini and Martin (2006 p.9) have highlighted ‘over-education’ as an increasing problem in many European countries, where one in five young workers hold educational qualifications that are higher than necessary for their current positions. Quintini and Martin (2006 p.18) argue that over-education rates have increased in fifteen out of twenty two OECD countries in the past decade, with young women more likely than young men to be over-educated.

The increase in educational participation by young people is not only in higher level and additional qualifications, but also in vocational educational pathways to qualifications for relatively unskilled jobs, for which previously there were no qualification requirements. Qualifications in areas such as retail and hospitality may not increase participants’ employability, but are encouraged by educational and welfare institutions. Publicly funded courses in Certificate II - Retail Operations and Certificate II - Hospitality Operations are in the five most common vocational training courses (National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) 2007 p.4). Research on such courses has found that this level of qualification is of little use in increasing students employability, and is only useful as a pathway to further study (Woods 2007 p.5). In the past, employees, particularly young people, have been employed in such positions and trained informally on-the-job. However, such informal training is no longer common according to participant reports. In their experience, training on-the-job consists of little more than the most basic level of demonstration of the work required. Any substantial on-the-job vocational training seems to have been subsumed within the formal traineeship system. Anna and Amy are typical of many participants in casual and part-time work in their comments about the training they receive:

I didn't know anything, but I had to learn fast. I didn't get any training at all, you basically had to learn it all by yourself. (Anna, 15, Retail)

No one really taught me anything, you know… I started working there and there was not much time, and then, when I would make a mistake, it was like, oh you have made a mistake again. (Amy, 17, Hospitality)

Despite Woods’ (2007) findings that low levels of qualification may not be useful in the labour market, there was a desire by a majority of participants to achieve some level of qualification. They say that this will assist in providing security in the labour market. Even
at the tertiary level there are examples of credentialism affecting young people’s aspirations and the level of educational attainment they feel they need. James was trying to avoid the labour market risk of unemployment by increasing his qualifications. This also means higher costs to him:

[T]he double degree, architecture and landscape architecture is a six year course. It is five years just for architecture, so I might as well do the other year, cause I know that there are not many jobs out there. So if I get both qualifications, I have got more of a chance. (James, 16, Retail)

Kate is already highly educated and qualified for her desired career. She is very ambitious and hopes to gain additional qualifications and skills. She believes her competitive edge relates to her willingness to continue to increase her credentials and dedicate her life to her career:

I finished my four years of engineering, which is the minimum and so now I've got a job as a graduate, I'm finishing the law degree part-time. …My aspiration is to get my chartered professional status, which usually takes about three years, but has jumped down to do it in 18 months. Post doing that, I have desires to take on postgraduate education. I'm not too sure what form it will take but I'm keen to maintain it in the technical spectrum so not Masters of Management, Business Administration or anything like that, more than likely say a PhD in something. (Kate, 22, Business Services)

Kate’s belief that she needs the level of qualifications she aspires to, may illustrate why Quintini and Martin (2006) find that over-education is more common for women. The fact that Kate is working in a masculinised field may add to her perception that she needs to demonstrate exceptional skills and qualifications to be competitive.

Formal qualifications alone, however, are not seen as sufficient to obtain employment. Many participants perceive references from employers, in the same or related fields to the qualification, as necessary to increase chances of employment. Only a few participants were able to gain concurrent work relating to their desired future careers while studying. Despite difficulties, for example, with shift work, relevant employment is still seen as highly desirable. For Jane, the experience of working with children relates to her teaching goals, so she chooses to manage the twenty-four hour rostering required:

It is not necessarily my preference. I think it is relevant to teaching and something I do enjoy, but it is more a step in the door. I don't really like the shift work… (Jane, 24, Health and Community Services)
Participants recognise that specific vocational qualifications may not be sufficient in themselves to guarantee employment in a chosen field. They are concerned that the world of work now requires pre-employment credentials as well, to make them more successful in a competitive labour market. This was a feature of the comments recorded from many of the young people participating in this research.

**School based traineeships**

Years in compulsory secondary education have increased (White and Wyn 2004 p.120), with a delayed engagement with the adult labour market, compared with previous generations (White and Wyn 2004 p.168). A recent feature of final school years has been the introduction of school-based traineeships. These are provided by an interaction of the two major institutions of education and the labour market. For some participants, this interaction provides a coordinated pathway from school to work in their chosen occupation. This is a good example of the effect of institutions working together to provide positive outcomes. Unfortunately, for a few young people, this type of training seems to be an inappropriate pathway to paid work (during school time) that may later restrict their vocational opportunities to those available through their particular school. This early choice may preclude obtaining the level of qualification or general education necessary to enter alternative training/educational pathways on completing secondary education. The attractions of paid work may lead a student to commit to unsuitable or narrow pathways. Decisions about whether or not to take the traineeship, and then balancing school and work commitments, are placed in the hands of the students.

For example, Katie has chosen to participate in a hairdressing traineeship and needs to take time out of school to complete the work component of her training. She has to make up for lost school time in her own time. This is in addition to other normal homework and the part-time hospitality employment in which she is already engaged. Prior to taking on this additional activity, Katie was a very high performing student, academically:

I'm doing hairdressing, I've got a VET course which will start next term, which is one day a week at the hairdressers. It's through school I got it, but it's just you like do a TAFE course, then I've just got to do a certain amount of hours in the salon and that completes the course. I take a whole one day off of school a week. [My school work], I'll just do it four days instead of five. (Katie, 16, Hospitality)

Katie’s complex transition and career path, including school, part-time employment and accredited training with an on the job component, has more associated risks than normal
school, because failure in any one of these areas could jeopardise the education process and close off other career options. While this opportunity is available through Katie’s school, she needs to take control of how she manages her educational requirements. A lower level of school achievement may limit her options should she require a certain level for entry to other tertiary studies. Katie is very confident of her ability to maintain high levels of academic achievement in her final school years, despite soon having responsibility for completing one fifth of her schoolwork without any educational supports, and in a reduced amount of time. This may be unrealistic. She does not express commitment to the goal of becoming a hairdresser, but is appreciative of being able to earn more money while at school, participating in accredited training and of having ‘won’ the opportunity of the traineeship, against considerable competition. What appears to be a seamless transition between education and the labour market, only works if Katie’s choice of hairdressing as a career, at the age of sixteen, turns out to be correct. She may be handicapped if she changes her mind.

Lee’s traineeship in youth work also cuts into her school time and means she needs to miss lessons, which she works on independently. Unlike Katie, Lee is concerned that this might become more difficult in her final year of school:

[I]t is a lot of responsibility for me, cause it is more independent learning, than having a teacher actually there. And also, I have to go to the teacher and ask what we did that day and catch up with that. It hasn’t been too bad yet, but when I get into Year 12, it might be a little bit harder, like just the time.

So first off I did want to go to uni, but I am not sure if I will be able to do that, with my school workload. Like my school, you know, my homework and stuff like that and with work and then here [at the school based traineeship], drawing up lessons and things like that. But you know, I might still be able to go to TAFE. (Lee, 17, Health and Community Services, Hospitality)

Lee believes her paid traineeship commitments will affect her post-school opportunities. This would only be worthwhile if Lee was very sure that the traineeship is in the area of her final vocational goal. She has already downgraded her academic ambition from university to TAFE because of her expectations of a lower high school certificate result, caused by her significant paid workload and absence from school. A lower level of tertiary qualification could be reflected in a lower wage at a later date, and therefore less opportunity for the achievement of financial independence and other adult goals like home ownership.
Mark was also able to start an apprenticeship part-time while still at school. He is able to put together an individualised career pathway at an early stage, which he hopes will allow him to reach his career goal sooner. Unlike Katie, he expresses great commitment to his career goal and seems likely to be advantaged by this opportunity:

> Well I've just completed my Certificate 2 in Engineering. With that a man comes down from Adelaide and gives me about a 2 hour session every month just on how to weld properly and stuff. If you don't know how to do something, just ask and they just teach you quickly. It will be good ‘cause now if I go off and do an apprenticeship it cuts it back to 3 years instead of 4. (Mark, 17, Manufacturing)

In summary, unless the vocational training is directly related to a carefully chosen and appropriate vocational goal, the requirements of a school based traineeship may have negative effects on other school achievement and preclude alternative more financially rewarding options for the young person at a later date. This example of institutional interaction between the educational institution and the labour market has hazards and risks associated with it.

**Income support for further education**

Where people do not make an early commitment at school, the availability of post-school pathways is dependent on a variety of factors. One of the major factors is the potential for income support while studying. Some educational pathways are located in the labour market and pay wages, some are supported by the welfare system and others are not. This influences the desirability or even the possibility of certain options and outcomes. Most young people receive some level of support from their families during the time they are engaged in education. A minority of participants are receiving support from the welfare system while they study to either supplement or replace family support. These are the major supports for young people in further education which they supplement to varying degrees with labour market engagement. Not all young people have adequate access to these supports and anticipate financial difficulty in undertaking their desired studies.

Jean’s choices are constrained by her high-school educational achievements as well as her need for income. Four years after leaving school, she still hopes to attend university and achieve her career aspirations. As a young adult, Jean recognises that she will need to keep working, but with the support of friends and family it might be possible to commence studies:
I want to be a teacher, so I’m doing a test at the end of this year to apply as an adult, I didn't get a high enough TER. I was thinking that I'll stay here and I'll just be a shift supervisor because they get paid for every hour they work, they get about $21 an hour. At least then I can stay in something that I know and they can work around my hours, I was hoping that's what would happen, I don't know. …I've got pretty good support, like friends and family, that if [it] so happens that I lose my job, I don’t have much money, but I've always got them to help me out if I needed it. I think money would be the only barrier, like oh you know, I can't keep going to school every day if I'm not earning much money and stuff like that. (Jean, 22, Hospitality)

Financial issues are exacerbated at times by youth wage rates and fluctuating hours and earnings. Jean is explicit about the risks of dependence on the precarious labour market, but feels able to take this risk because she has a fallback position of supportive friends and family. It seems that the more support systems available to a young person, the less the risk and therefore more choice available to them. This is further evidence that where institutions complement each other choice is increased, and conversely, where there is over reliance on one institution choice is reduced. Many young people acknowledge the effect finances have on their ability to attain goals or ‘choose’ certain routes for achieving transitional and future aspirations. For example, Melanie’s lack of ‘financial resources’ dictates the speed at which she can attain her educational goals. This has flow on effects for other aspects of her life. Despite the possibility of economic factors being a barrier, she remains positive about her ‘choices’ and that barriers can be overcome:

At the moment, I'm studying a course that will get me into full-time work in the legal industry, so I'd like to do that for at least the next ten years, I guess. Perhaps I'd like to study law later on, but at the moment I'd just like to work for a few years and save some money and buy a house. …I don't have very many financial resources, everything takes a bit longer [but] I'm very positive about my ability to you know, work it out long term. (Melanie, 23, Administration & Business Services)

Garfield would also like to attend university to increase his skill level and job options. However, he is concerned about the rising costs of this type of education. He states that these costs may preclude this choice for him in the future:

[W]ithin 5-10 years, I’d eventually like to get into university on a part-time basis. I don’t know really, what my possible working future is going to be, …I mean if I’m planning to do university or business management, I’ll need the funds behind me, but also the necessary pre entry skills, that could be an issue. I have dyslexia so that maybe something that inhibits me. …I have a sister, she’s studying at university and it’s just phenomenal how much she’s paying just to do that. I’m thinking well I’m looking to start it
when I’m say 30, at least another 5-6 years time, how much is that going to rise by? I mean what am I going to be looking at? $15,000, $20,000 a year and if I’m working, well I won’t be able to get HECS or whatever it is, so that’s going to be a very large barrier to come across… (Garfield, 23, Business Services)

Garfield identifies a number of personal and environmental factors which influence his options for the future. Garfield may be an example of a person who needs more than average support to have the same choices as others. Nussbaum (2006) might advocate for him to receive extra assistance, on the basis that he may need more resources to reach the same level of capability as other people, given his learning disability.

Financial barriers to achieving educational goals are mentioned by a number of participants, including Jean, Melanie and Garfield above. They all describe constraints on choices because of economic barriers. White and Wyn (2004 p.167) argue that young people from privileged backgrounds are able to use social resources to ‘make their lives work’. They note that many researchers have found that cultural capital is a significant feature of successful navigation of a ‘difficult’ labour market. As an example, White and Wyn (2004 p.167) discuss research by Evans, that indicates that young people’s life chances are linked to their ability to engage in long term planning, and this is related to their socio-economic background. Participants like Garfield, Melanie and Jean do not have the ‘privilege’ of sufficient support to enable the most efficient pathway to their desired goals.

The participants’ emphasis on financial barriers to optimal educational achievement may be because these issues are better known and more tangible than some other social and structural barriers, that may also be at play. A barrier, such as a lack of social capital in the form of support, advice and other resources may be very important but is not as obvious as the financial issues, and this may be why it is not raised by participants.

The financial support received from the institutions of welfare, family or the labour market, influences access to further education, and in some cases what further education can be undertaken. A well-resourced and supportive family facilitates access to the most options, whereas the greater the engagement with the labour market, the less time is available for education. Welfare explicitly supports some options and excludes others as part of its eligibility criteria for income support. The above evidence demonstrates that institutions
provide support and/or create barriers to a range of theoretically available pathways and options, inhibiting choice and fostering certain favoured pathways.

**Risk and education**

Even where considerable planning and commitment has occurred and participants are able to undertake their chosen training and education options, positive outcomes are not always achieved. Incurring university fees and/or reducing earnings because of engaging in accredited traineeships did not always ‘pay off’ in terms of accessing work commensurate with these investments. Jackie’s experience exemplifies this. After spending several years away from her hometown in rural South Australia, incurring accommodation and study costs, Jackie returned with a specific vocational degree, to find work. While there is employment in her chosen vocation in the area, there were no vacancies. Wanting to stay close to where she had grown up, she found work in a related but different field, which did not require the same level of qualification or provide the same pay or opportunities for promotion. A suitable qualification for this job could have been obtained in less time and at much less cost.

… I wanted to come back here, but there wasn't that specific job available and I was just really lucky that I got this job. I guess. (Jackie, 24, Health and Community Services)

In order to secure work, Jackie needed to be flexible in the type of employment that is available to her in the region where she is purchasing a home. Her location reduces the options available and although holding a sought after qualification, she is unable to gain work in this field. Jackie has financially invested in a qualification and skill set that she may not be able to use. Limited job opportunities may cause difficulties for young people trying to gain employment, especially in rural areas.

I have always wanted to work with kids, I guess. I went and did my teaching degree, but because there was no teaching jobs here, I went for this job, so I guess I am happy at the moment, where I am, still getting to go into classrooms and stuff. One day I might go back teaching. …Cause like teachers didn't leave. …all those old teachers that should leave, are still there. …cause we just brought a house, I didn't really want to be paying off a house and renting somewhere else as well. And I moved away for four years [to study], so I would rather come back home and not do more travelling. (Jackie, 24, Health and Community Services)

This experience is not confined to rural areas. Like Jackie, Jo has found that employment in her profession is simply not available in the metropolitan area where she lives, due to lack of turnover and few job opportunities. Jo believes now that she may never obtain
work commensurate with her training. General laboratory work will not use the specialist training Jo has completed.

It’s all location dependent in terms of jobs, the forensics location. …very competitive. …obviously you have to wait for someone to die, a vacancy and it’s pretty tough and there’s really only one centre in Adelaide that does it, but I could work in any kind of lab really. (Jo, 22, Health & Community Services)

These young people report that they have acquired educational debts or have lost income to gain qualifications that seem to have little use to them, despite their interest in the relevant industries and their continuing desire to use their specialist skills. This confirms that an investment in tertiary education, even when successfully completed, is an expensive and risky business, which does not always result in increased income. These young people are liable to pay their educational debts regardless of the usefulness of their degrees in earning income.

Other participants are aware that their educational attainment might not have immediate applicability. They are thinking that in the future, changed circumstances may require a certain level of achievement and therefore it would be prudent to obtain that early. Some participants realised that career goals may need to be changed during their working life for various reasons. Daniel intends to work in the building industry. He knows there is a high rate of injury in his chosen career and that his investment in an apprenticeship may not provide sustenance for him in the long term. To avoid this risk he intends to finish high school in order to be able to change direction should he experience such an injury in the future.

Just in case, like in ten years or something, I get like injured when I was on the job. Trades are not the safest work and I’ll probably get a sore back and if I can't do it anymore, then what is behind me, well then I have Year 12. So then I can go to uni or get a TAFE course and get a desk job or something. (Daniel, 18, Hospitality)

Daniel does not need this level of education for work in his chosen field. He believes he will get an apprenticeship and acquire skills in return for reduced wages, which will provide a good and secure income for as long as he is able to perform the work. However, he foresees that he may have to again accept no or reduced wages to retrain in a different field, later in life. This would not be a traditional training pathway. In the past an early sacrifice of wages for skill acquisition would be expected to pay off throughout the individual’s working lifetime.
Unlike Daniel, Jim is not using education to expand his future options. He may experience vulnerabilities inherent in believing in a ‘job for life’. His investment in working on the family farm affects his achievement at school and therefore the possibility of future education or training. It would be unfortunate for Jim, if the farm is unable to provide for all of his future needs.

I just come back from four weeks off school for seeding leave, so I got a bit of money in the bank right now. …Well technically there isn’t [seeding leave] it’s just my old man wanted me home for seeding, so I took four weeks off school, got harvest leave, but not seeding leave, because my old man needed me and my brother’s got a bung shoulder at the moment, so he couldn’t really do a lot.

[I] generally do what assignments or lessons I feel I’m going to benefit from a lot and then when they come up, they’re due, I generally do them then. So apart from that, I get home, after being on a tractor for 12 hours or something and the last thing you want to do is homework, so you just crash.

(Jim, 17 Agriculture)

The interaction of the institutions of the labour market, family and education system are working to create risks for Jim’s future. The current apparent coherence between the labour market and the family, in the attempt to provide a stable financial future for Jim, may not be secure. The farm, according to Jim, currently needs labour from family members to run productively enough to support one family. In the future, should both Jim and his brother form families and depend on the farm, it might need to support three families. This is problematic. If Jim does not own his own farm, his skills could be utilised in labouring for other farms, as long as he is fit enough, and there is work available. The education system is cooperating with the institution of the family by releasing Jim from school to work, but this time off is detrimental to Jim’s academic achievement. This is another example of a young person who is expected to be able to keep up with the school curriculum, without teaching assistance, after working a full-time job. Jim’s current environmental pressures, namely the need for his labour on the farm, are limiting his future options and capabilities, by having a pronounced negative effect on his academic achievement. In this case the apparent coordination between the three institutions may not be to Jim’s benefit, possibly excluding him from options other than the family farm or related low paid work in the future.

In summary, credentialism is making educational qualifications and work experience more important for labour market entry and progression. Considerable investment in tertiary
education or foregone wages in apprenticeship training can be risky. As highlighted by the experience of participants, it does not always pay off in terms of secure higher wages during their working lives. The school system underpins further education and training and is highly structured in its attendance requirements and homework demands. Some flexibilities such as rural harvest leave and school based apprenticeships allow students to engage in other potentially useful activities during school time, but no attempt seems to be made to provide teaching assistance to these students, during the time away or in extra tuition on their return. School based traineeships can require a commitment to one pathway at a very early age, which can act to close off other options. It is possible that the need to work, to obtain money, is stronger for lower socio-economic groups. This may mean that students from these groups, who have significant work commitments, do not achieve their academic potential, thus perpetuating their inability to access higher wages. It is assumed that parents will provide support, to the extent that young people will not need to work an amount of hours or at times that will jeopardise their schooling. This is not always so, according to interviewees. Nussbaum’s (2000) idea that the acquisition of capabilities is dependent on sufficient environmental support is confirmed by these findings. Educational engagement may be affected by inadequate supports resulting in increased labour market dependence. It seems that too much work while studying can reduce educational achievement but qualifications are needed later to underpin successful labour market engagement, although they do not guarantee it. This is a conflict between meeting immediate day-to-day needs through labour market engagement, while giving sufficient time and attention to achieving progress towards vocational and educational qualifications needed to enhance future opportunities. Such interactions between institutions occur across many life domains and are further explored in the next section.

Interaction between institutions

In the preceding analysis, participants described the four institutions of family, welfare, education and labour market, as important in supporting their transition to adulthood and independence. There are instances where welfare has supported education and independence, where the labour market has enabled young people to make useful contributions to their families and their own sustenance; when families have supported participation in the labour market; and education and the labour market have integrated to enhance young people’s employability. These are the kind of interactions that our society expects of these important supportive institutions. On the other hand, there is evidence that
sometimes there is a lack of coordination which can work against successful pathways for some young people. The practices and policies of these institutions at times prevent or make difficult desired options, and their interactions sometimes force decisions, which appear to be detrimental to the young person. This is because a range of demands and resources exist or are created through these four institutions and their interactions, which cannot always be balanced to optimise supports available for chosen pathways.

Voydanoff’s (2004 p.398-399) definitions of demands and resources are cited in chapter three and are relevant here. She describes demands as ‘claims’ created by engagement with particular life domains that require individual effort and resources as ‘assets’ that may be available from such life domains. The analysis in the preceding sections of this chapter suggests that the four institutions of family, welfare, labour market and education give rise to structural assets (resources) and structural claims (demands) from the perspective of the participants. Table 3 sets out examples of demands and resources discussed by participants as affecting their autonomy and influence in the labour market against each of the four key institutions.

Table 3 -Institutional demands and resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Resources</th>
<th>Demands</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labour market</td>
<td>• Pay</td>
<td>• Fluctuating and inconvenient availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• References</td>
<td>• Too many/too few hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Skill acquisition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>• Economic: accommodation &amp; food</td>
<td>• Financial contribution (varying levels)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Advice, guidance, counselling</td>
<td>• Maintenance of childlike role and status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Fallback support, when other options fail</td>
<td>• Specified conditions, such as work or training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Welfare</td>
<td>• Economic: cash payments</td>
<td>• Compulsory engagement in approved activities (i.e. job search, education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Access to other services e.g. health and job agencies</td>
<td>• Regular reporting and accommodation of requests for information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Conditions/eligibility for entitlement, e.g. family circumstances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>• Access to courses both while at school and post-school</td>
<td>• Fees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Access to qualifications and the possibility of better employment</td>
<td>• Structured attendance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Homework/assignments for out of school hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants value the resources available from their engagement with the labour market, such as wages, references to assist in future job seeking and any relevant skill acquisition. Demands and conflict arise from fluctuating and inconvenient availability for work, when employers require them for too many or too few hours of work. Similarly, resources included under the institutions of family, welfare and education, list potential benefits arising from engagement with these institutions. Some demands, for example the labour markets requirement for extensive availability with unpredictable hours offered, are in conflict with other demands, such as structured attendance in education. This makes gaining support from both institutions difficult at times, and occasionally impossible. Gaining resources from an institution such as the family can make meeting demands from other institutions, such as the labour market and education, easier. While the table sets out examples of demands and resources made by the specified institutions, individuals may be able to access additional resources, or be required to meet additional demands related to their personal circumstances. On the other hand, some young people report they do not have access to some of the resources listed against institutions, such as family resources.

Discussions with participants highlight the complex process of navigating demands and resources from institutions in order to gain adequate secure support for their life stage and transition to adulthood. These are good examples of Beck and Beck-Gernshiem’s (2002 p.23) ‘paradox of institutional individualism’. Beck and Beck-Gernshiem (2002 p.23) argue that institutions such as welfare can encourage individualisation by forcing people to organise their own lives. They state that ‘one has to become active, inventive and resourceful, to develop ideas of one's own, to be faster nimbler and more creative - not just on one occasion, but constantly, day after day’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002 p.23). Nicole’s story exemplifies the need for complex individual organisation. She balances the demands and resources of each institution to cobble together support for her life stage, attempting to minimise negative interactions and maximise access to resources.

After a conflict with her father, Nicole is living away from home. She is receiving some welfare entitlements but these are not sufficient for her living and schooling costs, and her aunt supplements these. Nicole is reliant on precarious ‘youth’ work for minimal economic autonomy. Nicole cannot see a time in the near future when she will be financially independent and does not think it would be truly possible without a full-time career type job.

I’m living in a home stay situation …I’m living with a lady, …I pay $150 a fortnight but my relatives pay the rest of it, because it’s actually $200 a
week. So basically I live there and I study, and I do what I want, I just need to let her know where I am because she’s legally responsible.

I wouldn’t be able to live out of home if it wasn’t for my relatives. When I was living with my dad, I was originally supposed to pay $100 a fortnight out of what I got from Centrelink, but I asked my dad if I could not pay that …he kind of didn’t really say anything, something about oh, I’ll see. And so I just kind of left it at that, and I didn’t. But then when my dad decided to be difficult and I told him I was moving out again, I kind of had to start paying a lot of that money again. So now, out of the Centrelink that I get, which is like $180 a fortnight, I have to pay $150 of that to the lady I’m staying with, …so I get $30, not including what I earn, so I usually work about 5 hours a week, but because I’m casual I could get as little as 2½ hours. So it kind of depends. But if it wasn’t for my aunt, …she pays for my school fees, …she pays for bus, she pays for textbooks and all, like, what I need for school. If I’m desperately in need of some money, I can get it off my relatives. But yeah, generally, I support myself in most ways.

[To be independent] I’d need to get a lot more hours and be paid more, …I don’t think I’ll be completely financially independent until I’m out of university and got a proper job. (Nicole, 17, Retail)

The wages Nicole earns are not enough to live on and she supplements the income with her Centrelink entitlement. Her hourly pay rate was calculated at a training rate for her first six months, which was even less than the junior rate. She needs to delicately balance her study and workload to ensure as much income as possible through paid work and welfare.

It’s not really enough to properly live off, which is why I need to get the Centrelink, which is why next year I don’t know what to do. I definitely don’t want to do 4 subjects again, but if I do 2, I’ll need to work the rest of the time to be able to survive. So I don’t know. I started off on like $6 something plus casual loading which is like $1 something, which my aunt kind of joked about as being slave labour. But at that stage, it wasn’t really about the money. It’s become increasingly about the money, but now that I’m 17 and off trainee wage, I’m on about $10.50 an hour, which is better, but I can’t really live off like one day a week, which is what I’m working at the moment, if I wasn’t getting Centrelink. So it’s not an issue at the moment, but it could be in the future. When you first start, you’re on a trainee wage for 6 months, but I think it changes like for different ages. …during holidays, it was really hard for everybody to get lots of hours and they weren’t giving people who got paid more very many hours. And because I really wanted to work, I kind of said that I prefer to be getting like $6 an hour and working a lot more. (Nicole, 17, Retail)

While still receiving financial support from extended family, Nicole’s nuclear family is not functioning in the way that might be expected for a seventeen year old. Nicole’s mother is absent and therefore not providing any support or assistance. The breakdown in the relationship between Nicole and her father has left her with little emotional or financial support from him. It seems that Nicole’s only family support and guidance is from her
aunt, who has no formal responsibility to provide this. Nicole has limited access to the resources listed against the institution of family in Table 3. Due to this reduced family support, Nicole is heavily reliant on the welfare entitlement she receives, although this entitlement does not come close to covering her independent living expenses. Nicole’s casual work in the youth labour market is highly precarious and she is unable to depend on this attachment for economic security. Nicole’s complex supports from various institutions allow her to continue with her study and living situation, with which she is happy. However, any change would put her whole life situation at risk. Nicole’s circumstances need constant re-evaluation of supports, risks, resources and demands. This illustrates the impact of individualisation on the lifestyles of some young people.

Nicole receives no support from her biological parents. However, her father’s refusal to state to Centrelink that he will not allow her to live at home, limits her access to resources from the institution of welfare. Parental income is taken into account in determining whether youth allowance will be paid and the rate at which it is paid. It appears that Nicole’s ‘living at home’ rate of allowance is further eroded by her father’s income.

Nicole is receiving approximately $300 per fortnight from her aunt, to cover the remainder of her board and other school related expenses. Interestingly, this regular ‘gift’ is not counted as income by Centrelink and therefore has no effect on her welfare support. In effect, Nicole has two anomalies working for and against her support from the welfare institution. The first is that despite being unable to live at home, her father’s statement and income prevent her from being classed as independent. Secondly, despite receiving regular income from her aunt, this is not counted as income by Centrelink, unlike earned income (wages), but is defined by Centrelink as a gift. This situation means that Nicole can devote a regular time commitment to study and may benefit from this in her future opportunities for tertiary study and stable employment.

Nicole’s preferred choice is to finish year twelve while commencing bridging studies in information technology (IT). However she is unsure of her educational future because of Centrelink eligibility criteria:

…the original plan was that next year I’ll do one or two subjects of year 12, to finish off year 12, and then at the same time, I’ll do a first year uni level course in IT. But I’m not sure if I want to go straight ahead with that because I won’t be able to get money from Centrelink and so I’ll need to work more to be able to support myself. So I think I’ll just be finishing off year 12 next year and then hopefully get a pretty good TER score and get straight into a university course.
Nicole needs to be in ‘approved’ full-time study or be seeking work in order to qualify for Centrelink. This is an example of a demand made by the institution of welfare. Due to disruptions in her family relationships in her final year, Nicole’s results are not good enough to gain admission to her tertiary course of choice. She therefore initially planned to repeat a few subjects of her high school certificate in order to upgrade her total mark and gain the appropriate entry score. She intended to spend the residue of her study time in vocational studies, in her chosen area of IT. She then discovered that the IT course she had chosen, that would have given her credit towards her future university studies, was not an ‘approved’ course for Centrelink entitlement purposes. She considered relinquishing her welfare entitlement but realised that the number of hours that she would have to work, in her very low paid youth job, to make up for the lost income, would jeopardise successful completion of her proposed studies. She is currently trying to work out what would be the most efficient pathway. Her current idea is that she will have to repeat the whole high school certificate year, to ensure continued welfare entitlements and forgo the specific vocational studies, which would have contributed to her university studies.

If Nicole’s wage was higher from her labour market involvement, she may have been able to manage both work and study, because the number of hours involved in work would have been less. However, Nicole is employed in a very typical youth job in the fast food industry, on very low wages. Her wages are determined by engagement in a ‘traineeship’, in a field which has no application to her future vocational aspirations. It involves no formal off-the-job training. It would appear that the ‘compulsory’ involvement in this ‘traineeship’ (if she wanted a job with that employer at all) is simply a means to further reduce her wage. The idea that the skill acquisition during an apprenticeship was an investment that more than paid off through increased wages in adulthood does not apply in this case. The institution of the labour market and its regulation was not sufficiently supportive in supplying enough remuneration for Nicole to support herself while studying.

Nicole will continue to need to work but also needs to attain a sufficient level of educational achievement to enter her desired course. Her work commitments may make this difficult.

It really depends on my TER score about getting into the course. Because I looked at the booklet thing, and it said the IT courses range from about a 64 TER to like 97. I think the one I actually wanted to do was 97, but I really don’t think I’m going to get 97. So I don’t know, I’m just going to aim for
the best I can, and hopefully it’s enough to get me into an area that I’m interested in. …I’m really unsure about what the future’s going to bring, because I’m living out of home at the moment already. And work is going to be something that I’m going to have to continue with, no matter what I do. So I’m not sure how I’ll do that. I don’t know if I’ll be able to work and study. …I’ll just have to wait and see, like, because my situation could change in the short-term, hopefully not in the too short term, because I don’t want another change, but yeah, I don’t really know. (Nicole, 17, Retail)

The requirement of a certain level of Tertiary Educational Ranking (TER) to enter university courses has forced Nicole to spend a further year in secondary schooling. Her first TER was affected by her family circumstances. The level of competition determines the TER for each university course and the number of places is dependent upon federal government funding. Neither of these may be a reliable indicator of Nicole’s likely success or otherwise in her chosen course, yet they will determine whether or not she can study it. Because of welfare requirements and a certain level of TER, Nicole will spend one year studying a curriculum which she has studied before and passed but not at the required level. This system is not supporting the most efficient pathway for Nicole.

Nicole’s living situation seems vulnerable and may influence her achievement levels. Family support, which would have been expected to underpin her plans and ambitions, is lacking. Where young people need to work out of economic necessity, they are unlikely to have as much time to devote to study compared to students who are subsidised by their families and can choose whether to, or how much work they will perform. Students from families of high socio-economic status may therefore have more choice and be able to optimise time spent in study, attaining better educational outcomes. This will give them access to a wider range of course options. Nicole’s socio-economic position is having a direct effect on her current educational choices and is likely to affect her final year results, which will further restrict her educational options. This evidence is counter to the popular rhetoric relating to individualisation and choice; that young people are free to choose from a wide range of options and pathways in their life course.

Many young people in the interviews conducted describe useful assistance from one or more of the institutions discussed in this section and do not experience the range of difficulties described by Nicole. However, a significant number experienced one or more difficulties similar to those described above. Nicole’s experience provides an example of institutions not providing optimal support and not interacting in a positive coordinated manner. This supports Bauman’s (2004; 2007) and Beck’s (1992; and Beck-Gernshiem
2002) concepts relating to the fragmentation and/or transformation of institutions. Participants as young as seventeen have to negotiate ‘a life of one’s own’, by balancing the demands of institutions, which do not seem to be working with or in support of each other. The intergenerational support suggested as necessary by Rubery (2004) is being provided at some level. However for some participants the support is insufficient to optimise pathways and potential. Whether the demands and resources from institutions have positive or negative effects, they are reported by the young people as being extremely important and influential in terms of their progress to independence. These reports are consistent across geographical areas, age groups and levels of education achieved by participants.

The effective functioning of each institution is dependent upon the effective functioning of the others in order to offer optimal supportive pathways for all young people in transition. Where one institution is not performing its expected role, for example, the family may not be providing an adequate level of support, the support cannot or appears not to be able to be provided by the other three institutions, and therefore places some individuals at risk. In this sense the institutions may be fragmenting, or may be so distant from each other, that the social structure as a whole is weakened. Some examples described above include labour market demand negatively affecting educational participation or achievement, and assuming parental subsidy will compensate for low hourly rates paid to young people. Education demands for attendance and assignment completion, allows for only minimal labour market involvement. Families are expected to provide for all basic needs but are not necessarily resourced to do so. Welfare pays less to ‘independent’ young people (under 25) than adults and demands a specific balance of activities in order to maintain entitlements. Many participants report continued reliance, at least partially, on families after other milestones marking adulthood are reached, for example, voting. This analysis, by describing individual experiences, illustrates the concepts of the changes in functioning of institutions described by Beck and Beck-Gershiem (2002), and also identifies the significant impact the failure of one institution has on the effectiveness of others.

**Conclusion**

This chapter in conjunction with analysis of the labour market in the previous chapter provides in depth knowledge of the major institutional supports and their interactions as identified by participants and depicted in the exosystem of the YESM (page 57). Significant demands and resources for each of these institutions have been set out in Table 3 (page 116) in this chapter. The complex interaction between them has been
demonstrated; Nicole’s experiences exemplifying some of the difficult compromises and negotiations needed for the individualised lifestyle reported by many participants.

Each institution included here plays a vital role in the intergenerational support of young people. The family provides the majority of direct support to participants in the form of basic sustenance. However, the family unit, the demands placed on it and the resources it provides are constantly changing and can be unreliable. The presence or the absence of significant support from families demonstrates the continuing importance of the family in the transitional experience of individual young people. There is considerable evidence that some dependent young people perceive a need to supplement their own, and even their families’ finances through engagement in the labour market.

Welfare is expected to provide support to those without alternatives and foster educational and employment opportunities. Unlike family support, welfare has legislated standards and guidelines. However, again, this research highlighted many inconsistencies in provision of welfare support to young people. While for some participants the stability of welfare income is an essential underpinning to their life arrangements, for others study choice and optimal career pathways are limited by the conditions of welfare provision. Welfare does not adequately replace a lack of family support.

Given the age of the participant group, education is an important feature of their lives. In an environment of credentialism, education is seen to provide access to more secure and better-paid adult employment. The high levels of structure in education provision contributes to difficulties for a number of participants in their attempts to manage their work and study commitments. Short-term demands at times seem to place long-term educational goals at risk. Some expensive and long-term educational goals also prove risky in a changing labour market. Even in the older age-range studied, participants are reporting plans to commence or continue educational attendance in the hope of improving their labour market prospects.

When the institutions are considered together, their interactions are complex. While the YESM (page 57) depicts interactions between the four institutions in the immediate experience of participants, it does not indicate the nature of these interactions. This has been the focus of the analysis in this and the previous chapter. In some cases these interactions reduce choice and fail to promote optimal pathways to adult independence. For example, Jim’s experience of the institution of education supporting his absence from
school to work on the family farm (without supplementary tuition to make up time lost) assists his family in their business, but contributes to closing off alternative vocational opportunities by significantly limiting his educational attainment.

Conflicts in the conditions under which resources are provided from different institutions can also restrict possible pathways. An example of this is the structured attendance required by educational institutions compared with the highly flexible work hours required at times by employers. For some participants this means either foregoing or lengthening their education or living in poverty because of the lack of suitable employment. These experiences support the contention that individualisation, far from increasing options and choices, is in fact creating a risky dependence on fragmenting institutions. The participant experience of institutional interaction exemplifies the concepts described by Beck and Beck-Gersheim (2002) about changes in institutions, and highlights the significant impact that the failure of one institution has on the effectiveness of others. A powerful example is the way the lack of a supportive family reduces educational and labour market opportunity. Rubery (2004) recognises major change may have taken place in the way intergenerational support is provided in vulnerable stages of the lifecycle, such as the youth phase. The above analysis suggests an adequate and necessary level of intergenerational support, as conceptualised by Rubery (2004), is not being provided to all participants. Rather Rubery’s (2004 p.1) ‘more fragmented, individualised and high risk system of provision over the life course’ is the current experience of many participants. Analysis in this chapter demonstrates that for the group studied, their life stage involves high levels of dependency on precarious support provided by multiple institutions, which require continuous active negotiation. The ability for young people to make the transition to financial independence within this environment is the focus of the next chapter.
Chapter Six

Fluctuating dependence: The family and the labour market

Chapter four established that while casual work is a major feature of the youth labour market, it is not a preferred option because its precarious and flexible nature does not provide a secure income and can interfere with the achievement of educational outcomes. In chapter five, other supports available to young people in their life stage were analysed. Of the institutions identified by participants as important to them, that is welfare, education, family and the labour market, no single institution provided secure supports. However, attempting to meet the demands of more than one - in order to gain the benefits of its support- can be difficult because they are sometimes incompatible, for example structured school attendance and late evening shifts at work. There is evidence from the participants that despite these difficulties they have a high level of dependence on the precarious supports provided by the multiple institutions of the labour market, family, welfare and education and optimising their support requires continuous active negotiation.

In this chapter, the focus is on how work affects young people’s transition to financial independence. This is research question two and requires a close study of the interaction between the participants’ experiences of their family and work within their immediate personal setting, and the family and labour market as social structures or institutions. This is one of the overlapping relationships shown in the YESM (page 57).

The analysis in this chapter explores the relevance of Bessant’s (1993 p.36) ideas about the changing nature of youth transitions and the emergence of a phase of dependent adulthood she terms ‘dependultcy’. This research supports Bessant’s work in finding that very few of the South Australian young workers participating in this research are able to live independently, even at the upper age range of twenty to twenty-four years. Most are dependent on more than one source of support: that is wages, family and/or welfare. Participants describe high levels of fluctuation in the level of dependency on family caused
by, for example, insecurity in the labour market, the need to return to or commence study and aspirations to obtain independent ‘adult’ goals such as housing. These fluctuations occurred across the whole age range studied.

As discussed in chapter three, Bessant’s (1993 p.36) concept of ‘dependultcy’ describes an emerging ‘transitional’ phase, which differs significantly from the ‘adolescent’ and ‘adult’ phases of traditional sequential transitions, and blurs or destabilises many of the key markers in such transitions. The concept is useful to the analysis that proceeds in this chapter. Dependultcy is characterised by delays in access to the full-time labour market and other economic, social, psychological and cultural signifiers of adult status. Bessant (1999 p.11-14) alerts us to the possibility that in this new phase, some young adults may not be able to access parents’ finances and may not find employment as a means to independence and/or financial security. This means there may be young people who are unsupported by others but are unable to support themselves adequately. The evidence in this chapter shows a diversity of experience within the dependultcy phase for young workers participating in this research. Their situations range from total dependence, with parents paying for all essential goods and their small earnings being used as disposable income, to situations where young workers pay substantial board to their parents and cover all other expenses. For those who have not already left home, the dependultcy phase often extends through periods of study or training and into the adult labour market. Sometimes young people are still at home or intend to stay at home while in adult employment, to financially afford the transition to full independence. Despite the diversity of individual experience and levels of dependency, there is a relationship between dependence on parents for economic needs and dependence on the labour market.

Dependence is a major issue raised by the young people I interviewed. Participants are very conscious of their level of dependence or independence and describe their aspirations for and attempts to obtain independence. There is a discernable movement towards independence from parents as the age of the young people increases, but surprisingly there are a significant number of young people who report continued reliance on their parents at twenty-four years, which is the maximum age range I studied. There is evidence of varying dependence across all ages studied, which I have categorised into three levels of dependence, each with specific characteristics.

Parents also fall into a number of categories in terms of support provided to participants. There is no standard, with a diversity of attitudes, amounts and conditions offered. There is
some indication that participants from poorer families tend to receive less and make a
greater contribution to family income, but this is not always the case. I have classified the
parents into four categories based on the kind of support the participants receive: non-
supporters, risky/reluctant supporters, bargainers and unconditional supporters.

Many of the participants want to reduce the amount of support they receive from their
parents and contribute to the finances of their household and family. As the young
workers’ engagement with the labour market increases, they begin to contribute in a
myriad of ways, from formal payment or purchasing of food, to occasional contributions
of money, goods or labour. Sometimes the young people’s earnings are being used in a
way that specifically reduces the young person’s financial burden on their parents. These
arrangements challenge the reduced level of youth wages, which are justified in terms of
parental subsidy supplementing the wage, and do not recognise the contributions some
young workers make to their families.

Given that the focus of this research is on workers, not on the unemployed, clearly all of
these young people have at least a minimal level of independence, unlike the significant
number of young people in this age group who are not in or who have never experienced,
paid employment. However, there is no linear progression to increasing levels of
independence reported by participants. In this chapter, I introduce the concept of
‘fluctuating dependence’, which extends Natalier’s (2007) concept of ‘boomeranging’,
described in chapter three, as it applies to the transition of young people to independence. I
also demonstrate the relationship between levels of parental support and degrees of
independence. The barriers experienced by these young people as they try to achieve full
independence and the experience of the few who had achieved this goal are analysed.

Figure 3 (on the following page) demonstrates the relationship between labour market
dependence and parental dependence and identifies common characteristics described by
participants for each level of dependence. At the highest level of parental dependence there
is very little dependence on the labour market. On the other hand, a low level of parental
support means a higher dependence on income from the labour market. Most participants
fall between these two extremes.
The next section expands on the interaction between labour market dependence and parental dependence through the provision of more specific information and participant comment from the data. I have categorised this information into three levels of dependence: high, medium and low.

**Levels of dependence**

**High level dependence on parents**

When young workers enter the labour market their earnings are usually very low. The participants reporting high dependence have all their basic needs provided by their parents. They generally save their wages or use them on personal consumption. Parents also provide extra cash when necessary. Some typical comments from the young workers about their financially dependent situations are as follows.

Well, I completely rely on my parents, so I don't have a regular job and they pay for everything. (Johnny, 17 Building and Construction)

Sometimes, because, when I run out of money I get it from my mum. (Amy, 17, Hospitality)

Now that I have got a job and a bit of money saved in the bank from the job, it is just for things that I need, like phone bills and stuff so I pay that for myself. (Todd, 17 Hospitality)
The young workers living in these highly dependent situations are generally still in high school (and therefore under the age of 18) and seem fairly at ease with their dependent status. They are in families that are able to provide for them, and they have gained employment to give them some economic autonomy and better future prospects.

**Medium level of dependence on parents**

This group attempts to minimise their reliance on their parents and are successful to varying degrees. Some are only able to reduce the cash outlay their parents would have otherwise had to make on their behalf, while others are able to make a small contribution to their family’s financial income, if only of a minimal and sporadic nature. This group, despite their efforts, might occasionally need direct financial assistance from their parents, but the participants regard this as highly undesirable and to be avoided wherever possible. Most of these young people are still studying limiting their availability for work, which in addition to the lower ‘youth’ wages paid, significantly reduces their ability to fully support themselves. Given that none of these young people have ever lived independently, it is likely that they do not have a good understanding of the real cost of independent accommodation and meals. This may lead to an over estimation of their level of independence from their parents. In view of the probable inability of the young people in their situation to meet their full costs, this overestimation of their independence may be helpful to them in terms of their development and self-esteem.

Many of the young people are quite explicit about their level of dependence on their parents. They realise that while studying and therefore only being able to work part-time, they are not able to fully support themselves. Lower youth rates of pay exacerbate this situation. Wendy describes just such a situation:

> If my parents were tomorrow to say to me you're out on your own, with the current lifestyle I have, I wouldn't be able to be financially independent, but as it stands with accommodation being paid for me, groceries being paid for me, internet connection being paid for me. If you were to move me out tomorrow and say you have to pay all of this on your own, plus you need to buy lunches everyday and you do need to do this and this and this, no. Yeah but as it stands I see myself as financially independent, I buy my clothes, I buy the food I want, I pay for myself to go out, but not on the base level of food and shelter. (Wendy, 19 Hospitality)

‘Financial independence’ to Wendy means cash for personal items rather than living expenses, such as accommodation and food. In similar situations to Wendy, another group
of participants describe themselves as ‘independent’, despite making no contribution to parental expenditure relating to food and accommodation. Marjorie’s circumstances are typical of this group.

My pay is alright, cause I am working two jobs, it is pretty good. Working at the hotel you get a fair bit because the amount of hours you work and stuff and living at home with mum and dad is a bit of bonus. [Financially] with the two jobs, I would be fine. With one I would probably struggle a bit, but I would survive. (Marjorie, 19 Hospitality, Retail)

Marjorie may feel more secure because it is unlikely that she will lose two jobs at the same time and therefore assumes she will always have at least one income. Since Marjorie and the other participants in this situation have never lived out of home, their assessment of the costs of accommodation and food provided by parents as a ‘bit of a bonus’, may indicate a lack of understanding of what they would actually have to pay if living independently.

Leah is more conscious of making what contributions she can to reduce her level of dependence on her parents. Leah needs to stay with her brother when she works after school, because her parents live some distance from the country town in which she works. Leah’s brother is living on apprentice wages. Recently her work hours and income were reduced. Previously she was able to contribute to her brother’s household through the purchase of food and other grocery items. She is no longer able to do this and therefore her parents now need to supplement their son’s household, so as to enable both their children to continue studying and working in the rural town.

I’m pretty much independent with my money and that, but when I work I stay with my brother because I live 50kms out of town, and I don't pay rent or anything, so I pay for food, and everything else for him... But mum helps me out when she knows I don't have much money to do it. I used to like go and buy $50 worth of shopping and that, for him, but now I just get odds and ends that we basically need. …he's on apprenticeship wage as well, so his wage isn't really high either. (Leah, 17 Property and Business Services)

In this situation, Leah’s parental support reaches beyond the family home. Two people on youth wages were just managing, with occasional injections of extra funds, to survive in a country town. When Leah’s hours were reduced, under her ‘flexible’ working conditions, her parents have to make up the difference in income. This enables their son to continue his apprenticeship, which does not pay enough to survive independently, and enables their daughter to continue at school and work.
Billy is also financially dependent on his parents; he lives with his parents and makes minimal financial contributions to the household. While Billy acknowledges the emotional and social support he received from his parents in the early stages of his employment, when discussing his emotional relationship with them and spending less time at home due to his shift work, Billy said:

> It was hard at first, I didn’t think it would be. But I find that I can deal without my parents pretty well [now]. (Billy, 22, Hospitality)

Billy believes that because of his job, he is now socially and emotionally independent of his parents and no longer needs this type of support. However, his level of pay means he needs to continue to live at home because his financial progress has not been equal to his social and emotional independence.

In addition to relieving what they perceived to be some of the financial burden of their dependence on their parents, Carly and Sam contribute to their households financially when they can:

> I was still living with mum and dad, but sort of always paid my own stuff, [I'd] buy the food for mum, because she was sort of paying all the other bills anyway… I would have my own telephone and stuff, so that would be my own. (Carly, 23, Retail)

> Well, I don't always go shopping and buy stuff with my parents, everything I need, basically I have almost. But if I want something, I will work for it and get it and the money I don't need and whatever, I give to my parents, like to help them out, especially like with things for the house. So I don't really spend that much money. (Sam, 17 Retail)

These experiences challenge one of the underpinning assumptions for youth wages, that is that parents provide all of young people’s basic needs and therefore adult wages are not needed. The experiences described above are typical of a number of participants, who actively contribute to their families’ income from their wages. Some young people are acutely aware of the financial circumstances of their families and believe they need to make a contribution. In some cases the contribution, or lack of, causes an additional stress to young people in precarious employment because of the contribution they feel they should make and the threat of unemployment. Even Jo, one of youngest participants, was explicit about her reasons for working and her concerns about her ability to continue to do so. It is possible there are a significant number of young people believing they need to make financial contributions to their family, rather than remaining passive recipients.
Because she is a single mum and I try to help her out because we have got four kids, they don't have jobs, so she has to look after them. …it would be a bit hard if I lost my job …I wouldn't have that money anymore, I would sort of feel that I had let my mum down as well. Because I would be like, mum I can't give you any money. (Jo, 16 Hospitality)

These young people are contributors as well as receivers of intergenerational support. While this responsibility for contributing to family finances might be appropriate in the later stages of transition, where they might be engaged in employment for more hours and at higher rates of pay, a number of these examples are of young people who are attending secondary school combined with highly precarious low paid work. The attitude of some participants who perceive their families to have limited financial resources is that they need to reduce their dependence and actively contribute to their family income. They worry about their ability to maintain this contribution and the consequences of lessening or ceasing to contribute.

The participants quoted in this section make contributions to their family income in a variety of ways. Some contribute money directly, others save their parents’ expenditure by paying for their personal expenses or paying directly for major expenses such as food and personal items. The comments provided demonstrate a general acceptance, by both parents and the young people themselves, that they are unable to support themselves completely. This is because the majority of these young people are engaged in study or training and are receiving low or youth rates of pay. Low youth rates of pay restrict the participants’ capabilities to either live independently or contribute a significant amount to family income. Using Nussbaum’s (2000) theories, this could be seen as a capability issue, where the young people are experiencing conflict between their social role as dependent full-time students and the reality of their economic position within their family. Their capabilities are constrained by the conditions of the youth labour market in two major ways. Firstly, lower ‘youth’ rates of pay require more hours of work for the same pay as an adult. Secondly, ‘flexibility’ of hours, causes anxiety about security of income to meet commitments and can interfere with study requirements.

**Low level of dependence on parents**

A small number of participants are almost completely financially independent, though still living at home. Most of the young people in this category have ‘adult’ jobs, are covering most of their own expenses and are often making a contribution of board to their parents, but it is likely that the amount does not cover the full cost. They also describe themselves as independent despite living with their parents and continuing to be subsidised to some
degree. Both Annie and Daniel describe adult responsibilities in relation to their independence.

[Ever]ything that I own is in my name, but I do still live at home, so I pay my parents board and I own my own car and my own credit card and pretty much everything is on my own, apart from living at home still. …As soon as I got full time employment, I started paying board and decided to buy a car and get a credit card and all that sort of thing. (Annie, 24, Property & Business Services)

I don't really rely on parents at all. Everything I want, I work for and I get it. I don't really ask my dad or anything, for money and even like now I have got my car and stuff, if I want food, I will go to the shops and buy some food and make it myself and stuff like that. (Daniel, 18, Hospitality)

Key issues for Annie and Daniel are that they own things in their own name, never need to ask for anything from their parents and in Daniel’s case, independent meal preparation. Their feelings of ‘independence’ relate as much to their freedom to make their own decisions regarding their financial commitments and arrangements, for example, the purchasing of a car without reference to parental guidance, as to their actual costs and expenditure.

Michelle and Mike are also somewhat dependent on their parents, despite working full-time. While they take responsibility for some of their costs, they rely on parental subsidy to save for full independence later. Michelle’s parents, confirming her continuing partial dependence on them, pay some of her expenses, such as private health insurance. Mike is concerned about the rising costs of living and wants to get a foot in the housing market, before housing costs are out of reach. Unable to afford it alone, he and his sister plan to share costs and are living at home while saving.

I live with my parents, so I do pay board with them, but it is pretty good board really. So, I know like, that doesn't cover. Mum does all the meals and stuff as far as paying, so it is probably not entirely. I pay board and I pay my phone bills and stuff but I don't pay bills in the house or anything. Mum and Dad just want us to save for a house. I think they are trying to do what they can and that is really good. …my mobile phone, I have just paid that and all that kind of thing. Like, all my car and stuff, they actually, I don't have a loan with the bank for my car, they have got a loan and I pay them for it. So, yeah I pay for all my car insurance and registration. The only other thing that I don't pay for is my private health, it still runs through them because it goes until I am 25 or something. (Michelle, 22, Administration)

I am living at home. I think in the near future I’ll be moving out and starting to get my own place with my sister, so I’ll have rent to pay and all
Both these young people would like to buy a house and their parents are willing to subsidise their living costs to achieve this. Like Annie and Daniel, they could live away from home, but would be unable to both support themselves and save for their future. Clearly young people with access to this type of support are advantaged in terms of plans for the future and future economic security. This is a clear example of how the family can develop young people’s capabilities for full financial independence from parents. However, some parents are unable or unwilling to provide this level of support and their children will not be advantaged in this way.

In less advantaged families, participants sometimes contribute a larger proportion of their low incomes to make a significant difference to total family income. Katie explains that although she earns very low wages from her paid employment, she still contributes what she can to her family. Katie gives half her pay to her single mother, to cover her share of the rent. She would like to earn more, but is unable to find better paying work because of her age rural location.

[My pay] is probably not the best but I suppose for younger people they don't go as high but because I basically live off my money, because mum's a single mum and I've got my youth allowance. So that money is mine and I need it. It's probably not the best for me but there's not much else you can do around here, to get more… I've got to pay my rent and all that because I have to, anything I want I have to buy, so that makes it a bit harder… I pay $50 a fortnight so that's something but it's a week worth of work… She does as much as she can, she can't exactly spend whatever I want, she's kind of like, yeah, you can have this much and that's it. Whereas, if I want clothes, toiletries and all that, I have to pay them and they're not cheap nowadays, so you kind of just get left with it. I don't have all the money to go and do whatever I want. She does put a little bit in here and there, but then yeah, small places and that, yeah I think it works out, I pay about a quarter of the rent a week, which considering there's four of us living in the house, its not too bad. (Katie, 16, Hospitality)

Lee also earns low wages and contributes to household costs through payment of board, which she believes would cover most of her living costs. Lee works in the same business, doing the same job as her single mother. However she is unable to work enough hours in addition to school and her traineeship, to be completely independent of her mother.
Well, I pay board each week, now that I have turned 16. So that is a bit of my pay gone. I work in the same job as my mum. So it is a little bit annoying, but I pay that much, so it is sort of up to me how much I work, like if I don't work much one week, I have to find that money some other way, kind of thing. … I pay for most of my stuff. It is just the things that are covered by board, that mum would pay for, like my food, water and electricity and things like that. I basically [also] pay for all my clothes and that.

I want to move out. I know I can't while I am still at school. I can't really up my hours, so I can't get any more money. So the way that it is going at the moment, it is alright. The board includes the rent and the food and everything like that. (Lee, 17, Health & Community Services & Hospitality)

Corinne’s Centrelink entitlements allowed her to have some economic autonomy, while still dependent and subsidised by her parents. Her Centrelink entitlements also enabled her to contribute to the financial capital of the household, through paying board.

[When I was 16, I had received Centrelink benefits and so with receiving Centrelink benefits, I just had a board payment that I paid my mum and then I paid for everything else… I was dependent upon them but I still managed my own money and paid it that way. (Corinne, 24, Health & Community Service)]

In this group of ‘low’ dependent young people, the rationale for the situation and the experiences of the young people, varied enormously. Families varied from high to low income and contributions by the young people also varied, with a tendency for young people from poorer families to contribute a higher proportion of their income. In addition, while some of the young people had the potential to live outside the family home, their circumstances would not have permitted common aspirations such as home ownership to eventuate. Most of the young people would have been living below the poverty line if they lived outside the family home. Some of the young people’s level of contribution to family income in poorer families completely precluded their ability to save money for their own purposes. Young people in wealthier families were sometimes at home specifically for the purpose of saving money for their financial future.

The attitudes of young people from poorer families appeared affected by a sense of their costs and they contributed a more substantial portion of their income to their parents than young people from wealthier families. In general young people accepted dependence on their parents while still at school but after finishing school this attitude seems to change to a desire for independence despite their continuing commitment to education. Some of the
attitudes of older participants are explored in the following sections, which builds on levels of support to examine the conditions under which family support may be provided.

**Types of family support**

Most participants report feeling comfortable with continuing dependence on their family, in the early stage of their engagement with the labour market. Levels and types of support change as the young people age. Different families react in different ways to the dependence of increasingly adult children. As with levels of support described earlier, the different types of support I analyse here are important in determining the nature of the young worker’s immediate personal setting (see Figure 2, page 57). Levels and types of support are also significant in affecting a young worker’s involvement with social structures or institutions. For example, where support is unconditional and of a high level there is much less need for a young worker to seek resources from the institutions of the labour market or welfare system. In this example the young worker can choose to dedicate more time to their education and/or exit unpleasant work situations. This may expedite achievement of qualifications providing the opportunity for relatively early financial independence. Examples of institutional resources supporting such achievement are documented in Table 3 (page 116). My research found four distinct types of support offered by families to young workers that have varying effects on their involvement with other institutions. The types of support identified are: non-supporters, reluctant risky supporters, bargainers and unconditional supporters. The various types of support provided by different families meet, to varying degrees, the social role of the institution of family. I will describe each of the categories and provide examples from the data.

**Non-supporters**

A small group of participants receive no support at all from their parents. These include young people who have no parents, young people whose parents have objections on principle to supporting their adult children, young people in families with such limited resources they are unable to make significant contributions to their child’s support, and families where the child felt so at risk that they left home and receive no support. These young people are entirely dependent on their ability to access other resources, which often include both welfare and earned income to support further education. Because of the characteristics of the youth labour market, particularly youth rates of pay and casual conditions of employment, these young people are insecure and often expressed anxiety about this.
Kaz is an example from this group; she has made the decision to leave home and is living well below the poverty line. Her finances are a constant stress.

I can’t live at home, cause like, I can’t be with my dad, but Centrelink doesn’t recognise that the stuff that’s going on there is not okay. So basically, if I’m not earning the money myself, I’m not getting the money. So there have been weeks where I’ve literally got $60 a week, when my rent is over $100 and the finances just don’t work. And so I’m a bit the same, in that I’d love to be jumping through Centrelink’s hoops just to be like knowing, that if I’m sick for a week that I’m not going to be having to ask for the money and borrow money just to be able to eat. …On average I’d be earning about $160/$180 a week. My basic living costs would be about $160 a week, not including transport or anything like that, so that’s just basic rent, electricity, food all that. (Kaz, 21 Retail, Health and Community Services)

Kaz’s experience at home must have been quite negative for her to choose to live such a stressful and precarious lifestyle. Her complete dependence on her inadequate income, in preference to a risky family household, leaves her open to exploitation in the labour market. Kaz receives no supplementary assistance from her family, but because of their income Kaz is unable to receive any welfare benefits and so is entirely reliant on her own insecure and low paid employment.

**Reluctant and risky support -‘Exploitable dependency’**

Another small group disclosed to me that they are or had been living in risky situations and/or with parents that were reluctant to support them. The support young people receive from these parents is not secure or stable.

Lister’s (1997) concept of ‘exploitable dependency’ is useful here. This means a subordinate party is dependent on another party for needed resources and the second party has discretionary control over these resources. For such a relationship to exist ‘exploitation’ does not necessarily need to have taken place, simply the potential exists for it to occur. A key test suggested by Lister (1997 p.110) to measure this power dynamic is to establish whether, and how easily, the dependent party is able to withdraw from the relationship. This could be applied to young people’s parental dependence and in some cases and increasingly with age, their dependence on the labour market. Exploitable dependency and its relationship to the strategies participants use to attempt to improve their working situations will be further explored in chapter seven.
Delores is an example of one young person who is not comfortable in her current situation. She is studying as well as working, which reduces her capacity to earn and access resources from the labour market. She can’t earn enough to become independent until she finishes her study, and she is not entitled to financial assistance from the government as she is aged under twenty-five and therefore assumed to be dependent on her parents (since they theoretically have sufficient means to support her). However, they are reluctant to support her. Although she does not feel secure in her house, she sees herself as having few options but to stay. Delores explains:

I live with my folks, I have very casual work but I want to be independent because living at home isn’t the best situation. But because my parents earn too much, I can’t get independent [welfare payment] without working and getting 16 grand. I’m also a university student, so I don’t have the time to work that many hours. But the thing sucks about having to earn money, to get out of my house and get away from my parents, its like, just because my parents earn too much, doesn’t actually mean that they’re going to give me that money. They strongly believe that you’ve got to earn your own way and so I’m forced to get a job, when I don’t always have the time and I can’t get out of that situation because I don’t have enough money, but I can’t get Centrelink… I would like to have the freedom to be on my own or with some mates and feel safe in my own house all the time. But I don’t have that option because you have to jump Centrelink hoops to get there in the first place. But because I come from a well to do family, doesn’t mean that I’m well to do. (Delores, 20 Health and Community Services)

Delores’ low income and inability to access government support, means that she relies on other low-income youths in times of need. This highlights the riskiness of her dependent relationship with her parents.

[F]or me, not having Centrelink, not having that benefit means that when I can’t go home, I actually rely on my friends, so I’ve got to stay at their houses, which puts a drain on them, because they’re only living on Centrelink benefits. One of my friends is from the country, so she can’t live at home because she is studying. She gets rent assistance and things like that. But it means that I’m at their house, using their electricity, using their water, eating their food because I can’t be at home. And I just don’t think that’s fair on anyone. (Delores, 20 Health and Community Services)

Delores is the dependant party; she wants to be independent from her parents but is unable to withdraw from the relationship. Using Lister’s (1997) test this places her in a position of exploitable dependency. To withdraw from the relationship with her parents, she has to ‘jump Centrelink’s hoops’ and earn sixteen thousand dollars to prove she is financially independent of her parents, and eligible for income support from the welfare system during her studies. If she was able to gain suitable employment, the earning of this money would...
take a considerable time and she would need to defer university to work the number of hours necessary. Many young people report such work is not readily available in any case.

Delores may be able to achieve the same lifestyle as Kaz, in the earlier ‘non supporters’ category, if she could find a second job and very inexpensive accommodation, but clearly the dilemma is between two very negative options of staying or going, and between risky dependence on reluctant parents or on the labour market.

**Bargaining for support**

Dependent children are not in a strong negotiating position when seeking support from parents. Despite assumptions underlying legislation relating to youth wages, regarding some hypothetical and consistent level of parental support, young participants reported wide variation in willingness and capacity of parents to support them. Many report ‘deals’ whereby they would receive a certain level of support because they engage in parentally approved study or training opportunities, others reported cut off times for support relating to age level, income level, full-time work and other milestones. Examples of the types of agreements entered into are given here.

Most parental negotiations of support for dependent children were centred on study or training activities. Parents seem to recognise that the low wages young people earn mean they are unable to fully support themselves and provide this form of encouragement to children, to develop skills and earning capacity for the future. For example, Liam doesn’t pay board because he is studying and Frank does not need to pay board until he obtains full-time work.

I cover my personal expenses, I don't pay board at the moment because I'm studying and that's the sort of deal but yeah, I pretty much cover everything myself. I do borrow money occasionally… (Liam, 20, Hospitality)

It will change when I get a job, a full time job. (Frank, 16 Hospitality)

Rick states the wages he receives from his butchery apprenticeship are too low for him to live independently. Rick’s parents guided him into an apprenticeship and wanted him to learn from his father’s experiences. This involves a temporary reduction in income, to better secure his future income, health and safety. He says he has no power to change his current working conditions, but believes that his situation is temporary and will improve with qualifications. Rick’s reference to his powerlessness with regard to his apprentice
wage levels, is reminiscent of Sennett’s (2006 p.161) concept of the ‘spectator citizen’ who is disengaged, inactive and powerless.

I feel it’s shit, I suppose. …living at home I suppose it is enough, but if you had to go and live somewhere on your own, or rent a house or something, then it wouldn't be real good. You wouldn't have a social life, I suppose. …apprentice wages aren't real good to start with anyway, so I suppose that you can't really do much about it. I think after the first year, you get paid $1.00 more. …At the end it is not too bad, but I don't think it is great. It is not really much… I noticed the difference with that and shearing. Getting paid heaps and then not getting paid very much. I suppose it is cause like you can't shear all your life, you have got to get a bit of a trade behind you or something. But I would probably still be shearing now, but the old girl sort of pushed me into getting a trade… me old man was a shearer and that and his back is rooted. (Rick, 18 Retail).

Rick states he has no influence over his current wages or conditions, or his financial dependence on his family. Rick valued being financially independent but has reached an agreement with his parents, such that they will support him and he will take a reduced wage, as an investment in his future. This is an example of the ‘fluctuating dependence’ explored later in this chapter. Rick indicates that access to parental resources was critical to his decision to undertake his apprenticeship and that without such conditional support his engagement with further education may not have taken place at all or may have been of a different nature.

Another example of a financial deal involved Jacinta’s parents paying most of her current expenses, so that she could save and contribute to the cost of her leaving home, to go to university in the city the following year. Jacinta (and presumably her parents) know that going to university will be expensive and she is unsure whether she will be eligible for welfare assistance to study.

I put it all in my bank account because I'm going to the city, hopefully next year, I'm just saving up as much as I can, for either a car and for living over there, because it's going to cost a lot living over there, so I’m trying to save up as much as I can, before I go. (Jacinta, 17 Retail)

Though still at high school, Jacinta is working, saving and planning for the risks of the future. To do so she is temporarily more dependent than if she was able to use part of these earnings to pay some of her everyday living expenses.

Skye uses a deal she made with her parents to plan how her transition, from dependence to independence will take place. Skye wants to use this assistance to work and save to
achieve career and lifestyle goals. The parameters of this negotiation are set by the parents and based on Skye’s age.

Well I'm going to work after I finish year 12 cause I don’t have to pay rent at home until I'm 19. So that's about 2 years, then I want to move up to Queensland and become a life guard or do, like, diving courses to become a diving instructor or something that I'll enjoy, and I won't get bored. (Skye, 16 Retail)

These negotiations of support and financial encouragements to further study or save earnings for other life goals are only available in families that have the resources to do so. There is much risk involved when this is not financially viable for families, or in situations where young people are forced to be dependent against their will. The ability and willingness of parents to support their children, even when they commence receiving wages, appears to be a very significant determinant of the scale of opportunities available to the young people. These opportunities include where and for how long they may study, whether and when home ownership may be possible and the level of their engagement with other activities such as sport and social time.

**Unconditional supporters**

Some parents provided considerable support without setting specific boundaries. They do not base their support on the level of need of the young person but simply attempt to assist them to achieve their own goals. Jamie’s quote describes how her parents are happy and able to meet all her daily needs.

[T]hey’re pretty good about it really, they don’t really mind. They have the idea about while I’m studying, they’re quite happy to provide food and accommodation and have me living at home free of charge, so I can earn enough money to set myself up later and enjoy things while I’m young. …I would prefer to be a little bit more financially independent from my parents. They often offer to pay for things and I say no, I’d rather pay for that myself, so I don’t feel so reliant on them. Like for example, they used to pay my mobile phone and offer to pay for college and things and that made me feel a little bit uncomfortable. I feel like that if I can pay for it myself, those kind of extra things, I want to do that. (Jamie, 19, Retail)

Interestingly, some of the participants in this situation are ambivalent about their dependent status. They express discomfort in receiving this level of support and try to minimise their requirements from their parents. In some cases, participants felt they should repay what they could, in recognition of their earlier and/or continued dependence. In these circumstances, it is often the young person who limits the support she or he receives, rather than the parents.
Independence from parents

A small proportion of the young workers are completely independent from parents achieving an aspiration held by most participants. The experience of independence is significant because it provides information about the nature of the end goal of transition and gives some indication why this transition might be difficult. As might be expected these independent young people are among the oldest participants in the sample.

The type of employment held by this group of independent participants is different to that of the majority, who are mostly employed in hospitality and retail. Approximately one third of young workers are employed in the retail industry in South Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006b) and this proportion is the same in my study. However only one participant in my sample, aged over 20, is working in full-time permanent employment in this industry. The few other participants, who describe themselves as in full-time work and independent from family and welfare support, have skilled or professional qualifications. In addition, a majority of this independent group either have extra non-professional jobs or are working extended hours, involving up to 60 hours per week. Most participants see full-time work as highly desirable and a necessity to achieve other life goals, such as home ownership.

Jackie states that full-time work is the key to a secure and liveable income. Jackie explains that her previous casual employment on the weekend (even at night in a hotel on higher hourly rates) did not pay an income sufficient to live independently. For her more and regular hours, even at a lower hourly rate of pay is more desirable:

I guess it is huge difference, but that is only because I am working more hours. Like I used to work at the pub and get less [in total] than I get now, but I’d only do a couple of hours on the weekend or whatever. So being full-time makes the pay packet real good. (Jackie, 24 Health and Community Services)

Carly, the only participant in full-time permanent employment in the retail industry, values her current full-time status to the extent that she would not risk it even to pursue her preferred career aspirations. She values the reliability of her income in helping to secure other adult milestones, such as purchasing a car. Similarly Melanie sees full-time work as enabling larger financial investments:

I am happy where I am. I have a full time job and so that is working well at the moment. I have been there for five years so far, I will just keep going
unless something else just comes up and say, oh, come here...I don't really want to leave a full-time job to do part-time. I would rather go from a full time to a full-time. Cause then I know I will get money. I suppose if you have a full-time job it does help, because when you go away on holidays, you still get paid... You know what you are going to get. And that just helps, if I get loans of whatever for my car and stuff like that, I know I can do it, cause I have got the money there. I have always wanted to be a police officer. But I have never thought of going there... (Carly, 23, Retail)

…it enables you to, you know pay off loans and debts and so on, so that's the main attraction of it I think. (Melanie, 23, Administration & Business Services)

Full-time adult jobs, unlike the flexible, casual, part-time jobs experienced in the youth labour market, are particularly attractive because of the ability to plan for and achieve commitments to larger goals, which need regular financial payments. To achieve this young people are willing to make sacrifices in terms of career goals and accept lower hourly rates of pay.

**Long hours and ‘the Australian dream’**

A few participants in this study have purchased a home and are paying a mortgage, a common aspiration and signifier of adult status for many participants. This seems motivated by a desire for independence and/or as an alternative to the competitive rental market. High mortgage repayments result in extremely long hours and/or multiple jobs in order to increase incomes, and appear to leave some of the young people in precarious financial situations. For example, Sarah needs to supplement her full-time professional wage with casual retail work to cover her mortgage payments. Sarah is in a risky situation where she is working long hours and is reliant on additional casual insecure work, just to cover basic living costs:

> I’m working 40 hours a week at community health and I only get paid 7 ½ per day cause you don’t include breaks. And at the [retail job] another roughly 15 hours on top each week… Got a mortgage, so I kind of have to… One job is definitely not enough for a single mortgage. (Sarah, 24, Health & Community Services, Retail)

Although Sarah would have preferred to wait to purchase a house until she was earning more money, the expensive and competitive rental market meant she had few options. While she admitted her financial situation is precarious, she compared herself to others who were worse off:

> I mean my plan was as soon as I had finished uni to get a job, which I did while I was still at uni, so that was really beneficial. And I guess since I
was 12 years old I wanted to buy a house. Unfortunately I wasn’t given a choice, with the rental market at the moment, there just isn’t really any other option for me. So I had to buy that house, which I mean, which is really great, I really wanted to. Maybe not financially quite stable yet to do that but hey, I mean it’s done and yeah. So we’ll see how that goes.

With the rental market at the moment there wasn’t going to be any difference between paying rent for a week and paying repayments for a week. And at the moment there just isn’t any rental properties available. Everyone is, what do you call it, bidding for them. And whoever makes the highest bid gets that place. So it’s really, really difficult and I mean, it’s a lot easier for me to find a rental property, you know, being a full-time worker and not a student anymore. Whereas a lot of the lower income people, I don’t know how they’re going to manage. So yeah, in that respect I’m really lucky to have been able to afford a home loan.

[I]f I don’t have that casual work I don’t have my mortgage. That’s, the casual work is what’s paying the bills and the government work is what’s paying the mortgage. So if I don’t have the casual work I don’t pay the bills and therefore I don’t pay the mortgage. So yeah, I’m petrified that that job won’t stay around. (Sarah, 24, Health and Community Services, Retail)

Tommy also needs to work six or seven days a week in order to pay his mortgage. He is a qualified tradesperson and does additional work on the weekends, paid in cash to avoid tax. Even though he enjoyed living at home he desired independence:

I moved out of home at the start of the year because I bought a house. …I liked living at home, but I wanted to look after myself, so I moved out of home, yeah. …I work really hard, that’s why I work 60 hours a week. 60-70 hours a week, depending. I do a lot of cash work, so it helps out. (Tommy, 20, Building & Construction)

Steve, another tradesperson is also struggling to pay his mortgage. In order to save the deposit, he had to return home, where his father subsidised his living expenses. Full-time qualified work when living independently was insufficient to enable Steve to save for a home deposit.

I have just bought my first house. Yeah. I did live out of home through my apprenticeship and then I moved back home for six months with my dad and then saved up money and went and bought a house. …I am finding it real hard, yeah, at the moment …I have had to sell my car and that, so that I can afford to buy the house and I can only afford a Ute now. So, yeah, it is a big shock to the system. You have got to budget a lot more and sacrifice quite a few things, like going out and all that. (Steve, 24, Building & Construction)

It is interesting to note that of the few young people who were able to obtain full-time ‘adult’ jobs, the majority had made the very large financial commitment of home
ownership. They had sacrificed a great deal to obtain deposits and continue to do so, with some working a seven day week and in multiple jobs, to service housing loans. Despite the hardships experienced, the young people who had purchased a home seemed happy that they had achieved this goal, which is a stated goal of a majority of participants.

Full independence, as described by the participants in this section, involves living without parental subsidy and being able to acquire some of the major symbols of adulthood such as credit cards, cars and their own home. The only people in the participant group claiming full independence are in full-time (or more) employment and, except for one, they are in skilled occupations. Despite skilled or professional full-time employment the arrangements these young people have undertaken to support their mortgage payments are fragile, risky and may be unsustainable. Sarah reports the loss of even her casual part-time employment would result in the loss of her home. Steve and Tommy are only sustaining their mortgage payments with extensive overtime. If any of these young people experienced illness or injury or for any other reason were unable to continue to work very long hours they may lose their investment and may have to return to parents for support if this is available. The circumstances of these participants demonstrates the fragility of independence in young adulthood.

**Fluctuating dependence**

The analysis in the above sections suggests full-time adult employment is a vital underpinning to a successful transition to adulthood and independence from parents or welfare. The majority of participants had not obtained full-time adult employment and therefore had varying degrees of dependence on their parents. Participant experiences provide evidence that the interaction between labour market dependence and parental dependence is an inverse relationship. Figure 4 (on the following page) pictorially represents a relationship where the more resources a young worker receives from the labour market, the less resources they need from their parents and vice versa. Independence from parents is directly related to dependence on the labour market.
Despite this clear relationship, there is no sure linear progression for individuals, who often experience fluctuations in their levels of dependence. Young people highlight many barriers to independence. Participants struggle with low wages, minimal access to affordable accommodation and having enough time for work hours in addition to study, in their transition to independence:

I only started working post high school, so it was just for my own sort of spending money and you know, I came from a fairly supportive family. Having said that, since working, I've moved out and I'm working in a regional setting. I can speak of the experience on behalf of all my young people, my clients who are getting minimal wages and then a lot of them are trying to move out or leave home for whatever circumstances and they are coming up against many, many barriers with not being able to support themselves at all. So accommodation, well this is an issue in itself but there are lots of barriers… (Clare, 24 Health and Community Services)

Having experienced a fairly smooth transition to independence, with the support of her family, Clare, as part of her work, encounters many young people struggling to live independently. Clare was not required to support herself independently until she had graduated from university and had obtained full-time employment. She did not work until she had completed high school, which allowed her to maximise her high school certificate results, in order to enter the course of her choice. Her part-time work was also not onerous while at university, as she continued to live with her supportive family.

Clare followed a pathway requiring minimal support from outside her direct family and reported a successful combination of work and study, resulting in gaining adult
independent employment. Her success is substantially underpinned by a well-resourced family background, which enabled her capabilities in engagement with other institutions. This pathway is made possible by intergenerational support through three relevant institutions, that is, family, work and education. A well-resourced family unit seems the most significant of these institutions for a positive outcome as it enabled her to restrict her work commitments to a level that did not interfere with her academic achievement. This is a very different experience from that of the young people with whom Clare works.

Clare says her clients do not have such supportive families, are in the youth labour market with minimal wages and most accommodation options are unaffordable. These issues are heightened by their semi-rural location. So rather than being supported at home, they are ‘trapped’ at home. In addition, their level of engagement with the labour market could jeopardise their educational outcomes and their ability to access ‘adult’ employment in the future. They could be marginalised in the labour market, working in casual part-time and short-term employment in the longer term. Even as young adults they may find financial independence from parents difficult to achieve.

This supports Lister’s (1997 p.138-139) arguments about economic and social marginalisation resulting from part-time and casual work and the necessity for full-time work as the key to economic power and citizenship. For example, Lily has no specific vocational qualifications and has never found full-time work. She has been unemployed for significant periods and is currently in very precarious casual employment. She has always aspired to full-time work but has never had an opportunity to work more than part-time. Lily would need a substantial increase in her hours to be able to move out of home and become financially independent. When unemployed, Lily searched for full-time work but was unable to obtain it because of her lack of experience. Lily works in the retail industry where casual, part-time work dominates:

I’m going to have to find a full-time or at least a full-time hours job, like working at least 30 hours a week to be financially independent, and then I can think about saving until I can move out completely. I tried [to find full-time work], but because of the age that I was at the time, the only people that would employ me would have been people that you need experience for, and it just wasn’t working out. (Lily, 22, Retail)

Lily faces an uncertain future; a timeframe for her achievement of financial independence from her parents is unpredictable. Others have the same aspiration for full-time work and also recognise it as necessary for independence:
I would definitely aspire to a full-time job of course… in order for me to be financially independent, I think it would mean working full-time or at least five full days a week. (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)

[I want] to be a teacher in junior primary. Basically working full-time next year because I have been studying for four years, I want to work full-time. (Jane, 24, Health & Community Services)

Rachel and Jane are combining study and part-time work and hope to commence full-time work on completion. Full-time work and the stable income connected with this type of work, is seen as necessary for the achievement of desired economic goals.

According to these accounts, when young people first enter the workforce, they value any level of economic autonomy and are not knowledgeable about what might be required to live independently. Garfield progressed from having no money as a school student, to earning low full-time youth wages and he was initially happy with his earnings. His quote exemplifies how young people think about their wages, after being completely dependent on their parents and with little access to money. With more experience, Garfield has changed his mind about the level of wages in his first job. He now feels he was paid too little:

I was very happy with that money, I mean I had just left school, hadn’t had a job before and you know $300 a week, oh this is fantastic you know because it was more than enough for my costs and expenses, so I was very happy with it, but in hindsight I’m just thinking ooh, maybe that was a little low! (Garfield, 23, Business Services)

Extended experience with youth wages provides young people with insight into the fact that this level of income can never provide independence. The Melbourne Institute for Applied Economic and Social Research (2008) calculated the poverty line at the time of my interviews to be $380.28 a week for a single person in the workforce. Those on incomes below this level are deemed to be living in poverty.

In addition to low incomes, unexpected events at work can have negative consequences in terms of dependence, for both parents and young people. When Kylie left her job after a disagreement with her manager, she was forced into full dependence on her parents once again. While she appreciates their help, she prefers to support herself through earnings from work. Her parents complain to her about how much she is costing them when she isn’t working. Although Kylie is still at school, her parents put pressure on her to work to at least partially support herself. Kylie’s parents are not happy, or are unable, to support
her completely. Kylie needs to contribute to her family and cannot rely on it for full support, even as a full-time high school student.

I think my parents are pretty good. Cause I don't work anymore, they pay for most things, well everything. But when I had a job, I paid for everything. I really want another job. Cause I like to pay for my own things. And because my parents complain. (Kylie, 15, Hospitality)

Louise is another example of a person with a fluctuating level of dependence, who needed to return home for further assistance with her transition to adulthood. However her attitude is different from those from poorer families or who have no choice about the level of support they receive from their parents. She wants to live rent-free, so that she will be able to save money to purchase a home for her partner and herself. For Louise, even though she had lived independently previously, the financial support from her parents will enable her to achieve another marker of adult status.

I was completely financially independent when I was in [the large rural centre], but now that I have moved home, I won't be paying rent or anything like that. [Just] paying all my personal bills and everything and do all that. [It's] just cause me and my partner, are trying to save up and buy a house. So it will help us, not having to pay rent. (Louise, 23, Health and Community Services)

Louise’s progression through the various levels of interaction between labour market dependence and parental dependence described in Figure 3 is illustrated on the following page. Her experience is typical of many young people who do not experience the achievement of independence as a straight progression. Fluctuations occur because of employment opportunity, aspirations, relationships and family type. Sometimes independence or partial independence is followed by a return to full dependence and then further periods of differing levels of dependence follow over extended periods.
I described Natalier’s (2007) concept of ‘boomeranging’ in chapter three, referring to adult children returning home after leaving. My analysis suggests that the phenomenon is not simply a boomerang but rather a series of fluctuations in the level of support, which do not necessarily demonstrate a gradual advancement to independence or any strong relationship to the age of the young person. Unlike the predictability of the return of a boomerang, the fluctuations described by participants could be unpredictable and sudden. Fluctuations result from loss of work, return to study, changes in career direction and from planned returns to subsidised living to attain financial goals.

At the first point on the graph, Louise commenced work at fifteen years of age in a typical youth job. She was almost completely dependent on her parents’ resources until she left school and increased her hours of work. At this point she no longer received money from her parents but continued to receive support in the form of food and accommodation. Hoping to improve her career prospects, she moved to another location to take up a traineeship in the hospitality industry in hotel management. At this point she became completely financially independent of her parents. Louise completed this traineeship, was promoted and remained away from her parental home until she was over twenty-one years of age. Despite the qualification and promotion, she found her wages were insufficient to allow her to save money, and she was on call twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.
Louise formed a long-term relationship with her partner and they aspired to purchase a home together. Louise decided the best way to achieve her goal was to return to her parental home with her partner, live there for some years without paying board and save the money for a deposit on a home. This arrangement returns her to a medium level of dependence, where her only expenditure is on personal items. Louise returned to parental dependence with a partner who is also now dependent on her parents. The change of location required a career change to a new traineeship in administration. Louise hopes that on completion of her traineeship she will get a better-paid job, which will enable her to make repayments on a housing loan. In this example fluctuations in dependence occurred at key points: commencement of work, completion of school permitting increased hours of work, leaving home to work and returning to the parental home (at twenty-three years of age) in order to save money. The provision by Louise’s parents of unconditional support based on the level of Louise’s needs has provided her with opportunities that are not available to other participants receiving different types and levels of support.

The above analysis of the experience of Louise and other participants supports Bessant’s (1993) concept of dependultcy. However the concept needs expansion to include major fluctuations in dependence caused by young people’s engagement with the labour market and other institutions, for example, family, welfare and education. This includes variations in level of subsidy the young person requires from family, from very early engagement with the labour market while living at home, up to and including further significant periods at home after trials of independence away from home. The concept of boomeranging (Natalier 2007) is enhanced by additional data about the complex factors, illustrated in Figure 1, which explain this phenomenon. In terms of the YESM depicted in Figure 2 (page 57), Natalier’s description of ‘boomeranging’ is a social process. There is no doubt, as she describes, that it has an impact on the individual’s immediate personal setting at the centre of the model. However, she does not thoroughly explore the influences of the institutions on the social process of transition. The reasons for the fluctuations exist within this institutional layer, that is, within the social structures. My analysis suggests that this middle layer is crucial to understanding why boomeranging occurs. The fluctuations in dependency reported by young people appear to result from characteristics of the precarious labour market. Reasons for fluctuation and young people’s attitudes to this phenomenon have not previously been extensively described in the youth literature.
Conclusion

This chapter has focused on young people’s dependence on their parents and/or the labour market, and the relationship between these two. There is evidence from the data analysis that while participants receive varied amounts of support from parents and the labour market, this does not determine their level of dependence as much as their reliance on the support, whatever the level. Even where no support is currently provided by parents, the belief that support is available, if and when needed, permits risk taking and prevents potential exploitation.

The concept of ‘exploitable dependence’ is relevant to the youth situation because of the lack of choice available to many young people regarding their dependence on family or the labour market. Where young people may appear to be in a similar situation of dependence on parents, for example the circumstances of Lily and Louise, the concept of exploitable dependence encourages us to look more deeply at the long-term effects of these living arrangements. Louise is exercising choice in living at home to achieve a long-term benefit of home ownership. In comparison, Lily has no viable alternative and the longer she stays at home the more negative the experience is likely to be. Louise is not in a situation of exploitable dependence, whereas Lily is. Therefore this concept enhances understanding and enables us to differentiate between situations that superficially may appear the similar. This concept has wider applicability and I employ it again in the examination of working conditions in the next chapter.

The analysis in this chapter demonstrates that the relationship between parental support and ‘adult independence’ is not straightforward. A degree of support from parents clearly assists young people to engage with the labour market in a positive way. Because earnings from youth work are so low, young people need resources from parents, if they are to continue to attend school productively. This is because the number of hours required to earn any significant income would be too great to continue to meet school commitments adequately. But all families do not provide the same level or type of support. Levels of support vary from low to high and may not be directly related to the individual young person’s needs. The type of support also varies, from completely non-supportive parents to those whose support is totally unconditional. These types and levels are another influence on young people’s dependence on their parents and/or the labour market and other institutions.
Parents seem to be the major source of societal intergenerational support. However the variations in support provided make it a fragile source for some young people, which needs substantial alternatives where there is failure to provide adequate and secure sustenance through this single institution. A number of participants in this study are in need of such alternative support and a reconsideration of the responsibility for the provision of societal intergenerational support appears necessary.

With regard to the YESM (page 57), the data in this chapter also demonstrates that the level of support provided by parents influences the young person’s experience of their immediate personal setting, which includes in addition to family, their social life, work and study commitments. The relationship between immediate experience, social structures and the social processes in the macro system, assisted in directing attention to the importance of institutions in understanding the reasons for social processes such as ‘boomeranging’ and ‘fluctuating dependence’.

Figure 4 (page 146) models how, where parental dependence is high, labour market dependence is low and vice versa. However, independence from parental support does not mean young people are independent in the generally perceived way that adults are. Because of the nature of the youth labour market they are likely to be engaged in multiple, ‘flexible’ and low paid jobs, where they are not acquiring useful vocational skills for the future. Because these jobs are precarious, participants report fluctuation in dependence on their parents and the labour market. Figure 5 (page 150) depicts an example of this. Fluctuation can occur even while still in the family home, but can also involve moving in and out of independent accommodation. Some of the participants in this research reported feeling anxious and stressed in this situation, and if independent from their parents, may be living well below the poverty line.

Most of the young people aspire to full-time work and see it as a key stepping-stone to adulthood. Only a few participants actually achieved full-time secure, adequately paid work, which allowed for the achievement of aspirations such as financial independence from their parents and home ownership. These few are primarily ‘qualified’ and in the older age bracket of the young people interviewed. Even standard full-time hours did not provide the income and security hoped for by participants and required for mortgage repayments, and usually needed to be supplemented by considerable additional hours of work.
Young people’s attitude to their dependence varies both by age and by the socio-economic circumstances of their parents. Most school-aged participants appear to have little difficulty with their significant dependence on parents. The few exceptions are young people who are aware of the limited resources available to their parents, want to contribute to family income and even feel guilty at the thought that they may be unable to sustain contributions. After leaving school most participants are explicit in their desire to be financially independent, although most are unable to achieve this goal. There is a marked difference in attitude to dependence between those who are choosing the level of support being received from parents and those who are forced to accept a level through lack of choice usually due to insecure work.

Very few young people expected that their involvement with the youth labour market would ever provide financial independence. Almost all participants saw further education or training as necessary precursors to more secure ‘adult’ employment that would enable independence from parents. Parental support and/or at times welfare are perceived as necessary to underpin education. It does this by enabling young people to reduce their engagement with the youth labour market to a level which did not compromise their achievement in education or training. This belief is supported by the experience of participants in the upper age-range who had required these supports to make their transition. Some participants achieved financial independence after minimal engagement with the youth labour market and for them education and family were the primary supports for their ‘successful’ transition. A good example of this was the experience of Clare described in the fluctuating dependence section of this chapter.

A few participants are ‘independent’ of parental support because their parents are unable or unwilling to support them. Their independence is not a result of their engagement with the labour market but simply due to the inadequacy of family support. They are living in poverty and their educational attainment is at risk, which further jeopardises their future prospects.

In answer to research question number two, the labour market can make useful contributions to the transition experience of young people providing they are not dependent on their employment for sustenance. Where such dependence exists, engagement with the labour market can jeopardise achievement of secure financial independence particularly by reducing achievement in education and training. The labour market is the primary institution providing financial independence from parents at the end
of the transition process, but its contribution during the early stages of transition is ambiguous and may be less important than the roles of other institutions, such as family and education.

The limited amount of choice and agency available to participants in dependent relationships is explored in-depth in relation to the labour market in the next chapter. This will involve an exploration of the degree to which the youth labour market is commodified and whether this limits young workers citizenship and voice in the workplace.
The proceeding chapters have established the high levels of dependence that participants have on the institutions of family, welfare and the labour market. Evidence has been provided establishing the fluctuating and precarious nature of participants’ relationship with these supportive institutions, and that work in the teen years does not provide a straightforward or guaranteed pathway to financial independence from parents. This chapter addresses the final research questions: is youth labour commodified and does this limit the effectiveness and/or capacity of young people to experience citizenship and voice in the workplace? What strategies are available and utilised to address and promote citizenship and voice for young people in the workplace?

The first section of this chapter examines the extent to which youth labour is commodified and explores the degree of industrial citizenship experienced by participants. These two concepts emphasise the importance of voice and/or agency in any assessment of young people’s power to influence their working conditions. Existing theories about voice have some relevance, but miss important aspects about young workers’ ability to have voice. With reference to the YESM (page 57), this chapter focuses on the immediate personal setting of work, the social structure of the labour market and the social processes of individualisation, industrial citizenship and commodification of labour.

The second section of the chapter explores participants’ strategies for improving work conditions. This analysis leads me to propose a concept building on literature on dependence in other contexts that I call ‘dependent relationship power’, describing young people’s attempts to build power in the contemporary labour market. I argue that a strategy of reliance upon dependent relationship power has been developed by young people in response to individualising pressures in the labour market. While widely used by the participant group, the analysis/evidence suggests that the strategy is of questionable effectiveness. A model of this concept is presented in the final section exploring the characteristics of ‘dependent relationship power’.
Commodification and industrial citizenship

Participants’ perception that they lack power in the institution of the labour market and are unable to challenge their conditions of employment was described in chapter four. The concepts of commodification of labour and industrial citizenship are useful in explaining this perception. While developed for the labour market in general, these concepts have relevance to the specific experiences of young people. The relationship between industrial citizenship and commodification was established in chapter three and is briefly summarised here. I then analyse examples of participant experience relating to these two concepts. This analysis demonstrates that many young people have little access to the rights and ideals associated with industrial citizenship and have considerable experience of labour commodification. In this analysis I examine participants’ experiences of voice at work in some depth.

The model below (Figure 6) depicts the connection made by Canadian researcher and theorist Judy Fudge (2005), between labour commodification and industrial citizenship. The status of industrial citizen limits the commodification of workers and their labour (Fudge 2005 p.2). A central feature is that workers’ industrial citizenship rights must be enforced by the state rather than being dependent on the market (Fudge 2005 p.6). This is significant to young workers’ experience because, as described in chapter four, participants have little direct experience of the enforcement of labour market regulation and considerable experience of informal and unregulated engagement with the labour market.

Figure 6 –Relationship between commodification and industrial citizenship
The theory of industrial citizenship uses concepts from citizenship literature in industrialised nations. Citizens of such nations are perceived to have the right to education and social welfare relief and the responsibility to equip themselves for employment in a competitive society (Collins in McCallum 2005a p.31). Displayed in the model above (Figure 6), the characteristics of industrial citizenship include fair wages, reasonable conditions and protection from unsafe workplaces (Zetlin and Whitehouse 2003; Fudge 2005; McCallum 2005a). McCallum (2005a p.33) specifies a further right in terms of employee participation in decision making through collective bargaining, consultative committees and works councils. He regards these as important mechanisms giving voice to workers, enabling them to participate in the making and interpretation of work rules (McCallum 2005b p.145). Zetlin and Whitehouse (2003 p.775) identify worker responsibilities within an industrial citizenship system, including the responsibility to work hard, supply labour that exceeds personal need and contribute to a growth in general wealth.

The level of industrial citizenship is measured by workers’ ability to access these rights, which are listed in Figure 6. The reciprocal responsibilities including equipping themselves for employment and the responsibility to work hard enough to provide an excess of work over personal need are accepted by the young people interviewed in this research. Participants report working hard and even at times experiencing stress related to the level of work demands and their attempts to meet them. There is a degree of complexity in their reports of their attempts to equip themselves for employment. While they clearly accept responsibility for vocational training, there can be a disjunction at times between the education system and the labour market. For example, formal traineeships in the youth labour market and any skills acquired may have little relevance to adult employment goals, and successfully completed tertiary training may not result in a relevant job.

Commodification is generally accepted to mean the reduction of human labour to a status of a commodity for sale, unconstrained by regulation. Labour theorists and researchers (Polanyi 1944 p.1; Vosko 2000 p.1; Touraine 2001 p.11; Campbell 2004) have expressed concern about a growth in the commodification of labour. This trend in modern work arrangements was described in chapter three. Commodification is likely to be most obvious in marginalised and powerless segments of the labour market, for example, the less skilled or youth segments, and proves to be highly relevant to the experiences reported by participants in this research.
These theories together show that labour markets with strong industrial citizenship promote the power of the individual within their workplace through consultation, fair wages, safe work conditions and autonomy. On the other hand, commodification describes conditions where individuals have little power and influence in their workplace and are forced to accept commodification of their labour for personal sustenance. The following sections present the analysis of participant experiences against these theories and establish participants’ level of power and voice in the labour market.

**Commodification experiences**

In chapter four, I provided extensive evidence of young workers’ experience of some of the characteristics of commodification within the institution of the labour market. These include the unpredictability and insecurity of the amount of work available and therefore pay, difficulties with balancing work and other aspects of life because of the on-call nature of much of their work, the at times long and unsociable hours and the transfer of risk from employers onto workers because of these arrangements. As a consequence of experiencing such conditions, some young workers feel they are treated as ‘tools’, ‘numbers’ and ‘machines’ by employers. Commodification typically dehumanises labour and the young workers quoted below, describe this experience in graphic terms.

I just feel like, I don't know if it makes sense, but I feel like I'm a tool, rather than an employee. (Charlie, 19, Retail)

I feel like, when I'm putting 110% in, I'm working so hard and I'm just getting nothing for it, or I just feel like I'm not getting anywhere, yeah. I know that sounds weird to explain it, but that's the way I feel, just like a number, like okay yeah, you're the owner of 1796, you're looking after that business, but I just don't really feel that they even care about us. …I feel as if we can be replaced… [We need] better pay and probably more recognition, probably that would be the main two things, or even the hours to be changed, different like so that they accept that, we do have lives, we're not just like working machines, that just work here all the time. (Jean, 22, Hospitality)

They’re just really exploiting you. …When I get hired for like a proper job, I won’t be paid to the full extent that I should be and I’ll be overworked. I’ll be underpaid and overworked. …It will cut into my social life and my own time, therefore, not really allowing me to have my own life and just a working machine. …But with everything going up right now, like petrol going up and food going up, people aren’t going to be able to live comfortably. (Raj, 19, Hospitality)
Both Jean and Raj, in different interviews use the term ‘working machines’ to describe the employers’ use of their labour, particularly with reference to the expectation that they can be turned on and off at any time of the day and night, without any thought that they might have any other human commitments, responsibilities or any life outside of work. They report receiving no recognition for extra effort and the feeling that they can be readily replaced, without regard for their individuality as people.

A number of participants describe their status at work as connected with their power. This is likely to be a major factor determining the impact of commodification. Status at work is influenced by academic achievement, qualifications obtained, and networks. These are characteristics frequently utilised by upper socio-economic groups to enhance their status in the labour market. Young workers perceive a clear distinction between business owners and professionals and the rest of the workforce. A few see declines in regulation of labour market conditions, for example, the ‘WorkChoices’ legislation, as contributing directly to diminishing pay and conditions for less skilled workers. Wendy states differences between the power elites and the rest of the workforce are increasing:

I pretty much as a casual worker have no rights, I just found a good employer. I mentioned before, I don't get over-time, I don't get holiday pay, award rates, none of it, I don't get paid breaks, I work twelve hour shifts, I don't get paid for a break from that, it's taken out. It's something that the Liberal party thought was great because they are all white collar workers and this is why Labour's standing there going, hang on, think about everyone underneath. Unions now effectively have no power, like union members can be arrested for speaking up, I've thought, like, that our constitution said that we could have free voice… (Wendy, 19, Hospitality)

The conditions Wendy describes do not recognise her human needs, which is typical of commodification of labour. Wendy believes her conditions could be worse and that she has found a ‘good employer’. In these terms this would seem to mean an employer working within the law, rather than one with any consideration of the employee’s life or lifestyle outside of work. Indeed in this workplace, the employer does not accept the cost of basic human needs; even in extended shifts of up to twelve hours the employer does not financially accommodate the need for toilet and food breaks. Other young workers also refer to this concept of the ‘good employer’, which if found would be the answer to their individual labour market problems. They seldom make any connection between labour market regulation and individual experience, but think their work conditions are primarily a result of their individual relationship with a ‘good’ or ‘bad’ supervisor or employer. This
acceptance of individual responsibility in the workplace relationship and its consequent conditions is further developed and modelled later in this chapter.

Other participants describing their low status relate it directly to employees’ dollar value. Sarah’s experience of different professions being valued more than others because they brought more dollars into the organisation is a variation on this theme. ‘Medicare’ structures allow direct billing to government for medical services but not for some allied health professionals, such as social workers. Therefore some workers have a direct and easily measured income value, others may have only an indirect and less easily measured value:

> Managers are influenced by resource and time constraints. That’s all that they look at and don’t really look at, you know, what the workers actually do and what they do bring to the service. And I guess medical staff bring in money because they’re funded by Medicare. They bring in money for the organisation, whereas community health workers or social workers don’t, because we’re not funded by Medicare. …people would actually, I think, be putting in a lot more effort and there’d be a lot more passion and people would strive to actually work harder if there was, I guess, that valuation of work people actually do. (Sarah, 24, Health and Community Services, Retail)

Employees can be stratified by managers according to their monetary value, without regard to their contribution to the work of the organisation or the amount of effort they make. All staff in this situation are commodified, that is they are valued only because of the organisational income they generate (or not) and are therefore replaceable by any person with the same qualification. Sarah is especially dissatisfied with this situation since she is in the less valued group.

Garfield is struggling to reconcile media rhetoric about future opportunities with his own experience. He sees the potential for workers to gain more power as the baby boomer generation retires from the workforce; he also sees workers having to work harder and longer in order to survive in a high tech, results driven work environment. Considering that Australians already have among the longest working hours in the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development 2004 p.25-26), increased working hours would seriously erode time for personal commitments and rest. This disregard for human needs outside of work is a feature of commodification.

I mean work now is definitely becoming more involved, working at home, you know you might say do 9-5 but you still might have to do another 2 hours of work at home, there’s a big change there, you know more
demands at work… it’s always changing now especially with the internet and all the technology, it’s definitely changed since my parents. We are however coming towards the baby boomer retirement, so soon we’re going to have the same sort of conditions that my parents had when they could just go from one job to the next, whereas today we’ve got to apply and all that sort of thing but soon it’s going to come to the point where you can just go into any industry you want if you’ve got certain skills, so it is definitely changing, it’s going to be a more demanding working environment. …it’s going to be a lot more result driven, so there’s going to be a lot of efficiency, protocols put in there, results base sort of encouragements as well so you know, you might become, you know, apparent to employers to have payment on a results, so you actually get paid on a results basis, that might already be considered as commission work at the moment, but it may soon transcend into other areas… (Garfield, 23, Property and Business Services)

Garfield’s ideas of the future are in conflict with each other, and neither of his ideas resembles the life he describes his parents as having led. Garfield makes explicit a tension that many young people experience. This confusion invites young people to ignore their personal experience and hope there will be improvements because of external factors without the need for personal action.

These examples demonstrate that the concept of commodification is highly relevant to an understanding of the youth labour market, and of some participants’ experience of the adult labour market. Young people are experiencing work conditions which at times do not recognise the workers as human beings with lives outside the labour force.

Commodification is also evident and increasing in the adult labour market according to Vosko (2000), Campbell (2004) and Papadopoulos (2005). What young people assume to be a transition or ‘rite of passage’ is, for some, likely to be characteristic of their entire working life.

**Industrial citizenship experiences**

Voice is an important characteristic of industrial citizenship and relates directly to the ability to influence working conditions. The existence or otherwise of this characteristic in combination with other working conditions such as those described previously in chapter four, determines the level of industrial citizenship and/or commodification of an individual or group. The presence or absence of these characteristics therefore determines a worker’s status and position as set out in Figure 6 (page 157). This figure demonstrates the inverse relationship between these contrasting characteristics. In this section, I explore a variety of influences on participants’ ability to express their voice in the workplace.
**Voice at work**

McCallum (2005a p.33) argues employee voice in workplace decision-making is an essential characteristic of industrial citizenship. In this situation ‘voice’ relates to the ability of workers to express opinions freely and have them considered with respect, in decisions affecting their work experience. Participants report a lack of voice in their workplaces across all industries included in this research, and have little understanding of the concept of voice as a right embodied in the ideals of industrial citizenship. The majority say that they cannot contribute positive ideas for change and improvement or express concern about any issue. There are only a few examples of young people who feel they have voice and the ability to contribute useful ideas for improvement, and they value this opportunity. In this section, I will describe the factors the participants identify as important to their ability to have voice in their workplaces. These are: the employers’ influence on voice, the degree to which voice is influenced by hierarchical structures in the workplace, the fact that age alone appears to influence level of voice, that time and experience in the workplace supports the development of voice and that young people are fearful of supervisors’ reactions. I have chosen illustrative examples of each factor from the data.

**Employer influence**

Participants report the strongest influence on employee voice in the workplace is employer attitude. They say employers’ attitudes vary from creating formal structures promoting the expression and consideration of young people’s opinions and recommendations, to situations where workers perceive that the expression of personal opinions would result in termination of employment. Most participants report a lack of real attention or respect for any opinion they express.

Kate is one of very few participants in this research who has experience of workplace activities that increase voice and power. As a new recruit and a young woman in a masculinised profession, she finds this a positive experience.

> I think it's empowering when you're invited to participate in something that's voluntary, I suppose things like being dobbed into you know, standing on the EEO, the Equal Employment Opportunity Committee and being similarly asked to be involved in a mentoring program for an education project which happens for recruitment of students. …I suppose there's power in those of us who take the initiative to actually stand up and say something and to express an opinion, how big or small that is I suppose time will tell. (Kate, 22, Business Services)
These activities are formal, structured, promoted by the employer and inclusive of young workers. While still at the discretion of the employer, this organisation has workplace structures that support workers’ capability to have voice. Nussbaum’s (2000) approach is relevant here, where the workers’ theoretical right to have voice in the organisation is underpinned by supportive processes and structures. However, at the end of her quote, Kate recognises that the structures alone do not guarantee any level of influence in the workplace. She knows that those with power in the organisation will decide whether or not to pay any attention to the contributions of workers. She states that time will tell whether contributing through the structures is worthwhile. If none of the worker suggestions are acted upon, it will be obvious that such structures are not necessarily effective in increasing voice. Kate says none of her suggestions has been acted upon as yet.

In any case, most participants do not have access to such structures, leaving them unsupported in their efforts to achieve any level of voice. Whether such structures exist or not is a decision of each employer and clearly employers without these structures are either less interested in supporting voice or they are so small that such arrangements would be inappropriate. Many participants recognise this and know that it is at the employer’s discretion whether they will listen to an employee’s ideas and opinions or not. Katie’s experience was typical of this. She knows that her opinion might be heard or not depending on the mood of her employer at the time.

[Y]ou kind of feel like you can't [suggest anything] …but it just depends on what mood they're in really, whether they're going to listen or not. (Katie, 16, Hospitality)

Larger organisations, which have structures in place for employee voice, enhance opportunities for young people to contribute their ideas and opinions. Without these, young workers seldom report being heard by their employer or supervisor and are aware they have few rights in this area.

**Workplace hierarchies**

Participants report an awareness that power is hierarchical in the organisations in which they work. Voice and power increase the higher a person’s position. For example, Jason feels he has more power since his promotion.

I do think I have power. Cause of moving up the ladder. (Jason, 17, Retail)
Jason’s perception is typical of many of the participants who see gains in voice and power with higher status in the workplace. However, participants usually report themselves to be at the bottom level in the hierarchical model of voice and power. Position on the hierarchy is determined by qualifications or seniority, neither of which is readily available to young workers. Most of the participants accept this situation as natural.

**Time and experience**

Another factor which participants say reduces their voice in employment is their lack of experience. These young people understand that when entering new employment they are likely to have less knowledge than their colleagues. Comments and concerns are given less attention when they come from new staff with less experience, and they hesitate to make comments or concerns known for fear that they may not be valid or useful. This results in them making fewer suggestions and looking to senior staff for direction. For example, Lily said senior employees have the most power, are listened to the most and can choose the most desirable duties. Steve and other young men in the building trades also had this experience.

I’m basically there to do a job, to work, and I don’t think I have very much power because I’m the newest employee. I basically get told where I have to work and I’ll just do it. There are some who don’t like certain sections and get that power to choose what they like. But with me, I’m not allowed to do that. (Lily, 22, Retail)

[I]t is the more experienced guys that have actually got the power... You have got your leading hands, you have got your foremen and all of that. It is the more experienced guys or guys that know how to read plans. Some people can’t get their heads around different plans and that, but if you know what you are doing, you are fine. You are not going to cop any crap and that’s it. (Steve, 24, Building and Construction)

This situation can result in the requirement to put up with negative treatment from older, more experienced workers. Steve perceives young inexperienced workers as having no voice in the construction industry. Having passed through this experience, he believes it to be a normal progression.

**Age**

Some of the participants have time and experience in their work but still report reduced voice in comparison to older workers with the same or less experience. They believe regardless of skills and experience, older workers’ attitudes to their age undermines their capacity to contribute to workplace consultation and discussion. Sometimes they report
they are targeted because of their age, with behavior that would be unacceptable to most adult workers. Sarah’s experience highlights a lack of voice in the workplace that seems to be entirely a result of prejudice against youth. Sarah’s qualifications and experience are superior to some senior staff in her workplace but she feels senior staff and management continually undervalue her.

I’m classified as junior staff even though I’ve been there 4 years and a lot longer than the senior staff and have a lot more qualifications than either senior staff, however because I’m younger, I’m not seen as respected or as qualified or as knowledgeable. And so even though a lot of the other junior staff have the exact same concerns as I do, it’s not seen as important. …all the senior staff don’t respect the younger staff and the management does not respect the younger staff, even though we do the majority of the work. (Sarah, 24, Health and Community Services, Retail)

Sarah’s ‘junior’ status has no relation to her work role or the degree of responsibility she is expected to accept. She is confident that this treatment is totally due to ageism. Sarah and other participants do not believe this treatment is related to any attributes and characteristics of young people generally or individually, but rather on unsubstantiated assumptions based on age alone.

While Sarah provides a clear example of her experience of ageism, it is likely that young workers may experience a more subtle conjunction of ageism and prejudice against workers with less experience. Such prejudices may help explain certain workplace dynamics as they act as a powerful combination to affect the confidence of young entry-level workers. Other prejudices associated with gender, class, sexuality or ethnicity may further disadvantage workers and reduce their ability to have voice in their workplaces.

Fearful of supervisor reaction
A final barrier to the ability to have workplace voice is participants’ fear and lack of confidence when dealing with supervisors and/or employers. This lack of voice means that they are unable to raise issues of concern, or ask for explanations or assistance. Quinn and Jill describe feeling fearful, and Jenni expresses similar fears related to possible negative repercussions that might result from any assertive behaviour on her part.

I'm just not confident enough to go up to the supervisor and say stuff, like I'm just a bit scared. …If I wanted to ask if I could cut down on shifts, I’d panic, I wouldn't be confident enough to say it to her face. (Quinn, 17, Hospitality)
…cause she is the owner, she intimidates me for some reason, I don't know why. She is nice, but I am afraid of her. (Jill, 16, Hospitality)

I just can't work up the courage to tell them, you know, I am not working this night even if you tell me to, I am not. They’d probably just sort of yell at me all the time and tell me to do stuff, they would probably give me graveyards all the time. All the late shifts. (Jenni, 16, Retail)

Workers who are under-confident and fearful about raising issues are vulnerable to exploitation, for example, in terms of feeling forced to work unwanted shifts or having hours reduced. They find it very difficult to initiate or challenge workplace practices or culture, giving employers the opportunity to require behaviour unlikely to be expected from a more senior employee.

‘Voice’ is more than the ability to contribute useful ideas in a workplace. It includes the ability and confidence to express concerns. These young people from their various industries recognise that it takes some time to master new skills and understand the culture of a new workplace. The nature of young people’s work, however, means that skill acquisition is often a fairly brief period until the new worker is working at the same capacity and producing the same outputs as more experienced workers. The higher percentage of work injury to young workers in the early stages of employment (Mayhew 2005) could possibly result from their willingness to follow instruction without question and their hesitance to express concerns as new employees. Both the lack of experience of the new worker, resulting in self-censorship and the devaluing of new staff members’ opinions by more experienced staff, may contribute to this poor outcome.

In summary, participants identify factors including employer influence, workplace hierarchies, age related prejudice, time and experience in the job and fear of supervisor reaction, as the major factors reducing their voice at work. The participants described situations of ageism and other prejudices. The idea that they could contribute and should be heard respectfully on workplace issues or in fact actively consulted regarding workplace practices that affect them, did not occur to many of them. The few who expressed concern about their lack of voice were either highly qualified and experiencing age discrimination or had involvement with external legal and/or parental supports.

**Industrial citizenship and commodification: a summary**

Participants report their labour as dehumanised and highly commodified, when describing themselves as ‘tools’, ‘numbers’ and ‘working machines’. The working conditions of participants analysed in previous chapters demonstrate reduced access to liveable wages,
reasonable conditions and safety. A lack of access to these basic conditions indicates young employees’ low level of industrial citizenship. The final necessary characteristic of industrial citizenship is voice, which has been examined in this section and again young people have reduced access. Industrial citizenship may only be an ideal for young workers, but it has proved useful in the analysis of the level of commodification and whether or not young workers have any power in the labour market. Unfortunately the labour market as experienced by the participants quoted above, appears to have a high level of commodification and a low level of industrial citizenship, reflecting the inverse relationship between the two as proposed by Fudge (2005) and modelled in Figure 6. The youth labour market experienced by participants in this research confirms concerns expressed by theorists such as Touraine (2001 p.94), that commodification is increasing and Vosko (2000 p.3), that the erosion of security and freedom in the wage relation intensifies commodification.

Therefore, in answer to the first part of research question three, this analysis suggests that youth labour is highly commodified and this limits the effectiveness and capacity of young people to experience citizenship and voice in the workplace. Job security may be the foundation upon which characteristics of industrial citizenship such as voice can be developed. Many participants do not have this basic security and therefore are willing to accept commodified working conditions that do not meet the ideals described in industrial citizenship.

**Strategies for improving work conditions**

This section focuses on strategies that are available to address and promote citizenship, voice and power for young people in the workplace. This is the second part of research question number three and involves an analysis of participants’ perceptions of their ability to influence their working conditions and the ways they attempt to achieve this. An examination of the power available to young people in the employment relationship involves analysis of the use of three strategies identified by the participants. Firstly, I describe the two traditional strategies, that of unionisation and exit-voice discussed in the literature review chapter. In the second section, I describe the third strategy ‘dependent relationship power’, which is an individualised strategy used by a number of the participants for improving their working conditions.
Traditional strategies for labour market influence

As discussed in chapter three there is useful empirical research regarding the strategies of unionisation and exit-voice, and this thesis does not replicate this existing work. However, each strategy is briefly addressed for its relevance and utilisation in the youth labour market, prior to an analysis of participants’ reports of their individualised attempts to influence working conditions in the next section. These traditional strategies provide a context for young people’s current attitudes and practices regarding maintenance of and improvement in, the quality of their labour market engagement.

Unions benefit workers through activities such as collective bargaining and representation in grievance and arbitration systems (Freeman 1980 p.646). Unions play a role in increasing the industrial citizenship of workers through their democratic structure, aims and functions, giving members input and power in their workplace and the broader labour market (McCallum 2005a p.19). However, union membership has been in decline for a number of years and the majority of workers are not represented by unions in their workplaces (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2008a). In England, Canada and Australia, young people’s rates of union membership are less than that of adult workers (Lowe and Rastin 2000; Waddington and Kerr 2002; McDonald and Dear 2005). Canadian research indicates the years after first entry into the workplace, usually during the teen or early adult years, is a period in which work attitudes and behaviours develop (Lowe and Rastin 2000 p.206), therefore young people’s low propensity to join a union is ‘embedded in the context of an individual's work history’ (Lowe and Rastin 2000 p.217). Oliver (2006 p.77) has made similar observations in Australia and states that young workers who have not joined unions during their early engagement with the labour market, are unlikely to join as adults.

One of the main explanations for low levels of youth union membership conceptualises young people as being more ‘instrumental’ or ‘individualistic’ than past generations. Present day youth are seen as possessing attitudes that are less supportive of the traditional ‘collective’ union ethic (Waddington and Kerr 2002 p.299). This theory gives little weight to other factors that might affect the predisposition to join a union, such as those identified by Canadian researchers Lowe and Rastin (2000), for example job dissatisfaction, general union attitudes and perceived union instrumentality. There is some indication from the data that there may be at least three other influences. A number of participants discuss
membership cost and employer attitudes as significant issues affecting their unionisation, given their low wages and dependence on supervisors for rostering hours of work:

I think the cost is one of the main reasons. I think I asked how much it would be to join and it was going to be about $5 or $4 per week which is a lot of money for a young person, particularly if they are only working 3 hours a week, or getting paid $10 an hour or whatever. That’s kind of 10% of their pay gone. (Jamie, 19, Retail)

[O]ur managers would be like… all they really do is steal your money. …don't join, don't join... I have never joined. (Samantha, 17, Retail)

The third influence may be a structural impediment to union membership for this group based on the mismatch between young people’s style of labour market engagement and the traditional industry specific arrangement for union coverage. As reported in earlier chapters, many young people hold multiple jobs across different industries. The young workers in this situation, under the current industry specific union system in Australia, would have to be members of several unions if they wanted to participate in collective representation in all of their work. The short-term nature of their employment adds to the complexity of the situation, by making it necessary to update their union membership each time they change their employment situation. These characteristics of the youth labour market seriously interfere with young people’s capacity to use unions as a strategy for positive change in their workplace, even if they understand the function of unions as a way of enhancing their power.

Therefore while unionism is potentially a valuable strategy, there is a range of reasons for the low level of membership amongst young people. Whatever the reasons, the current level of young people’s membership means it is not a significant force for young people to improve their working conditions.

The other traditional strategy for voicing dissatisfaction is ‘exit-voice’ (Hirschman 1970), which can refer to the influence on the workplace of workers choosing to leave that workplace because of negative factors. This action can have power and bring about positive change, especially if taken by a number of employees together or sequentially. Bauman (1995) using Hirschman’s concepts of ‘exit’ and ‘voice’ argues that contemporary institutions foster ‘exit’ as the most appropriate response to something disliked. However, many of the participants in this research state they have no voice through ‘exit’, given that exit is only available for those who can risk loss of income. Few of the participants have
considered using exit as a strategy for change; most believe their exit would not result in any real change.

As mentioned previously in relation to the fluctuating dependence of young people, Lister (1997 p.112) used Hirschman’s framework in an explanation of women’s voice and opportunities for exit from dependent relationships. She found an independent income from either the state or the labour market strengthened their voice and their opportunities for exit. This framework has relevance for examination of young workers’ experience of exit-voice, particularly with respect to their problematic dependence on parents, social security or the availability of alternative employment. Some participants in this research left unsatisfactory employment but, alternative financial supports influenced and/or enabled such decisions.

Dependence on earned income reduces a young worker’s ability to exit. Lucy is typical of participants who cannot exit despite their inability to improve their conditions in other ways. Participants in this situation are usually not living at home and have no significant financial backing from their parents. In line with Lister’s (1997) findings that an independent income source supports exiting ‘dependent’ relationships, such young people cannot leave because they do not have an established alternative income source.

I cannot last without jobs and that’s my main source of income, so I have to keep on working there and just put up with it. (Lucy, 18, Retail, Hospitality)

Lucy is very clear that she must continue to work and cannot exit her workplace because of unpleasant or unfair conditions. Using exit to voice dissatisfaction would result in her being in a more dependent and vulnerable position than remaining in an unpleasant workplace. She states she has little power to change her conditions for the better through such action and would quickly be replaced.

The competition for youth jobs and their precariousness not only deprives many young people of the power of exit-voice but also requires them to continue in ‘dependent’ relationships with their employers, which have the potential to be exploitative, abusive and inappropriate. Many of the participants believe, like Lucy, that they are easily replaceable; this reduces their power both inside the workplace and in leaving jobs. Many young workers say they feel powerless to challenge work conditions or pay rates because they are aware of a large number of other young people who would accept the job under the current
conditions. Lucy is aware of the competition for her job and that if she relinquishes the job, the employer would have no difficulty in filling the vacancy.

I think most of the [pay rates for the] work around the place, like the [supermarket] and Road House, are based on age and in one of my jobs we do exactly the same work if not more than the seniors in that job. I believe we do more heavy lifting and everything and we would probably get paid $5 less [per hour]. Yeah and it is a bit unfair, but I think the way they see is there's a lot of juniors around the town that want to get jobs and we're the lucky ones that got one, so we just have to deal with the wages... I know for [the supermarket] there's a waiting list and Road House now there's a waiting list. (Lucy, 18, Retail, Hospitality)

White’s (1997) research into young workers leads him to a similar conclusion in relation to competition and worker power. He argues that limited job opportunities for young people leads to a reluctance ‘to contest the terms of their employment or fight for improvements’ (White 1997 p.70). The young people White (1997 p.73) researched felt vulnerable in the labour market due to high youth unemployment, which effectively left them at the ‘mercy of their employers’. Lucy’s perception is that the employer can pay less to young workers because of the high level of competition for jobs. The bargaining power of young workers in informal work may be even less than those in legal positions and the high rates of this work for this age group (White 1997 p.72-73) may make this a significant issue.

In summary, exit can be used where young people have alternative sources of income. However this is not exit-voice; it is simply the ability to remove oneself from an unsatisfactory situation. Voice would imply some impact on the relinquished workplace. High levels of competition, making replacement of young workers easy for employers, makes change as a result of exiting unlikely, and so this analysis suggests that exit-voice, like unionism, is not currently a useful strategy for young people to improve their work situations.

**Dependent relationship power**

The previous section explored the ability of young people to influence the conditions under which they are employed through two traditional methods. Despite the poor conditions of the youth labour market described in the preceding chapters and the lack of effective supports for change as described earlier in this chapter, young people must continue to participate in the labour market in order to earn income. Their reliance on this income places them in a dependent relationship with their employer if they cannot easily exit the employment. The level of competition for jobs and the predominance of casual
employment (that is employment with no guaranteed level of hours or income per week/month), combine to place some participants in a position of ‘exploitable dependency’. This means they are dependent on their employer and perceive they are unable to withdraw from this relationship, even if they believe they are being poorly treated.

A further consideration of individualisation at this point can help explain the development of behaviours aimed at achieving protection and security of working conditions. Most participants are not in secure and predictable employment and are trying to develop ways of introducing some level of certainty into their working lives, which Beck (1997 p.96) describes as a ‘compulsion’ in an individualised society. Bauman and Tester’s (2001 p.110) pessimism as to the actual power of individuals to be successful in this endeavour, in the absence of larger protective structures, leads to the need for close scrutiny of outcomes achieved by strategies utilised. Analysis of interviewee reports of behaviour and attitudes relating to strategies to protect themselves in the labour market builds on Beck’s (1997) and Bauman’s (Bauman and Tester 2001) theories. Earlier in this chapter, Figure 6 (page 157) demonstrates the relationship between commodification of labour and industrial citizenship. Analysis of participant data in relation to their power and status in the labour market suggests young people have reduced access to characteristics of industrial citizenship, such as: fair wages, reasonable conditions, protections from unsafe workplaces and participation in decision making. Consequently the analysis confirms that participants’ labour is often commodified. These theories when considered together, assist in explaining both the need to develop individual strategies to build power and their likelihood of failure.

Most participants report trying to improve their situation on an individual basis through direct relationships with supervisors and employers. Interviews identified a range of behaviours, which are common to many of the young people interviewed and which young people state elicit more favourable treatment by employers. I use the term ‘dependant relationship power’ (DRP) to describe this constellation of behaviours, which are analysed and modelled in this section.

I provide a number of examples to demonstrate the set of behaviours which participants believe is the most effective way to success, credibility and consideration at work. The behaviours include: submission, obedience and cheerfulness under all circumstances. Rarely questioning, rarely presenting problems and always demonstrating gratitude for
work provided are also important. Participants say that if they exhibit these behaviours their supervisor will be more likely to like them, treat them well, put their interests above others and possibly even protect them in times of economic downturn. Being a ‘favourite’ gives them opportunities for voice and influence in the workplace. The actions are an attempt to establish what might be termed a ‘personal’, rather than a purely professional relationship with supervisors and/or employers. The relationship has characteristics of favouritism, loyalty and nepotism.

In the literature review, I described Holmes and Gifford’s (1996 p.447) research that established that employers with an ad hoc management style took a ‘reciprocity’ approach to the employment relationship, where the employer considered minimum legal employment conditions to be a reward for those workers who are perceived as ‘good’ employees. It is interesting that both the participants in this research as employees and Holmes and Gifford’s (1996) employers agree that in order to receive the ‘favour’ of minimum employment conditions, employees have to perform more than the job requirements.

The model on the next page depicts a process of building DRP that begins when an individual attempts to reduce their dependence on their family or welfare by entering the labour market. The majority of young people commence work as casual workers. They encounter precarious and low paid work conditions and attempt to improve these through exhibiting attitudes and behaviours that are desired by their employer. Through this strategy they are attempting to establish a ‘reciprocal relationship’, where in return for their compliant value-added labour they receive improved working conditions. Because some of the value-adding behaviours are unsustainable in the long-term, for example never being sick and always being available, a breakdown will inevitably occur, which results in one of three options. Firstly, the young person may stay with the employer and attempt to rebuild the relationship, thus continuing the cycle. Secondly, they may obtain alternative employment and build a similar relationship with their new employer or thirdly, they may exit to dependence on welfare or family again. At the very least, a temporary fluctuation in dependence is the likely result of all three options. In option one, there would usually be a reduction in hours given to the worker who has fallen out of favour. In option two, there is likely to be fewer hours until a favoured relationship is built with the new employer. In the third option, unemployment results in a return to full dependence on parents or the welfare system.
This model of behaviour, that is to ‘add-value’ to your employment by being compliant, by working in excess of specified duties and/or exhibiting personal characteristics that are seen to be attractive to your employer, may have wider implications in the future. These behaviours are now being recommended in the popular press, to adult workers, as a legitimate strategy to preserve the security of even full-time, permanent jobs in times of high competition or economic downturn (Nicholas 2009 p.1).

**Figure 7 – Cycle of Dependent Relationship Power (DRP)**

Start

Dependence on family or welfare.

Relationship Breakdown.

Incident occurs, which means worker is unable to maintain value-added labour. E.g. workplace injury or sickness outside of work.

Young worker either exits employment, or remains.

A ‘reciprocal’ relationship forms. Desired work conditions are achieved for the worker who provides ‘value-added’ labour.

Young person gets a job.

Young worker exhibits behaviours and attitudes they believe are desired by their employer.
**Good boss, bad boss**

Participants frequently describe their search for the ‘good boss’ and their experiences with ‘bad bosses’. A good boss is one with whom a DRP relationship can be built, which is perceived as necessary to gain secure hours of employment and other improved working conditions. Many participants believe the employer has complete discretion in providing good or bad working conditions. As discussed above, what is described as ‘good’ working conditions is often merely the legal minimum requirement for the job. ‘Bad’ working conditions are sometimes less than the minimum legal requirements. Conditions may involve unreasonable employer demands for on call arrangements, split shifts and/or extreme flexibility, impacting on number of hours worked and consequent income. Below, Jim’s attitude typifies that of many participants. He states that government policy and regulation is ‘crap’ and has little effect on employer behaviour. His opinion is that employer behaviour is governed entirely by labour availability.

> Sitting on the tractor listening to all the crap that government always talks about. …basically you can get a crap boss out in the country [and] you’re just going to get done. But if you do get a good boss, which most people around here are because they want to keep their workers, you’ll get good awards and that. But otherwise if there isn’t much work around everyone’s just going to screw people over. (Jim, 18, Agriculture)

No participants had experience of negative consequences for employers from the state for not complying with regulation. This situation leads to the development of individual efforts to address negative conditions. These efforts occur between individual workers and their employers with recognition of the power differential between the two. The workers are dependent on the employer to provide work for financial security and see their power as reduced due to oversupply of labour and competition for work. Participants generally want income security and predictability of work. However, as established earlier in this chapter, exit-voice and unionisation are not seen as effective in achieving this outcome. Dependent relationship power is a mechanism by which young people try to get greater continuity of support and independence, in the context of an individualised labour market.

**Reciprocity in ‘dependent relationship power’**

A number of participants relate use of the specific behaviours which I define as ‘dependent relationship power’. Kaz exemplifies this behaviour. She states that building a trusting and friendship-like relationship with her employer is the best way to increase workplace power and voice. Kaz is explicit about her strategies to build dependent relationship power in
order to protect her income through her relationship with her supervisor. Kaz describes voice, as something that needs to be developed over time and that grows with confidence, longevity in a particular job and with security of employment. The implication is that Kaz sees voice as a privilege to be earned, rather than a right. Kaz emphasises the importance of a ‘good’ relationship with superiors, in having voice. She explains how managers consider the accommodation of individual workers needs, as favours that can be ‘called in’ when needed. Sometimes these late notice demands can be difficult for workers, who must relinquish all other activities and responsibilities in order to keep their employer happy. This power differential means that junior staff can be exploited.

Earlier in the year, I was getting 3 hours work, but it was costing me $180 or so to live, so I was basically in a position where I couldn’t get through... we’ve since had a new manager come in, who is really understanding of that, so she tries to give me as much work as she can, but it also means that I feel pressured to take work when I really don’t have the time. So I’ll be in the middle of exams and my boss will ring me the day before an exam, and say come in, and I’ll feel like I have to go in, like I don’t have a choice, because if I don’t take it then I’m not really appreciating the fact that she’s bending over backwards to get me work. So you know there’s kind of obligation that I know, that if I turn down work, that it will be like, well, she doesn’t want it, so extra shifts, they can go to someone else. So there’s that pressure... (Kaz, 21, Retail, Health and Community Services)

In this example, if Kaz had turned down work because of her examination the next day, this could be an incident that would risk her established reciprocal relationship with her supervisor. If she did not respond to the offer of work in the expected pattern, that is with gratitude and responsiveness, then she could not expect her supervisor to continue in her favoured shift allocations. This would threaten Kaz’s income security and her independent lifestyle.

The development of such relationships, which young workers believe give them power and voice, is hindered by high staff turnover and specific work practices that discourage long term relationships. In this case, the transfer of a supervisor is an example of an incident, such as depicted in Figure 7 (page 175), where the reciprocal relationship cannot be maintained and the young person is forced to build a new relationship if they wish to continue their favoured and secure status. Kaz describes the rotation of managers that occurs in her retail job and the need to be held in positive regard by all those with power.

The managers in [my retail job] rotate around stores about every, between 6 months and 18 months, you get new line managers and new store managers... If you get along well with your manager then it’s good, I’ve been really lucky.
I know there’s people who the managers don’t like and therefore everything they say it’s just, oh that’s that person and so they’re immediately discriminated against. Because the managers don’t like them, anything they say, basically just can be ignored. (Kaz, 21, Retail, Health and Community Services)

Because of her relationship with supervisory staff, Kaz can express an opinion without negative consequences but knows that even this status does not ensure that her opinion will be listened to or implemented.

Turnover in retail is very high, so I’ve been there for a fairly long time. So yes, I feel that I’m heard, but often I have to absolutely crack the shits to be heard, …so it’s probably taken me about 4 years to actually even feel comfortable to say, this is what I want. …But even that kind of falls down. Like we have a system at work where you report safety concerns and there was a thing of metal that was kind of sticking up in the stockroom. I had to report it 6 times before anything was done about it. I ripped 6 pairs of pants and I would fall over it every single shift… (Kaz, 21, Retail, Health and Community Services)

While Kaz reports her situation positively, this is not an example of voice or industrial citizenship. Conditions such as secure minimum hours and the ability to comment on work practices, are ‘privileges’ that Kaz may be granted if her relationship with her supervisor is sufficiently positive. Other people in her workplace do not have such privileges. Kaz is aware that her income security is completely in the hands of her supervisor, who does not have to provide reasons for depriving her of this security. The provision of regular working hours is a favour, which must be repaid above and beyond designated duties. Even in her privileged position, Kaz has difficulty accessing her right to a safe workplace. The implications of dependent relationship power on the occupational health and safety of young workers will be further developed in a later section of this chapter.

**Consequences for other young workers**

During slow times, businesses with a surplus of casual workers have greater opportunity to exploit the competition. Where some workers are able to gain favour, others may be negatively affected by favours granted. Participants did not report that they expect improvements in their working conditions that are of any cost to the employer. Wendy is an example of a participant who was negatively affected by other young workers gaining regular shifts through their personal relationships with senior staff.

I've always worked casual, the job I quit previously, to the job I have now. It got to the stage where there were five people getting all the shifts and 45 people getting one shift a week, so in that respect being a casual worker
really screwed me over. Other workers were having personal relationships with the managers. They got along better... (Wendy, 19, Hospitality)

Wendy is unable to earn special favour and therefore became one of the forty-five staff that received little or no work in the down times. Participants commonly report such experiences. The power of an employer or a supervisor to give or withhold work and therefore income, without provision of legitimate reason or justification, places an enormous responsibility for ethical behaviour on them. Inevitably some are responsive to any favours or extra positive behaviour provided by the casual workers.

Therefore at best, this strategy of DRP is only partially successful in some cases in achieving regular hours and income above that generally available in the youth labour market, but any advantage may be unintentionally gained at the expense of other young workers. Any change that may be achieved through these means will be limited to one or very few individuals in a workplace, and may in fact act to cause further deterioration in the conditions of other workers. There is no wide, systemic or structural change produced by this strategy. In addition, a wide variety of incidents that are beyond the control of the individual can cause this strategy to fail, even at the individual level. The next section will demonstrate the fragility of this strategy and its negative effect on work conditions using the example of an incident of injury at work.

**The ‘incident’ of injury in Dependent Relationship Power**

Dependent relationship power (DRP) explains some of the issues young people face and their attitudes and behaviours at work. The examples of Kaz and others in the previous section demonstrate the aims and process of building dependent relationship power and its consequences for other young workers. The use of DRP as a strategy to improve working conditions on an individual basis has many consequences for the work experience of young people. Participants describe their behaviour in relation to specific working conditions, such as increasing hours of work, requests for leave and pay disputes, as influenced by the use of this strategy. I have chosen to analyse the area of occupational health and safety (OHS) as an example of the way DRP shapes young workers’ responses to a variety of possible work incidents and issues.

In light of existing research highlighting high injury rates for young workers (Mayhew and Quinlan 2002; ACIRRT 2005; Mayhew 2005; Loudoun and Allan 2007), it is no surprise
that many of the participants in the research for this thesis discuss injuries associated with their work. However, research by SA Unions suggests that the likelihood of workers to claim workers’ compensation after a workplace injury increases with age. They found that 86% of 15-19 year olds were likely not to submit a claim in comparison with 78% of 20-24 year olds and 46% of 25-35 year olds (Schluter 2005 p.6).

In relation to these findings, participants give many examples of injuries not reported and workers’ compensation entitlements not claimed. Participants in this research report generally poor training in the prevention of injury and taking individual responsibility for injuries with few expectations of employer support. This acceptance of the transfer of responsibility from employer to employee, may be explained by Holmes and Gifford’s (1996) theory of a ‘reciprocity approach’ in employment relations. This concept assists in explaining the poor utilisation of worker entitlements particularly relating to occupational health and safety. The data I present here, is a further demonstration of the relevance of Nussbaum’s (2000) work on capabilities, where despite clear rights the participants, possibly because of a lack of societal support, do not have the same access to their entitlements as adult workers.

The experience of one participant, Rachel, is used here to exemplify the effect of an incident of worker injury on the fragile dependent relationship power developed by young workers with their employers. Rachel reiterates the perception of many participants, that worker power is dependent on the quality of the relationship that can be established with the employer. In her employment, she strives to build such relationships:

    [F]or me as a worker, I think it’s building a strong relationship with your employers and so they feel, you feel on par with them, and so you don’t feel scared about them, or worried about anything. …I think to feel that you have power, is to make sure that you have a good relationship with your employers and make sure you are friends with them and that you can feel like you can talk to them about stuff that might concern you. (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)

Rachel had been partially successful in achieving DRP in her previous employment. However an incident of injury occurred which damaged the relationship.

    [M]y big burn, I don’t think that should of happened, no matter who’s fault it was, and I don’t think it was anyone’s. It could have been avoided. When I look at it now, I’m going to have a scar there for the rest of my life. Working in kitchens, I think people think it’s part of the job, cuts, burns, you’re going to have it and in the end it’s like the stresses of working with kitchen combined with how dangerous the environment is, you just have to
deal with it …[I]t’s from looking up and seeing you’ve got 20 customers and going oops, doing it a bit quicker than you should. The [big] burn on my leg, it could have been avoided and so that’s something that I really regret. …I’m annoyed that it happened but it’s just the fact that it’s so much worse than it could have been. I don’t blame anyone because it’s not anyone’s fault, but there should have been measures in place, just the basic knowledge of first aid, even if we did think to put it under water, there’s no way that it could have been put under water in the set up that I was in. …[I]t was hard to come to terms with the fact that it could have been avoided, and yeah that’s what made it harder to deal with. (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)

Rachel reports a number of breaches of occupational health and safety procedures such as wearing inappropriate clothing (nylon shorts providing no leg protection), inadequate protective clothing provided (unclean, flammable apron), no occupational health and safety training provided and no first aid kit available for initial treatment of burns. After the injury the employer was unwilling to pay for medical costs or lost wages. In this case, the initial inaction of the employer relating to provision of training and adequate safety clothing and procedures, resulted in an injury, and the employer provided no support to the young worker in obtaining her rights to workers’ compensation entitlements. This is an example where despite the responsibilities of the employer, Rachel has great difficulty in allocating any blame to her employer, while repeating a number of times that it could have been avoided. Holmes and Gifford (1996) might explain this as resulting from the mutual acceptance by Rachel and her employer, that she is primarily responsible for accidents and injuries, whatever the circumstances.

[W]hen I was trying to chase up the money I was owed, my boss said, well do you remember last year when you scraped our car, …well we got a quote on it and it’s going to be such and such amount, so how about we just call it even?  And I was really nervous and I was like okay, I was just kind of really flustered and didn’t know what to say and I just kind of walked out of there and told my mum and she was just appalled… I rang up the legal guy again and he said that’s just ridiculous and so I ended up writing them a letter saying I’m sorry but ….I’m going to have to ask you to still pay me... (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)

This experience demonstrates that even where the young person builds a ‘personal’ relationship with the employer, the employer may not have reciprocal feelings or these feelings may not be sustained. In reality, the young person actually does not have the power they believe they have. When attempting to obtain her legal rights as a worker, Rachel’s personal relationship with her employer and the employment itself completely collapsed. This was an unexpected and devastating outcome for her. However, in the absence of more effective strategies for influence, Rachel has reverted to similar informal, personal strategies
to secure, what she hopes will be favoured treatment from her current employer. At the start of a new DRP cycle with a new employer, Rachel describes her success in obtaining favoured treatment regarding extra shifts.

I feel like because I’ve worked hard and made these relationships and I’m quite a good worker, in that I’m proactive rather than just sitting there, I think I would consider myself probably the most liked and the most like helpful of the casual staff. Certainly I’m told by my supervisors that, and in practice, if there’s a free shift going then I’m always offered it first and that kind of thing, so certainly I feel like they respect me and that they need me, for now. It’s up to them how many shifts they are going to give me, but I think they like having me there and I feel valued. (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)

Despite learning that her extra investment in building personal relationships in her earlier employment did not result in reciprocal regard or fair treatment after the incident of a workplace injury, Rachel is not aware of any other effective strategy to improve her security, and so she continues to seek favouritism and build DRP. She has no expectation that simply working in a conscientious and reliable manner will result in reasonable treatment or income security, but that building dependent relationship power may mean she receives ongoing additional hours of work and therefore income. In her new job, Rachel regularly receives minor burns and accepts this as part of the job.

I’m a lot more aware of it now because of my accident, I understand the risks that are involved working in the kitchen. You try and make sure that it is safe at all times, but I’ve got various burns, I’m a bit of a burns victim, I’ve got 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, I’ve got about 6 burns in the last year. But that’s my fault in that there’s not really much you can do about it. I mean these are made from the lights above the bain-marie and you know when you put your hand in to get something you might bring it back too quickly, you get burnt. (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)

Rachel indicates that the employee has primary responsibility for injuries and does not expect the workplace to be safe. Her experience with her previous employer has led her to value what can be obtained from dependent relationship power with an individual employer, over the legal rights afforded her by the regulatory bodies of the labour market institution.

If you don’t have that really friendly aspect, then you do have to bring in the Unions, …and that makes it much more hostile. I found it’s really, it’s like making a decision that says I don’t trust you any more, I’ve had to go to someone else and you know, it’s bringing a legal aspect to it. I found that really hard and the consequences were really bad. You might get your way in the end, but you sever all those ties. (Rachel, 21, Hospitality)
Despite her partial legal success in gaining some of her rights using industrial support structures, Rachel said she would not do this again. The involvement of a union funded support service resulted in no consequence for the employer of non-compliance with their legal obligations under the workers’ compensation legislation, or for the employer’s practice of employing workers illegally to avoid other employer obligations. This is a further example of the way young people rarely see evidence that workplace regulation is effective or that employers suffer any negative consequences when regulatory requirements are disregarded.

Rachel’s experience demonstrates a full cycle of dependent relationship power, where after an incident of injury the employment relationship broke down. She was forced to return to full parental dependence while she recovered and until she was able to find alternative work, where she recommenced value-adding to her employment, hoping to develop a reciprocal favoured relationship with this new employer.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has addressed the question of whether the youth labour market is commodified and whether this limits the effectiveness and/or capacity of young people to experience citizenship and voice in the workplace. It examined the strategies available and utilised by young people to address and promote their citizenship and voice.

Evidence has been provided that the theory of commodification of labour is closely aligned to the experience of many participants in feeling replaceable, dehumanised and undervalued. The inverse relationship between commodification of labour and industrial citizenship, described early in the chapter, is confirmed and indicates that highly commodified labour restricts the development of industrial citizenship. The characteristics of industrial citizenship including fair working conditions, sufficient predictable income to offer adequate support, recognition of life demands outside the workplace, an appropriate degree of autonomy and the ability to exit unacceptable working arrangements are explicitly desired by participants. The findings of this research indicate that these features are largely unavailable to these participants in the youth labour market.

Successful strategies for change in the labour market (or elsewhere) seem dependent on some balance of power between the parties in negotiation. Workers have been given weight in such negotiations at times, through government regulation and collective action,
primarily through unions. Young workers report a perception of a lack of power, which may result from declining regulatory protection, decline in union power and high competition for employment.

I found an examination of the ability of participants to access strategies for improving their working conditions disheartening. In their experience the power differential between employers and themselves was so great that both traditional and new strategies failed to deliver desired improvements in the long term. Unionism was only effective for the few participants in highly unionised workplaces and in secure employment. For the majority of participants the absence of both characteristics is compounded by a lack of any direct experience of union activities in their workplaces and significant negative information about unions from the media and their employers. In addition, the industry-based structure of unions meant they would have to identify, join and leave a number of unions as they changed workplace and industry. Exit-voice is also of little value in an environment of low skilled and easily replaced workers. Participants report high competition for work and the perception that employers would not be affected by resignation of any particular individual.

The analysis identified an individual strategy that is widely used by young people. I term this ‘dependent relationship power’. In this strategy young workers acting individually, try to achieve job security, reasonable treatment and a basic level of income by ‘value-adding’ in their employment. They perform extra duties, are particularly cheerful and obliging and try to be ‘friends’ with their employers. While the strategy can be effective in the short term, any advantage gained is usually at the expense of another young worker. In the longer term there seems to be no reliable increase in loyalty to the young worker from the employer. When problems arise this strategy offers little protection. Also, systemic or structural change is not produced by this strategy, and each individual must attempt to build and maintain this relationship with each new employer. While providing hope to individual workers, it seems that this is another ineffective strategy for young workers to challenge or change their working conditions more generally.

The analysis of the three potential strategies available to increase the citizenship and voice of young workers demonstrates that participants currently have minimal access to effective strategies. Unionisation while seemingly available is under-utilised, which weakens its effectiveness. While exit is common for young workers with alternative support, the power of this action is reduced because of the high turnover and competition for youth
employment. Finally, the use of ‘dependent relationship power’ -while at times providing temporary improvements for individuals- involves no transfer of power from the employer who has complete discretion as to the duration and terms of the relationship. DRP also has no impact on the general citizenship and voice of young people in the labour market. This lack of power provides opportunity for exploitation and inequity.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

This concluding chapter consolidates the key findings from the analysis undertaken in this thesis. These findings provide evidence supporting the argument that, for the group studied, their life stage involves high levels of dependency on precarious supports provided by multiple institutions that require continuous active negotiation. For these young people the labour market is a hazardous support institution, where they act within a framework of individual responsibility for working conditions. This argument resulted from a synthesis of the data collected to answer the research questions addressed in chapters four, five, six and seven, and supporting the empirical research reviewed in chapter three.

The qualitative research presented in this thesis is a socio-political analysis of the labour market experience of a group of ninety young South Australian workers. It contributes to current debates about the degree of individual agency versus the influence of important social structures on the nature of youth transitions. The research questions and interviews with young workers focused on young workers’ degree of power and level of autonomy in their interaction with significant institutions, particularly the labour market in supporting progress towards financial independence from parents. The research questions were:

1. What are the conditions of young people’s employment and what reasons do they give for being concentrated in casual employment, that is, does it reflect preferences and choice, or labour market opportunity?
2. How does work impact on young people’s transition to financial independence?
3. Is youth labour commodified and does this limit the effectiveness and/or capacity of young people to experience citizenship and voice in the workplace? What strategies are available and utilised to address and promote citizenship and voice for young people in the workplace?
This chapter presents the key findings resulting from addressing these questions. The first section summarises the study’s findings, dividing them into three themes. Subsequent sections identify the policy and research implications resulting from these findings.

**Research findings**

Addressing the research questions using a qualitative approach produced findings that can be grouped into three themes. Each theme contains a number of findings relevant to that area. These themes are a distillation of the analysis and explain diversity and convergence in participant experiences and attitudes.

**Theme one: Young workers are dependent on the key institutions of family, labour market, education and welfare. Maintaining support from these institutions requires active, ongoing compromise and negotiation by each young worker. Participant experiences are strikingly reflective of individualisation theory.**

Data analysis of focus groups and interviews identified the four key institutions, listed above, as significant to the participants’ life stage. A majority of participants were involved with three of the key institutions at the time of interview and some participants were involved with all four. Even with this multiplicity of supports a number of participants reported anxiety as a result of insecurity. Consequently an adequate and necessary level of intergenerational support, as conceptualised by Rubery (2004) as vital in vulnerable life stages, is not being provided to all young workers. Participants experience the family as the primary source of intergenerational support and when this is lacking, support from the other institutions does not compensate for its absence.

Young people are a vulnerable group because most are unable to be financially independent. There are two major reasons. The first concerns the commitment of many young people to education; this reduces their availability for paid employment and therefore their earning capacity. The second concerns the nature of the youth labour market; regulated lower rates of pay for young workers preclude the principle of ‘equal work for equal pay’ and the predominance of casual work involves precarious, unsociable and at times very short or very long working hours. Chapter four details the participants’ insecurities and concerns about their working conditions.

In order to analyse individual experiences of intergenerational support, it was useful to map layers of influence using Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecosystems model and theory. This
mapping enhanced understanding through consideration of immediate experiences in the context of relevant institutions and social processes. While the model shows that there are interactions between and within layers of influence, it is inadequate in depicting the highly complex nature of these interactions. I presented the findings relating to the complex interactions in chapter five through analysis of participants’ experiences that demonstrate that choices and abilities are supported or constrained by institutional interactions.

The inability of a young worker to access supports from any one of the key institutions can result in reduced choice, and barriers to optimal pathways to adult independence. Young workers need to prioritise and reprioritise short and long-term needs and goals in their attempts to reconcile conflicting demands from different institutions. A common example is the difficulty of meeting the demanding and flexible timeframes of their casual employment while maintaining optimal engagement in education.

The competing demands of multiple institutions required complex negotiations on the part of individual young people in order to maximise their security and opportunity. A majority of participants are engaged in senior school or tertiary studies and many of these are prepared to make considerable sacrifices to sustain these studies, which they see as the major factor leading to secure adult employment. The negotiations are not only complex because of the number of institutions involved, but also because of the flexibility and variations of demands. Constant adjustments are required and therefore the negotiations are ongoing. However, young people have very little power in their negotiations with rigid institutions, such as educational providers or welfare bureaucracies, and dependency reduces their negotiating power, for example, with employers or parents. Because of their lack of power, their ‘negotiations’ are more akin to prioritisation and navigation between ‘take it or leave it’ options, than an active compromise between parties that involves ‘give and take’.

This risky lifestyle, with multiple dependencies needing constant active and creative organisation, is characteristic of individualisation. The participant experience exemplifies Beck and Beck-Gernshiem’s (2002) concepts, as described in the theoretical framework in chapter two, and suggests South Australian young workers are experiencing the effects of an international social process of individualisation.
Theme two: *Young workers dependence on the institutions of family and the labour market is complex and precarious.*

This thesis closely examined the effect of labour market engagement on young workers’ transitions to financial independence from parents. While there is an inverse relationship between parental dependence and labour market dependence, the relationship is not stable or linear relating to age, because of the nature of the youth labour market. When support from parents is insecure or lacking, young people are more dependent on the labour market. This is problematic due to the highly casualised youth labour market, where young people rarely have security of hours and income. Dependence on one or both of the institutions does not provide a secure lifestyle and a number of participants discussed their anxiety about their precarious situation.

Participants reported fluctuations in dependence on their parents and the labour market while still at home but also including experiences with independent accommodation. Figure 5 (page 150) depicts fluctuations in Louise’s dependence on her parents for typical reasons such as change in jobs, return to study and needing to return home to save for future life goals.

The amount of support received from either the family or the labour market does not alone indicate young people’s level of dependence. Dependence also relates to the availability of alternatives and therefore the level of reliance on the support received. There is also evidence that even if parents are not currently providing support, the availability of assistance, if and when needed, allows young people to take risks and exit negative or exploitative situations. Lister’s (1997 p.110) concept of ‘exploitable dependence’ is relevant to the youth situation because of the lack of alternatives to family and/or low quality labour market involvement available to many young people, even as young adults. Where dependence on parents may appear to be the same, the concept of exploitable dependence allows a deeper analysis, which has implications for the long-term effects of such living arrangements. There are participant examples where dependence on parents is a choice to achieve a long-term benefit, for example home ownership. But there are also examples where no viable alternative exists to parental dependence and the longer the situation continues, the more negative the consequences for both the young person and their family. The first situation is not one of exploitable dependence whereas the second is exploitable dependency.
Families also do not provide consistent support. In chapter six I analyse levels of support that vary from low to high, and types that vary from completely non-supportive parents to those whose support is totally unconditional. These types and levels are another influence on young people’s dependence on their parents and/or the labour market but are not related to any particular needs of an individual young person.

The institution of welfare can play a role in minimising extreme hardship but a number of participants were excluded from this support due to strict eligibility criteria relating to assumptions of family support and/or difficulty in establishing other ‘acceptable’ reasons for receipt of welfare benefits. Participants who are excluded from these benefits and without family support, are highly dependent on the labour market and some participants experience exploitative and hazardous engagement with this institution in these circumstances.

Analysis using ecological systems theory shows that the level of support provided by parents influences the young person’s experience of their immediate personal setting, which includes their social life, work and study commitments, in addition to family. The nature of parental support also influences a young person’s experience of social structures including the labour market; for example regulation supporting lower wages for young people affects them differently according to the support received or not from parents. These influences in the immediate personal setting and social structures are also connected with social processes, such as the fluctuating dependence mentioned above.

One of the gaps in existing knowledge identified in the literature review related to young people’s attitudes to their extended dependence on parents. Participants’ attitudes varied according to their status as students and their parents’ financial resources. While at school, the only participants who try to be independent, are those who are aware of their parents’ limited resources. Some of these young people feel a significant responsibility to contribute to their family and are anxious that there be no interruption to their contribution. After leaving school participants express the desire to be financially independent but realise this is almost impossible if they are committed to further study or training. Feelings of agency and choice are paramount in young people’s positive acceptance of dependence. The status of ‘student’ appears to assist with this acceptance. Young people, who are not students, not in full-time employment and do not have sufficient resources to leave home, have particularly negative attitudes to their dependence.
Full-time work is an aspiration of most participants who see it as a necessary step towards adulthood. Only a few participants actually achieved full-time secure, adequately paid work, which allowed for the achievement of adult aspirations. These few are university or trades graduates and are among the oldest in the sample. Usually even their standard full-time hours are not sufficient to provide desired levels of income and are frequently supplemented by overtime or extra casual work.

Theme three: *The major strategy used by young workers to influence their labour market conditions is individualised and largely ineffective.*

There is a gap in the literature regarding young people’s ability to exercise agency in the labour market and particularly over their working conditions. Research question three focused attention on this area, which was addressed through an analysis of young workers’ status and power in the labour market and their opportunities for influencing their work conditions. Participants perceive their labour to be replaceable, dehumanised and undervalued; characteristics that reflect labour commodification. Participant experience in the youth labour market seldom reflect characteristics of industrial citizenship, such as fair working conditions, sufficient predictable income to provide adequate support, recognition of life demands outside the workplace, an appropriate degree of autonomy and the ability to exit unacceptable working arrangements, although these characteristics are valued by participants.

When participants are asked about their ability to challenge negative working conditions, they report an inability to influence these conditions using traditional methods such as unionism and exit-voice. While potentially available for young workers, union membership is declining and under-utilised, significantly reducing any influence it might have as a strategy. They report that exit-voice has little power because of high turnover and competition for work. The necessity for individual action and responsibility remains the only viable option, because participants perceive institutional protections as ineffective or nonexistent. This third individualised strategy for influencing working conditions, which I term dependent relationship power (DRP), can only result in limited advantage because of young workers constrained and dependent status. Chapter seven details this third method used in an attempt to achieve job security, reasonable treatment and a basic level of income. Participants describe ‘value-adding’ to their employment through extra duties, a cheerful and obliging attitude and attempts to be ‘friends’ with their employers. Unfortunately, any advantage gained from the strategy is usually short-term and comes at
the expense of other young workers’ conditions. There appears to be no long-term loyalty to the young worker from the employer, if problems arise. Systemic and structural change does not result from this strategy and individuals must build and maintain relationships with each new supervisor or employer. Dependent relationship power is an example of an action taken within an individualised labour market where young workers must take responsibility for their own working conditions. Despite its limitations, participants state that DRP is the best strategy available to them.

This acceptance of individual responsibility for working conditions and the constant effort needed to minimise risk and insecurity is typical of an individualised labour market, and is a specific example of a wider institutional environment affected by the process of individualisation. Dependency in such a labour market limits worker agency and fosters an environment conducive to exploitation.

**Implications of research findings**

It is important to recognise that a major challenge to any change that enhances support for young people in this age-group is the pervasive discourse, exemplified by media reports (referred to in the introduction) portraying young people as demanding, career savvy, self-indulgent ‘job snobs’. This research does not support these stereotypes. Instead many participants appeared to be hard working, eager to please and willing to accept low paid and low skilled work. However, they usually maintain traditional aspirations for the future in terms of career and other life goals. There is clearly a huge disparity between the media portrayal and the reality of young workers’ experiences and attitudes. Resources and assistance with issues identified in this research may be difficult to access while there continues to be a public depiction of young people as powerful free agents, choosing their circumstances and future pathways. This erroneous public image needs to be challenged.

The research has identified significant issues relating to each of the institutions of the labour market, family, welfare and education, which have policy or legislative implications. There is evidence of injustice and inconsistency, which needs attention. If young people are not able to achieve a secure transition to adult independence, there are repercussions for the rest of the community, and particularly parents, under the current system of intergenerational support provision. Societal intergenerational support is recognised as essential for successful transition and without knowledge of the workings of the most important institutions providing such support, policy and practice is unlikely to be
fully effective and injustices are likely to continue. Even where young people have rights and entitlements, at times they do not exercise these rights. Nussbaum’s (2000) concept of ‘capabilities’ is relevant here and an important consideration when attempting to address inequities. A capability approach requires ensuring people not only have rights but also the support necessary for them to have the ability to exercise these rights. In this section, I discuss implications for policy and research relating to each institution in turn and the capability approach is fundamental to a number of areas.

**Youth labour market**

The participants’ statements regarding their working conditions being at the discretion of the employer, indicates not only a lack of knowledge of their minimum rights but also a lack of experience of regulatory inspection or related activity within worksites. Given the significant proportions of informal cash work, both in the participant group and in other Australian research, an increased presence of regulatory bodies in workplaces seems necessary to ensure young workers have knowledge of and are receiving at least their minimum legal entitlements. This is an example of increasing the capabilities of young people to access rights that are currently unavailable to many because of insufficient supports. Such activity may reduce young people’s perceptions that they have individual responsibility for working conditions over which they have little influence.

Participants report clear inequities relating to reductions in pay based on age, for example some participants receive less pay than older staff with less skill. This challenges the assumption that the more skilled young person would lose their employment if they needed to be paid at an adult rate. In addition, such low pay rates caused considerable hardship for independent young people or those attempting transition. Youth rates of pay contribute to young people’s inability to support themselves and therefore their continued dependence on other institutions such as the family and welfare. Managing up to three separate sources of income (that is from family, work and welfare) requires ongoing active negotiation. These inequities and hardships require a reconsideration of the justice of lower pay rates based on age, and a reconsideration of a system where individual young people carry the burden of the incentive for their own employment. If incentives are considered necessary, other methods may be more appropriate, for example financial bonuses or reduced payroll or other taxes.

Almost all the work undertaken by student participants is casual and unpredictable. These young people find it very difficult to manage their study, finances and other life
commitments with unpredictable work. Much of the conflict and anxiety reported by participants could be reduced if hours of employment were more stable. Therefore strategies need to be developed to increase the amount of regular work that is available to them. Some examples may include paid internships, incentives to employers and conversion of casual to part-time worker after a specified period. Stable part-time employment for these young people would reduce the precariousness of their dependence on multiple institutions and might decrease the amount of ongoing negotiation necessary for secure support.

Given the high level of commodification of young people’s labour and lack of effective strategies to develop power or voice in the workplace, there is a clear need for the development of support mechanisms specifically for this group. Traditional mechanisms such as unionism and exit-voice are under-utilised and/or ineffective. Participants described an individual strategy (DRP), which is also generally ineffective and produces little long-term improvement, even at an individual level. While the DRP approach to influencing working conditions has many ramifications in workplaces, the example of its effect on occupational health and safety practise and experience is used to demonstrate the hazardous nature of an individualised labour market for young people. Without effective strategies, conditions are unlikely to improve and could deteriorate. Education of young people in the power of collective action may assist in increasing young workers involvement in organisations such as unions, which may then have the potential to improve their conditions. Given that union membership is in decline in Australia, union renewal may necessarily involve a reconsideration of how to attract and maintain young members. While the youth labour market is characterised by high turnover and competition for jobs, it is unlikely that exit-voice can be an effective strategy for achieving positive change in the workplace. The lack of power and inability of young workers to develop citizenship and voice in the labour market provides potential for exploitation and inequity.

**Family**

While families are reported by participants to be their major support, the level and type of support varies enormously. This occurs because of differences in resources of families and different family attitudes to the level of support seen as appropriate. Participants receive support varying from meeting all their basic needs, to nothing more than shared accommodation. Parents sometimes expect contributions from participants, varying from nothing to most of their income. In order to ensure equitable opportunity and capability for
young people, there needs to be some minimum standard of support expected from parents. The expectation that all dependent young people share in the economic resources of the family is not supported by this research. As the most influential institution in the experience of participants, the family is also the most inconsistent in the amount of support provided. The implication is that it is at the discretion of the family, whether well or poorly resourced, what support a young person receives.

The forced dependence of young people on families on the basis of parental income after they reach adulthood at eighteen is problematic. Lack of access to decent wages, reduced welfare entitlements and extended time in education provide a strong economic compulsion to stay within a dependent relationship with parents. These conditions, forcing young people to stay in the family home, are subject to regulation and policy. However, there is little government interest regarding the level of support young people receive inside the family home. Levels and types of support impact profoundly on participants’ capabilities, for example their ability to study, engage in the labour market and make the transition to economic independence. Therefore regulatory compulsion on parents to support and young people to be dependent, is not balanced by any regulated minimum standard of support and some participants report hardships as a result of this situation. There may be difficulties in trying to regulate or standardise private family supportive arrangements. Under current arrangements some participants are unable to access either welfare or family support and given the considerable stress this entailed, policies to address this situation need development.

**Welfare**

Participants report that youth levels of welfare income are insufficient for independent living. The implication of this is that these young people must live in poverty and/or participate in the youth labour market with its many disadvantages, regardless of other commitments, for example education. Some participants report needing to work hours to supplement their welfare payments, that negatively affect their academic achievement. Because there are students currently in this situation, economic support provided to students needs urgent review.

There are also examples among the participants of restrictions on particular vocational or training pathways that may have resulted from outdated welfare policy. The greater complexity of post-school pathways needs to be recognised in the types of educational activities which are deemed appropriate for support. The current system seems
unreasonably rigid, primarily focusing on traditional sequential pathways and not recognising equally efficient alternatives such as university bridging courses instead of repeating a final year of school. Welfare needs to support new styles of educational and transitional pathways, especially where they provide equally efficient pathways to desired qualifications.

Participants describe a number of anomalies in relation to welfare assessments of dependence and independence. Participants do not have the same conceptualisation of these statuses as Centrelink; whether advantaged or disadvantaged by the assessment, they report a perception that the system is unfair. In some cases siblings are both living at home and completely supported by their parents while studying, with one sibling receiving a welfare payment and the other receiving no welfare support. This occurs because at some time in the past one sibling has worked and earned enough to be deemed independent. In this situation both siblings could be engaged in the same educational activities and can be receiving the same amount of support from parents, but one sibling receives a welfare payment while the other sibling has to work considerable hours to earn the same amount. On the other hand, participants report seeking welfare assistance because of a lack of family support, but being refused on the grounds of parental income that was not being shared with them. This even extended to young people living outside the family home with no parental subsidy but being unable to receive welfare payment because of parental income. Participants unlike Centrelink, describe independence as a situation where no subsidy is being received from parents; dependence is a situation where a substantial subsidy is received. As described above, this is not the experience of participants in being assessed as independent or dependent for the purpose of being paid welfare. Participants’ definitions seem more closely aligned to the level of need of the individual concerned and might be appropriate to consider in welfare eligibility policy.

**Education**

Almost 60% of young South Australians between the ages of fifteen and twenty-four are in paid employment (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006a). This encompasses the final years of senior high school and tertiary education. Given the precarious and demanding nature of employment as described in earlier chapters, and participants’ direct reports of effects on school and university studies, there could be implications for the academic achievement of a significant proportion of working young people. One example is that the Tertiary Entrance Ranking (TER) results from final high-school examinations may be lower for some young people because of extensive or intrusive work commitments. The TER
determines what university courses a student may qualify to enter. Currently bonus points may be added to TERs where recognised disadvantages exist, such as rural location. There may be potential to recognise the effects of necessary engagement with the labour market on TER achievement in a similar way, to address inequities in opportunity resulting from this situation.

Approved absences from school for vocational purposes, for example, school based apprenticeships and harvest leave may also have implications for young people’s level of educational attainment. This issue is most significant for those participants who report their prime motivation for the school-based apprenticeship is the ability to earn money during school hours. They have no intention of taking up a career in the area of the traineeship and their potential academic achievement for accessing alternative pathways may be limited by their loss of teaching time at school. Participants report they are expected to submit homework and assignments for work allocated in classes at times of non-attendance. They may need additional support to avoid disadvantage, for example equivalent teacher contact time to that missed.

For some young people, education alone provides sufficient qualification to obtain employment providing financial independence from parental support. If the student has a supportive family, there may be no need to engage in employment prior to qualification. Such courses tend to contain a practical component which provides sufficient ‘work experience’ to obtain employment on completion, for example, social work, dentistry or engineering. This is evidence that employment in the youth labour market is not necessary for transition to financial independence from parents. Educational achievement may be more important in influencing young people’s access to secure and rewarding labour market engagement.

**Further research**

While the research findings have significant policy implications for the support of young people, further research could test their wider applicability. Due to the labour market focus of this research, only ‘workers’ were interviewed. However, findings emerged about broader issues for young people related to their support and agency. The perspectives of an important group of young people, ‘unemployed youth’ and/or young people not in the labour market, were missing from the sample. It may be that the precarious and churning nature of youth jobs means that the experiences of at least a proportion of unemployed youth may be similar to that of workers in this research. However, it is likely they may be
experiencing more extreme situations of dependence on parents and/or welfare. This
dependence could produce positive outcomes for some (for example high achieving
tertiary graduates) and very negative outcomes for others (who are unable to obtain secure
work). While the findings reflect the experience of the issues for working young people,
the experience of such non-working young people regarding institutional supports,
attitudes and agency may be different. This is an area for further research that could
strengthen the emergent data from this research in relation to a larger population of young
people.

My findings about the importance of a holistic approach to an investigation of youth
experience in the labour market indicates this might be a useful approach for other youth
issues and research. Focusing on participant reports in one specific area and not
considering the interconnectedness of other relevant areas, neglects important power
dynamics and influences. These influences are crucial to my findings about the limited
agency that young people have in the decisions they make.

Similarly, there needs to be further consideration of the difference between choice and
agency in youth research and literature. Choice is a concept that can be used superficially.
The findings of this research indicate that at times young people speak a discourse of
choice, even when they have little agency to make alternative ‘choices’. Deeper
consideration needs to be given to the reality and context of young people’s decisions. A
simplistic notion of choice can transfer responsibility to individuals in situations where
they may have little power or influence. The idea that a young person has exercised a
choice may reduce the responsibility of others for consequences, and does not reflect the
reality of the barriers and limitations to choice experienced by young people.

**Concluding remarks**

In answering the research questions I found that participants are dissatisfied with their
casual and precarious working conditions and do not gain financial independence from this
work. They also have little ability to challenge their poor working conditions and status in
the labour market. In the course of my investigation of the working conditions of young
South Australians, I found their involvement with the labour market was inextricably
associated with the effects of and supports available from their families, welfare and
education systems. These institutions not only provide supports but also place considerable
demands on recipients, which may impact on their ability to engage with other institutions.
Progress to financial independence from parents is not linear; fluctuations in young people’s degree of independence occurred across the whole age group studied. It takes place both while they are still at home and after they leave home. ‘Fluctuating dependence’ was a major feature of participants’ lives and the ability and willingness of parents to meet these fluctuating needs is a significant factor in the achievement of adult goals.

The precarious nature of young people’s engagement with the labour market, where there appears to them to be little external influence on the working conditions as set by their employer, may contribute to their individualised approach to work. This situation results in attempts to improve their working conditions individually, without any external supports in terms of collective action or regulatory authorities. I have termed their individualised strategies dependent relationship power (DRP). Young workers in this research demonstrated optimism, commitment and resilience in their attempts to improve their working conditions. Unfortunately, their casual employment status places a great deal of power and discretion in the hands of the employer. This means that their efforts to influence their conditions are largely ineffective. This lack of influence in the workplace is replicated in their power relationships with three other important social structures: family, welfare and education, where they also have little influence over the type or amount of support they receive.

The situation of young South Australian workers is characterised by both individualisation and dependence, where they have little autonomy in the face of much risk. In order to improve intergenerational support for young people’s transitions, policy development needs to take account of both the amount and security of support provided through each of the four identified institutions.
Bibliography


Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006b). Census Cdata custom table, State/Territory (STE) South Australia and Industry of Employment (ANZSIC93) by Sex Male/Female (SEXP), Age 5 Year Age Groups (AGEP) and Labour Force Status- 2006 (LFS06P).


Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006d). Census Cdata custom table, State/Territory (STE) South Australia by Indigenous Status (INGP), Labour Force Status- 2006 (LFS06P) and Age Groups (AGEP)

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006e). Census Cdata custom table, State/Territory (STE) South Australia and Highest Year of School Completed (HSPC) by Age 5 Year Age Groups (AGEP) and Labour Force Status 2006 (LFS06P).

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2006f). Census Cdata custom table, State/Territory (STE) South Australia and Non-school Qualification: Level of education (QALLP) by Age 5 Year Age Groups (AGEP) and Labour Force Status- 2006 (LFS06P).

Male/Female (SEXP), Age 5 Year Age Groups (AGEP) and Labour Force Status-2006 (LFS06P)


Appendix 1

Background Information Sheet
(To be completed by participants at focus groups and interviews)

Your name _________________________  Contact number ____________________________
(For contact purposes only. No information that could identify you will be included in this study)

Chosen Pseudonym________________________

Please tick the appropriate box.

What is your age?
☐ 15-17
☐ 18-20
☐ 20-22
☐ 22-24

Country of birth ________________________________

Main language spoken at home ________________________

Are you-
☐ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
☐ a person with a disability

Schooling
☐ Enrolled in school year 10, 11 or 12.
☐ Left school before year 10
☐ Completed year 10
☐ Completed year 11
☐ Completed year 12

Have you undertaken or are currently studying/training?
☐ Certificate________________________

☐ Diploma

☐ Degree

☐ Graduate Diploma

☐ Post-graduate Degree

☐ Other ___________________________

What type of household do you live in?
☐ Alone
☐ With parent/s
☐ With other relatives

What do you pay for housing (per month)? _________

Type of housing tenure (e.g. rent, mortgage etc.) ______________________________________

What is your occupation (in your main job)? ___________________________________________

What industry is this job?
☐ Manufacturing
☐ Construction
☐ Retail Trade
☐ Accommodation, cafes, restaurants
☐ Property and business services
☐ Health and community services

Do you have more then one job? If so what are they?
2nd Job _____________________________
3rd Job ______________________________

In your main job are you?
☐ Casual
☐ Permanent
☐ Limited term contract

If you are a casual worker, was your work-
☐ Regular/ongoing
☐ Relief
☐ Short term
☐ Seasonal
☐ Unpredictable
How many hours per week do you usually work (if unpredictable report the minimum and maximum hours in a week you have worked)?

How long have you been at your main job?
- Less than 1 year
- 1-4 years
- 5 years or more

What are your usual weekly earnings from all paid work?
- Under $100
- $100-200
- $200-300
- $300-400
- $400-500
- $500-600
- $600 or more

What is your hourly rate of pay in your main job?
- Under $10
- $10-15
- $15-20
- $20-25
- $25-30
- $30-35
- $35-40
- Over $40

What is your main source of income?
- Wages from paid work
- Government entitlements from Centrelink
- Other, please specify ____________________

Were your wages and conditions set by-
- An award
- Collective agreement
- Australian Workplace Agreement (AWA)
- Another individual contract
- Don’t know

Do you receive government entitlements i.e. from Centrelink?
- Yes
- No

Are you a union member?
- Yes
- No

Have you heard about the ‘Your Rights at Work’ campaign?
- Yes
- No

Do you receive financial support from parents/family (please tick if you receive)?
- Free Utilities
- Help with transport costs (car, petrol, etc.)
- Help with study/training expenses (fees, materials etc.)
- Free rent
- Free food
- Regular cash allowance (how much?)

__________________________

- Health costs
- Emergency expenses
- Other (please specify) ____________________
Appendix 2

Interview Schedule

First name____________________________ Chosen Pseudonym______________
Interview No.____________________________ Date of interview________________

Interview Questions and Notes *(These are guidelines only; pursue interesting issues where they arise. Skip questions already covered in earlier answers).*

Introduction:
1. Read out information sheet about project.
2. Do you have questions about the research?
3. Read consent form- yes or no, clear response needed.
4. This interview can take anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour- is that ok? Please feel free to stop the interview at any time if you need to, for any reason at all.
5. Could you please choose a name that we can use in the place of your real name so we can keep it confidential?

Interview questions

1. **Could you tell me about your current work situation?**
   a. What do you do?
   b. How long have you been working at your current job?
   c. Are you casual/permanent part-time/permanent full-time?
   d. How many hours per week do you usually work?
   e. Why do you have this job? Is this job your preference?

2. **Could you tell me about your work history?**
   a. Have you worked anywhere else?
   b. Have you had any good or bad experiences?

3. **How do you feel about your work?**
   - What is good, bad etc?

4. **What do you think about your wage?**

5. **What do you think about junior rates of pay?**

4. **Are you financially independent?**
   - If not, what do you think will need to happen for you to become independent?

5. **What are your aspirations for the future?** *(These do not have to relate directly to work).*
   a. Short term? Long term?
   b. Do you believe your aspirations are achievable in reality?
   c. How will you achieve them? Do you have a plan?

6. **Thinking ten years ahead where do you think you’ll be?**
7. Does your work impact on other aspects of your life e.g. study, social or leisure time?

8. Who has power in your workplace?
   - How can you tell?

9. Do you feel like you have influence at work?
   - What do you have influence over?
   - What would you like to have more influence over?

10. Are your ideas or concerns listened to by decision makers?
    - Are some people’s ideas and concerns listened to more or less than others?

11. Do you feel like you are valued by your employer?
    - Why/why not?

12. If you had a problem that related to work, who would you talk to, why?

13. Is your workplace safe? Is it likely that you will incur an injury as a part of your work?

14. How would you describe the culture in your workplace?

15. What is your relationship like with you colleagues? Supervisors?

16. Can you think of a time when you felt powerful (or powerless) at work? What was happening at that time?

17. Do you know about the new work laws (Workchoices)? How will these laws affect yourself and other workers?

18. What do you think about the training and education available to you in your workplace?

19. Do you have a union representative in your workplace?
    - If yes, is that person approachable and or sensitive?

20. Are you a union member?
    - Why/why not?

21. Is there any way that unions could better respond to your needs/wants at work?
    a. How could unions better help young workers?
    b. How might unions attract young workers to become members?

22. What are your rights as a worker?
    - Do you believe you should have rights? Why?
Appendix 3

Focus Group Questions

1. Could you tell me about your work?
   • Have you worked anywhere else?
   • Have you had any good or bad experiences?
   • Why are you in your current job?

2. How do you feel about your work?
   • What is good/ bad?

3. What do you think about the training and education available to you in your workplace?

4. Is your workplace safe? Is it likely that you will incur an injury as a part of your work?

5. What are your aspirations for the future?
   • Short term?
   • Long term?
   • Do you believe your aspirations are achievable in reality?
   • How will you achieve them? Do you have a plan?

6. What do you think about your wage?
   • What do you think about junior rates of pay?

7. Do you feel that you are financially independent?
   • What do you think will need to happen for you to become independent?

8. Does your work impact on other aspects of your life e.g. study, social or leisure time?

9. How would you describe the culture in your workplace?
   • What is your relationship like with you colleagues? Supervisors?
   • Do you feel that you are valued by your employer? Why/why not?

10. Could you tell me about voice/power/agency at work?
    • Who has power in your workplace? How can you tell?
    • Can you think of a time when you felt powerful (or powerless) at work?
      What was happening at that time?
    • Do you feel that you have influence at work? What do you have influence over? What would you like to have more influence over?
    • Are your ideas or concerns listened to by decision makers? Are some people's ideas and concerns listened to more than others?
    • If you had a problem that could impact on your work would you report it? Who would you tell and why?
11. **What are you thoughts on the new work laws (workchoices)?**
   - How will these laws affect you?
   - Has your pay or conditions (in your current job) changed recently (or since 31st March 2006) (Pay, penalty rates, leave, hours, shift arrangements, notice of shifts etc.)?

12. **Can you tell me a bit about your experience with unions?**
   - Do you have a union representative in your workplace? If yes, is that person approachable and or sensitive?
   - Are you a union member? Why/why not?