
The policy panoptic of ‘mutual obligations’¹

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The panoptic mechanism is not simply a hinge, a point of exchange between a mechanism of power and a function; it is a way of making power relations function in a function, and of making a function function through these power relations. (Foucault 1977, pp 206–207)

Abstract

Australian Government policies of ‘mutual obligations’ are based on the UK’s ‘Third Way’ and the ‘Workfare’ policies of the US. The discussion here is pertinent to the range of welfare reform initiatives adopted by Western governments over recent times. In this paper, I focus on the ‘mutual obligations’ aspects of the Australian welfare reform agenda as Foucauldian ‘technologies’. A feminist and poststructuralist stance is adopted in outlining some developing theoretical arguments about the ways that Australian welfare reform initiatives position working class young women. I begin by discussing the ‘gaze’ and the ways the gaze is brought to bear on contemporary working class young women in Australia. In the second section, I discuss the panoptic mechanism and the specific features of the mechanism that correlate with Australian welfare reform initiatives containing mutual obligations. Thirdly, I discuss Foucauldian ‘technologies of the self’, ‘technologies of domination’² and ‘governmentality’, focusing on how the policy panoptic of mutual obligations constructs particular subject locations for the contemporary hybrid subject³. My objective here in the initial stages of this project is to describe some of the theoretical resources I am using to think about mutual obligations policies.

Introduction

Recent welfare reform initiatives in Australia describe ‘social obligations’ or ‘mutual obligations’ as ‘one of the five features of the Participation Support System’ (McClure 2000a, p 5) that are ‘underpinned by the concept of social obligations’. The Reference Group on Welfare Reform,⁴ appointed by the Australian Government

to reform Australia's welfare arrangements, argues that 'social obligations extend beyond individuals to corporate entities such as business enterprises and trade unions' (p 4). The emphasis described in the document '*Participation support for a more equitable society: final report of the Reference Group on welfare reform*' (McClure 2000b) has shifted from income support to participation support, reinforcing the argument that everyone, including businesses, government and even trade unions, are required to 'participate'. These initiatives mirror the obligations and requirements placed on welfare recipients in other Western nations. At the simplest level, the Australian reforms are organised around the concept of participation in unpaid and voluntary work and sanctions are imposed for non-compliance with the activity tests associated with these policies.

I suggest that, despite the expectation on everyone and all sectors of the community to 'participate', the processes of monitoring and surveillance affect social participants unequally. Those most affected by the 'gaze' are the young, particularly the working class women, whose attitudes, behaviour and conduct have always been monitored.

In this first section I will focus on Foucault's (1977) description of Jeremy Bentham's (1843) illustration of the panopticon, and introduce the Foucauldian concepts that I intend to mobilise as resources to understand working class young women and hybrid subjectivities in relation to Australian Government policies of mutual obligations. I begin here with the key concept of the panoptic mechanism as described by Foucault (1977) – the 'gaze'.

The 'gaze'

The gaze has been brought to bear on individuals in society as a consequence of age, gender and class⁵. I discuss the power of the gaze through the panoptic mechanism and suggest ways that these concepts are applicable to an examination of Australian Government policies of mutual obligations. In *Discipline and punish*, Foucault (1977) outlines in detail his interpretation of Bentham's (1843) illustration of the panopticon. In summary, the panopticon is a device that allows prisoners, or subjects, to be gathered together and observed without being able to see who observes them and when.

As Bentham (1843) drew it, a central tower provides an observation post for a guard or other supervisor. This observation post is arranged so that those being observed do not know if and when they are being observed. The prisoners or subjects are arranged around the central tower in their own rooms or cells. One wall is open to the view of the central tower, enabling an observer to monitor closely what the cell occupant is doing at any moment in time. The panoptic mechanism is sophisticated in that observation is invisible – or as Foucault writes, 'unverifiable'. Large numbers of subjects can be observed at any time by one person. Thus, it is the threat of being observed that is effective in gaining compliant behaviour from those in the cells.

The panoptic mechanism is therefore a powerful tool of subjectification that utilises an invisible gaze to exact compliance or other forms of behaviour from those

subjected to the gaze. In discussing the operation of the gaze, Foucault (1977, p 155) writes:

There is no need for arms, physical violence, material constraints. Just a gaze. An inspecting gaze, a gaze which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against himself.

The subjectification of the individual is achieved, in part, through this gaze. It is the field of visibility, the gaze or the panoptic view that constructs the circumstances whereby individuals begin the process of acting on themselves. The gaze encourages subjects to participate in processes that affect the contemporary hybrid subject, such as 'remaking', 'regulation', 'self-regulation' (Walkerdine, Lucey and Melody 2001), 'improvement' and 'self-improvement' (Skeggs 1997). These are conscious and unconscious processes, experienced by the contemporary hybrid subject as subjectification. In the section that follows, I discuss the operation of the gaze on young women from the working classes.

The gaze and working class young women

The working classes have always been subject to the gaze of the middle classes. Knowledge about individuals and groups is collected, in part, through the operation of the gaze. In *Discipline and punish*, Foucault (1977, p 184) discusses the 'normalizing gaze' as a process of examination; a 'surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish'. The normalising gaze, he argues, contributes to the subjectification and objectification of the subjects or objects of the gaze. He adds, 'in this slender technique are to be found a whole domain of knowledge, a whole type of power' (1977, p 185).

The gaze is a key strategy in knowing and understanding particular groups within society. Mechanisms and strategies developed to contain problem groups within society include prisons, schools and factories (Finch 1993). These efforts are aimed at normalising the working classes, particularly those who pose a possible threat to the established order of the middle classes. Foucault (1977) describes normalisation as 'one of the great instruments of power', where normalisation 'imposes homogeneity' (p 184). This imposition of normality has been applied to working class women over time.

Young women have been scrutinised over history and continue to be scrutinised in contemporary times with regard to their attitudes, behaviours, sexuality and general conduct. Lynette Finch (1993), in her analysis of gender and class relations, argues that 'the conditions of emergence of a particular discursive class group ... were articulated, not through economic ordering, but rather through the use of moral and cultural categories' (p 11). Youth is also an historically and socially constructed group. Having emerged in the middle of the 20th century, the results of youth culture development are still evident today. For example, youth are perceived to have the potential to cause disruption to the established order of the community (Johnson 1993).

Specific policies and institutions developed principally by government exist to contain young people. Boundaries for this containment are defined by chronological age and normative judgments about what is expected and deemed appropriate for people of a particular age. Johanna Wyn and Rob White (1997, p 1) discuss a range of ways of thinking about youth and argue that youth is a socially mediated construct 'shaped by relations of wealth and poverty', and that the category is only useful in its broadest possible sense. Schools and training institutions have been used as containment mechanisms for groups of young people. In these institutions, the gaze works by effectively normalising behaviour and relations. Physical and organisational structures and processes within schools, for example, facilitate the operation of the gaze.

In *Formations of class and gender*, Beverly Skeggs (1997) describes the surveillant gaze that falls upon young, unemployed working class women in the UK. She illustrates how employment, education and training policies have converged into the construction of 'caring' training for these working class young women. This training formalises the unpaid work that working class women who are not in the paid workforce have always undertaken. The purpose of the training is to formalise the activity and connect 'caring' work to the paid economy, reconstructing these working class young women in relation to it.

The construction of truth and knowledge about certain groups is a result or a product of the gaze. The perceived 'lack' attributed to working class young women described by Skeggs (1997) contributes to the construction of knowledge of particular populations as deviant, or represents them as a 'problem' and in need of intervention and normalisation. Illustrating this point, Carol Bacchi (1999), in her analysis of education policies, shows the ways in which girls' educational deficits are constructed over time; through access limitations, socialisation, stereotyping, a lack of role models and low self-esteem. However, it is argued that current policies on girls' education, which have resulted in the successful education of girls through special programs and strategies, have constructed a problem⁶.

Truths and knowledge '[savoir]'⁷ (Foucault 1994, p 214) are constructed in contemporary society to support policies that restrict the life choices of particular groups of women. This knowledge (as a knowledge of state) is constructed through the gaze that falls upon working class young women. Those who fall within the gaze of panoptic mechanisms know and understand themselves through information provided to them about themselves by institutions and other contemporary mechanisms, and through the information they provide to others about themselves. These mechanisms are what I later describe as 'multiform tactics' (Foucault 1994, p 211); the ways that governments collect information from subjects, contributing to the knowledge of the state.

Carol Bacchi (1999) argues that policies are constructed from the identification of problems, and these policy interests are a result of who gets to name the problems. Policies describe the problems, as well as proposing 'solutions'⁸ – and are possibly more effective in the former than the latter. However, knowledge about

individuals and groups is collected, in part, through the operation of the gaze. The gaze is therefore a 'dividing practice' (Foucault 1982, p 208).

Foucault argues that dividing practices are modes of objectification whereby a segment of the population is identified, categorised and excluded. This practice ultimately leads to 'subjectification', where the 'human being turns him – or herself into a subject' (Foucault 1982, p 208). Skeggs (1997) used this process as a starting point in her theorisation of respectability with regard to working class young women, and what Walkerdine et al (2001) imply by the term hybrid subjectivities. I describe these hybrid subjectivities in greater detail further on. I will elaborate here on the panoptic mechanism by describing what I call the policy panoptic of mutual obligations, and four key features of the mechanism.

The panoptic mechanism

I have already discussed how the panoptic mechanism constructs a relation between the surveillant gaze and the contemporary hybrid subject. A range of strategies of the panoptic mechanism are useful resources to mobilise in an examination of mutual obligations.

The panopticon (Bentham 1843) as described by Foucault (1977) has, but is not limited to, the following key features: the construction of and 'accumulation of new forms of knowledge' (p 224); 'observation of the subject'; the 'transparency of the gaze'; and the aim to 'strengthen the social forces' (p 208). I will discuss the features of each of these in an examination of government policy, and describe how policies of mutual obligations construct the circumstances whereby individuals act on themselves (Foucault 1988, p 19).

Construction and accumulation of new forms of knowledge

Foucault (1972, p 49) states that discourses are 'practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak'. The intention of my study is to examine the power of discourse in the construction and identification of objects, including the objects of policy. The objects of welfare reform policies in Australia are the Australian subjects, but not all Australian subjects – only those described as being a policy problem.

Returning to Carol Bacchi (1999), her 'What's the problem?' approach focuses on the construction of problems through language, and she sees the task is to 'examine the ways in which "public policy problems achieve their reality in language"' (Bacchi 1999, p 37, citing Shapiro 1988, pp xi, 26). She argues that meaning is constructed through argument, and acknowledges the 'difficulty of stepping outside of structuring discourses' (Bacchi 1999, p 45).

Sara Mills (1997) has summarised the key ideas of Michel Foucault's conception of discourses, that circle 'meanings associated with the term discourse and around the complex matrix of issues concerning knowledge, truth and power, in order to define parameters of its usage' (p 27). For now, knowledge – as Mills describes it – is constructed through language and discourse and the production of

new forms of knowledge about particular groups, which position some with power⁹ and others without. The challenge is, therefore, 'to see power as a relation rather than a single imposition' (Mills 1997, p 38). She argues:

Whilst Foucault would not minimise the importance of the power of the state, he would suggest that power operates around and through the networks which are generated around the institutions of the State; in some senses power has always been more thoroughly dispersed through-out society than had been realised. (Mills 1997, p 39)

Mills (1997) asserts that Foucault's theories are useful to feminists in three main ways. Firstly, his theories enable women to see that issues around childcare have been designated as private; however, these issues are 'structural and therefore political' (1997, p 79). Secondly, Mills argues that Foucault's analysis of power relations enables feminists to examine the complexity of these relations. Thirdly, his analyses provide a resource for 'women as individuals and members of groups negotiate relations of power' (p 78).

A further useful theorisation of discourses exists within colonial and postcolonial discourse theory, as summarised by Sara Mills (1997). This view of discourses theory is focused on the process of 'Othering' and looks beyond the text for knowledges that have been excluded. Policies are often criticised for excluding knowledges in their development, where the views of the constituents of policy, or those most affected by the policy solutions proposed, are often those not considered. Below, I discuss a number of ways that knowledge is constructed in discourse through the collection of information about policy subjects through themselves.

Techniques of the panopticon are described by Foucault as 'a multiplication of the effects of power through the formation and accumulation of new forms of knowledge' (1977, p 224). Knowledge forms constituted through discourses are the basis of contemporary policy. Government policy uses strategies for the collection of information and accumulation of knowledge about the hybrid subject that include forms, databases, questionnaires, surveys and interviews, and through the observation of the hybrid subject. Foucault (1977, p 178) describes 'micro-penalties' of time, activity, behaviour, speech, the body and sexuality. These micro-penalties are concerned, for example, with the management of time by subjects, their attention to tasks, their propensity for obedience, their manner of speaking to others, their personal hygiene and their decency. Knowledge about how the subject attends to the above criteria for normality forms the basis of knowledge that comes to be known about particular individuals and groups. Mutual obligations requires that subjects participate in the construction and accumulation of new forms of knowledge about themselves through the processes described above.

Government policy, then, uses discourses to collect, accumulate, formulate and disperse the accumulated knowledge. With regard to her 'What's the problem?' approach to policy analysis, Carol Bacchi (1999) identifies language as structuring some issues to be ignored, by redirecting attention to other issues. This is a process of subjectification. Binary oppositions and competing agendas are also structured through language. New discursive fields and representations of problems are

identified through language. Sara Mills (1997, p 109) goes further and, working from Edward Said, argues that 'discursive structures circulating within the nineteenth century in particular informed the way that knowledge was produced so that seemingly 'objective' statements were, in fact, produced within a context of evaluation and denigration'. The construction of discourses around indigenous peoples, argues Said (cited in Mills 1997, p 114), 'describes them as idle, weak, corrupt' and these 'discursive structures' are then available to others to apply and to 'produce knowledge and factual accounts'. The micro-penalties described above are used to collect information and classify groups according to their characteristics. Following Said, this information is then presented in ways that support the dominant culture's view of what is normal.

The policy panoptic of mutual obligations uses a range of strategies or technologies to accumulate and construct new forms of knowledge which are then applied to the problem population. The problem population is observed and described in ways that construct 'truthful' knowledge about it. Discourses are mobilised to make this knowledge truthful, thus 'form[ing] the objects of which they speak' (Foucault 1972, p 49).

The observation of the hybrid subject

The gaze operates as a disciplinary practice, and members of contemporary societies are invited to gaze upon the 'Other'. There is also self-gaze, as in the technologies of the self. I will first discuss the observation of the subject by others, and then self-observation or the process of 'making' and 'remaking' (Walkerdine et al 2001) hybrid subjectivity. 'Technologies of the self' and 'technologies of domination' are discussed in greater detail further on.

Observation by others

Contemporary hybrid subjects never know who is observing them, their behaviour or their actions at any moment in time. Government, through its agencies, ensures that the general public is enlisted into the project of observing the subject. Programs in Australia such as 'Neighbourhood Watch'¹⁰, where communities are enlisted in the performance of government, are an example¹¹. I also discussed earlier how Carol Bacchi (1999) understands the ways that girls' achievement in school has been constructed as a problem for boys.

Similarly, Madeleine Arnot, Miriam David and Gaby Weiner (1999) discuss Margaret Thatcher's observation of declining standards in education. This policy change in the UK has ramifications in Australia as well as in other industrialised nations. For example, the 'problem' of falling standards in schools has been addressed through the introduction of league tables in the UK; the measurement of students' performance against a range of standards; and an education system that is encouraged to see itself as a marketplace, where consumers are free to choose – in short: a neo-liberal agenda. Similarly, Thatcher's focus on welfare sees blame and responsibility individualised. Her agenda is described by Arnot et al (1999) below.

Thatcher's mission was to eliminate the dependency culture which sustained the undeserving poor. Instead she argued the need to treat different families differently. Teenage single parents, one-parent families, absent fathers, and divorced couples were all seen as highly problematic and dysfunctional. (pp 84–85)

Enlisted in the observation of these subjects are the whole community, employers and business. A strategy of neo-liberal governments is to enlist community support in the individualisation of responsibility for social issues. Similarly, in relation to schools and literacy, these more powerful groups are reported as suggesting that our schools are inadequate for preparing young people. Literacy and other moral panics are credited as coming from community dissatisfaction with our schools. In order to establish knowledge about the problem of illiteracy in schools, students are subjected to the 'examination' (Foucault 1977, p 184) as 'normalising'. Foucault (1977, p 184) argues that 'in all the mechanisms of discipline, the examination is highly ritualised. In it are combined the ceremony of power and the form of the experiment, the deployment of force and the establishment of truth'. These examinations are techniques where surveillance of students, teachers and schools as normalising institutions are tested, compared and judged. Observation by others is a key strategy in the policy panoptic of mutual obligations, where the government and its agents enlist the assistance of others, including the general public, who are invited to gaze upon welfare recipients.

Hybrid subjectivity – observation of the self by the self

The contemporary hybrid subject performs the process of subjectification, where individuals act on themselves in order to change in some way¹². Foucault (1988, pp 34–35), in *Technologies of the self*, discusses 'three Stoic techniques of self; examination of self and conscience, including a review of what was done, of what should have been done, and a comparison of the two, ... and the third Stoic techniques, *akesis*, not a disclosure of the secret self, but a remembering'. These techniques are key strategies of government. In an increasing number of ways, the gaze is brought to bear by the self upon the self. The 'remembering' that Foucault speaks of is a key strategy in the techniques of the self and in the construction of hybrid subjectivity.

Examination of self and conscience is achieved in the policy panoptic of mutual obligations in at least two ways. Firstly, completion of written records and the act of writing and recording allow individuals to reflect on their activities. A common example affecting the majority of citizens is the completion of annual taxation returns¹³. Increasingly, in a range of neo-liberal states, accountability mechanisms such as diaries¹⁴ need to be completed to meet a range of criteria. The contemporary hybrid subject must therefore be vigilant about activities performed over a period of time, and in the recording of these activities be mindful of meeting the established criteria.

In many ways this is what Foucault (1977, p 149) describes as the 'control of activity'. He identifies the 'time table', which has 'three great methods – establish rhythms, impose particular occupations, regulate the cycles of repetition'. Some practices of contemporary government rely on these processes; due on a particular

day by a particular time within a regular cycle, these written records¹⁵ are clearly a process of regulation, self-regulation, 'improvement' and 'self-improvement' (Skeggs 1997). These forms of regulation establish control, and penalties are often imposed for not performing the technologies as required. The sanctions imposed on welfare recipients, such as suspension of payments for certain periods of time, is an example of what Foucault (1977, p 184) describes as 'normalization of power', where '[t]he Normal is established as a principle of coercion ...'. In discussing the 'art of punishment', he describes punishment as 'normalizing' practice. He identifies five 'distinct operations' in the punishment regime: comparison, differentiation, hierarchisation, homogenisation and exclusion – 'In short, it [the punishment regime] *normalizes*' (original emphasis, p 183).

A second way that subjects are able to reflect on self and conscience is through the mass media. Advertisements, aimed at hybrid subjects by government, practice the technologies of 'guilt', induce a sense of responsibility to others, and a fear of the consequences that may flow from acting in particular ways. Psychological strategies or techniques discussed by Walkerdine et al (2001) and Skeggs (1997), including the induction of 'fear', are to remind members of the community of their social and moral obligations.

The practices noted above within the observation of the subject contribute to the further construction of hybrid subjectivity, where individuals are required to act on themselves. Dawn Currie (2001, p 266) discusses the notion of "'ownership" of the subject position constructed by the text' in relation to girls and adolescent commercial texts. Similarly, hybrid subjectivity occurs in relation to government policies, when subjects participate in the panoptic mechanism by complying with the rules and regulations imposed by government and policy. Others observe the self, and the self observes the self on the policy panoptic of mutual obligations.

The transparency of the gaze

Bentham's (1843) panopticon was conceived as a 'transparent building in which the exercise of power may be supervised by society as a whole' (Foucault 1977, p 207). Foucault writes that the panopticon was designed to 'become a generalized function' (1977, p 207). In contemporary times, government policy fulfils this promise. As I discuss below, this occurs through visibility, the possibility 'to see constantly and to recognize immediately' (p 200), and the 'object of information' (p 200).

The panopticon reverses the principle of a dungeon where the subject is contained in darkness, remaining caged and hidden. In *Discipline and punish*, Foucault (1977) writes '[v]isibility is a trap' (1977, p 200). The panopticon makes the subject visible from a central point, but unseen by subjects in similar physical positions. In contemporary times, these physical barriers are removed from some prisons, with technology supporting home detention so the hybrid subject can participate in society within a number of constraints. These constraints include economic and social marginalisation, and the requirement to perform in identified ways, as in the technologies of the self. The visibility of the hybrid subject is through the processes of observation discussed above, and in many ways, hybrid subjects are required to construct their own cages. That is, they are responsible for

shelter, food and water and other staples of life. However, through the use of contemporary electronic technologies, the possibility of being seen constantly and recognised immediately makes the operation of the gaze transparent¹⁶.

Hybrid subjects and their families become the objects of information in the policy panoptic. Within the panopticon, Foucault states '[h]e is seen, but he does not see; he is the object of information, never a subject in communication' (1977, p 200). The policy panoptic of mutual obligations relies on communication and often this takes a written form. Products such as forms and letters are key strategies of the operation of the panoptic mechanism. The embodied hybrid subject is required to be available for observation at the request of government and its agencies. Welfare recipients are also required to provide information as deemed appropriate by government agencies when requested. They become the objects of information.

Therefore, communication serves specific purposes and strategies facilitate the transparency of the gaze, where hybrid subjects perform in particular ways and facilitate the panoptic mechanism. The policy panoptic is made a transparent mechanism through the processes of information provision and the presence of the embodied subject. Government policy therefore has the possibility of being enacted in ways that are more sophisticated than Bentham's (1843) illustration of the panopticon in its management of contemporary hybrid subjects.

Strengthen social forces

The panopticon as described by Foucault (1977, p 208) aims to 'strengthen the social forces – to increase production, to develop the economy, spread education, raise the level of public morality; to increase and multiply'. This strengthening of social forces constructs the circumstances in which the relation of subjectification and hybrid subjectivity occurs. It is not necessary to do anything, but construct the relations between the gaze and the discourse to complete the operation of government¹⁷. The aim is for discipline to become 'a generalised function' (p 207). Foucault (1977, p 202) writes:

A real subjection is born mechanically from a fictitious relation. So it is not necessary to use force to constrain the convict to good behaviour, the madman to calm, the worker to work, the schoolboy to application, the patient to the observation of regulations.

A mechanism of contemporary society is the formulation of government policy that 'improves the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design for subtle coercion for a society to come' (p 209). In contemporary society, 'relations of discipline' (p 208) that are features of the panoptic mechanism are created. Schools and other institutions are disciplining technologies, whilst compulsory schooling is an example of government policy that has disciplining effects and constructs relations of power. The aim of these policies is clearly to 'strengthen [the] social forces' (Foucault 1977, p 208), and they are 'exercised continuously in the very foundations of society, in the subtlest possible way ...'. Mutual obligations, with the requirements that welfare recipients return to school, education or training or participate in work – paid or unpaid – reflects the

concept of strengthening social forces as a key feature of the panoptic mechanism of mutual obligations. Indeed, the notion of 'social' and 'moral' obligations is about strengthening community.

The above concludes my discussion of the key features of the panoptic mechanism, which illustrates the usefulness of Foucauldian concepts to the problem of welfare reform in Australia.

Two technologies

The following is a discussion of some additional concepts appropriate to understanding the effects of the policy panoptic of mutual obligations: 'technologies of the self', 'technologies of domination', 'governmentality', the 'art of government' and 'political form of government'.

Technologies of the self¹⁸

The work of Foucault is useful in examining self-regulation as a form of control or discipline, where individuals develop practices to self-regulate or self-survey their own behaviour. In the UK, Walkerdine et al (2001) and Skeggs (1997) used these concepts to describe how working class girls and young women regulate themselves in order to take up the preferred female subject positions available to them within their classed locations. Foucault (1993) discusses a number of forms of technologies or techniques – production, signification and domination. Of interest here is what Foucault (1993, p 203) describes as:

... techniques which permit individuals to effect by their own means, a certain number of operations on their own bodies, on their own souls, on their own thoughts, on their own conduct, and in this manner so as to transform themselves, modify themselves, and to attain a certain state of perfection, of happiness, of purity, of supernatural power and so on. Let's call this kind of technique a technique or technology of the self.

Within the field of technologies of the self, Foucault discusses 'taking care of thyself' and 'knowing thyself' as constructs within self-knowledge. There are many other techniques of the self; however, as I illustrate below, the most useful resources for this study are the technologies of the self that require obedience, and where techniques of domination intersect with technologies of the self to produce government.

Foucault makes reference to the obedience of monks in the monastery, who 'must keep the spirit of obedience as a permanent sacrifice to the complete control of the master. The self must constitute self through obedience' (Foucault 1988, p 44 in Martin et al 1988). He identifies three types of self-examination: '[F]irst, self-examination with respect to thoughts in correspondence to reality (Cartesian); second, self-examination with respect to the way our thoughts relate to rules (Senecan), third, the examination of self with respect to the relation between the hidden thought and an inner impurity' (Foucault 1988, p 46 in Martin et al 1988).

These processes of self-examination are important in a consideration of ‘political form of government’ (Foucault 1994, p 202), or what I refer to below as ‘multiform tactics’ (Foucault 1994, p 211), because the institutions of government establish the rules that govern contemporary society¹⁹. Contemporary governments utilise a range of other strategies described by Foucault (1988, p 44 in Martin et al 1988) as types of self-examination, including the process of ‘remembering’ as a technique of the self and subjectification. I discuss these below, with reference to ‘multiform tactics’ within the panoptic mechanism of mutual obligations.

Technologies of domination

Techniques of domination or coercion intersect with technologies of the self to produce government. When Foucault initially conceived of ‘government’, he was referring to a range of ways that subjects are governed. His early writing focuses on the management of the household, self-control and guidance as government. Later, his conception of government developed to include other forms, often referred to as the ‘art of government’ and ‘governmentality’ – the former meaning governance of the self, and the latter being the governance of others. Foucault (1993, pp 203–204) describes the relationship between techniques of domination, technologies of the self and government as follows.

[T]ake into account the points where the technologies of domination of individuals over one another have recourse to processes by which the individual acts upon himself [sic]. Governing people, in the broad meaning of the word, governing people is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which assure coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself.

I demonstrated above how contemporary government policies of mutual obligations require these technologies of domination and technologies of the self from the contemporary hybrid subject. It is in these ways that technologies of the self intersect with technologies of domination to produce the art of government and governmentality²⁰, and ‘political form of government’ (Foucault 1994, p 202, #1094). In considering these three concepts, it is important to recognise that a range of governmental scholars view them differently. For example, Mitchell Dean (1999, p 18) argues the following.

If government involves various forms of thought about the nature of rule and knowledge of who and what are to be governed, and it employs particular techniques and tactics in achieving its goals, if government establishes definite identities for the governed and the governors, and if, above all, it involves a more or less subtle direction of the conduct of the governed, it can be called an *art*. The object of our studies, then, is not the simple empirical activity of governing, but the *art* of government. To refer to the art of government is to suggest that governing is an activity which requires craft, imagination, shrewd fashioning, the use of tacit skills and practical know-how, the employment of intuition and so on.

The ensuing discussion is an elaboration on the differences between these concepts.

The art of government, governmentality and 'political form of government'

It is necessary here to unpack three Foucauldian concepts that use the word 'government'²¹ – all three with very different meanings, intentions and effects – and the ways that I intend to utilise these concepts.

The art of government

Foucault (1994, p 207) argues that the 'essential issue in the establishment of the art of government – [is the] introduction of economy into political practice'. He adds:

To govern a state will mean, therefore, to apply economy, to set up an economy at the level of the entire state, which means exercising toward its inhabitants, and the wealth and behaviour of each and all, a form of surveillance and control as attentive as that of the head of a family over his household and his goods.

In contemporary times, the hybrid subject is seen as existing to serve the economic goals of a globalised economy. The processes of 'psychic defences' as described by Walkerdine et al (2001) are implicated in processes of government and resistance to the gaze of government. **Demos** (Wilkinson 1994, cited in Walkerdine et al 2001) describe the subject positions opened up for contemporary young women in the UK. These policy spaces are organised around the economy, and Foucault (2001, p 215) argues that populations 'render possible the final elimination of the model of the family and the recentring on the notion of the economy'. In this model, the family becomes an instrument for the gathering of information about populations, and hybrid subjects become economic units.

Government as an art, therefore, concerns itself with the welfare of the population in the broadest possible sense and designs techniques to manage the population or to govern. The concept of government results in techniques as instruments of government. I argue below that policy is a function of 'political form of government' – it is an art of government that constructs particular relations and effects.

Governmentality

Governmentality, as described by Foucault (1988, p 19 in Martin et al 1988), is the 'contact between technologies of domination of others and those of the self I call governmentality'. Mitchell Dean (1999, pp 209–210) defines governmentality as:

... how we think about governing others and ourselves in a wide variety of contexts. In a more limited sense, the different ways governing is thought about in the contemporary world and which in large part can be traced to Western Europe from the sixteenth century. Such forms of thought have been exported to large parts of the globe owing to the colonial expansion and the post-colonial set of international arrangements of a system of sovereign states.

Dean (1999, p 210) adds that his interest is in the 'interaction between oneself and others and the technologies of individual domination, the history of how an individual acts upon himself, in the technology of the self'.

Governmentality is described by Foucault as managing 'the conduct of the conduct' of others. Working from this point, Mitchell Dean (1999, pp 18–19) argues that an examination of government is not about 'rule' per se, but rather:

[A] study of the organized practices through which we are all governed and through which we govern ourselves, what we shall call here *regimes or practices of government*. These regimes, however, involve practices for the production of truth and knowledge, comprise multiple forms of practical, technical and calculative rationality, and are subject to programmes for their reform. It is important to realize that regimes of practices exist within a milieu composed of mentalities of rule, without being reducible to that milieu. [original emphasis]

The panopticon as illustrated by Bentham (1843) and described by Foucault (1977) is a technique of domination of others and is implicated in contemporary political forms of government. The links with governmentality are therefore clear, although there are gaps in these approaches. Mitchell Dean (1999, p 4) argues:

... there is no one governmentality paradigm. There is no one common way of using the intellectual tools being produced by workers in this area. There are no prescribed limits to the intellectual formations of which studies of governmentality can be a part or to the empirical areas in which they can be developed.

In discussing governmentality within the representations of how problems of the population are represented, Carol Bacchi (1999) argues that, in focusing on the ways that individuals self-regulate, scholars of governmentality ignore some problems. These include:

A need to examine problem representations in terms of other structuring discourses, those affecting gender relations ... When we ask what a problem is represented to be, we need to attune ourselves appropriately to these intersecting dynamics. The point here is to create a technique which leaves us ever sensitive to the limitations of our own problematizations. (p 48)

My intention here is to focus on the above concern outlined by Bacchi (1999); how gender is part of the structuring of the political form of government.

Political form of government

I have already mentioned the concept of government of the state, or what Foucault has described as 'political form of government' (1994, p 202, #1094). In *On the government of the living*, Foucault (1994, #1092) takes the notion of government as understood in 'the broadest sense of techniques and procedures for directing human behaviour'. Increasingly, contemporary political forms of government are concerned with economy and psychology. Beverly Skeggs (1977), and Valerie Walkerdine, June Melody and Helen Lucey (2001) stop just short of discussing²¹ this point.

Political forms of government construct new ways for us to think about ourselves, including the discursive constructs of policy as a function of government of the state. Contemporary government is concerned with '[g]overnment of children, government of souls and consciences, government of a household, of a state, or of oneself' (Foucault 1994, p 81). At this point, where technologies of the self intersect

with technologies of domination, a range of strategies are required. Foucault (1994, p 211) describes multiform tactics as follows:

I believe we are at an important turning point here: whereas the end of sovereignty is internal to itself and possesses its own intrinsic instruments in the shape of its laws, the finality of government resides in the things it manages and in the pursuit of the perfection and intensification of the processes it directs; and the instruments of government, instead of being laws, now come to be a range of multiform tactics.

The processes I described in the previous section that are features of the panoptic mechanism of mutual obligation can be described as multiform tactics. This is a useful and interesting concept that I intend to utilise to include the psychological effects of political forms of government on hybrid subjectivities of contemporary working class young women in Australia. Mitchell Dean (1999, p 18) does not use the term 'multiform tactics' in his discussions of government, however, he does state that:

If government involves various forms of thought about the nature of rule and knowledge of who and what are to be governed, and it employs particular techniques and tactics in achieving its goals, if government establishes definite identities for the governed and the governors, and if, above all, it involves a more or less subtle direction of the conduct of the governed, it can be called an *art*. The object of our studies, then, is not the simple empirical activity of governing, but the art of government. To refer to the art of government is to suggest that governing is an activity which requires craft, imagination, shrewd fashioning, the use of tacit skills and practical know-how, the employment of intuition and so on.

In using the term 'multiform tactics', I am implying the use of craft, and referring to the strategies demanded of the contemporary hybrid subject such as those discussed by Walkerdine et al (2001) and Skeggs (1997).

Also of relevance to my work are Foucault's (1997, 1994) concepts of the 'family' as an economic unit to be managed; the hybrid subject as an economic unit; and processes of surveillance and the enlistment of others in these political forms of government. Contemporary government is concerned with 'wealth, longevity, health, and so on' (Foucault 2001, p 217), and the surveillant and normalising gaze is one multiform tactic in the political form of government. These changes, the result of neo-liberal forms of government, are in the ascendant. That is, the many and varied processes involved in the creation of the contemporary hybrid subject are outcomes of neo-liberal governmentality and political forms of government.

Conclusion

Multiform tactics as contemporary political forms of government have developed a level of sophistication that enable them to govern aspects of the self such as conscience, children, households – and indeed, oneself. Mutual obligations relies on a range of multiform tactics and micro-penalties within the panoptic mechanism to coerce contemporary hybrid subjects as welfare recipients to comply with the rules, sanctions and obligations of the policies.

I have described here the policy panoptic of mutual obligations. I have argued that policies of mutual obligations requiring some activity to be performed in return for welfare benefits rely on a range of Foucauldian technologies that can be considered coercive. The subjects of these policies lack economic, social and policy power; they are the objects of increasingly sophisticated technologies of policy. These policy technologies occur at the intersection of technologies of the self and technologies of domination in the policy panoptic of mutual obligations.

Notes

¹ This paper has been developed from my PhD thesis, tentatively titled; Policing and practising subjectivities: working class young women and Australian government welfare reform policies of mutual obligations. The thesis will be completed by the end of 2003. A much earlier version of this paper was presented as 'Weaving webs of obligation: working class young women and welfare reform in Australia' at the International Sociological Association World Congress 2002 and the Australian Association of Research in Education Annual Conference, 2002.

² I am aware that Foucault (1988, p 18) described four technologies – these technologies work together – however, for my purposes here I wish to focus on the technologies of the self, the technologies of domination and their intersection to produce government and governmentality.

³ In using the concept of hybrid subjectivities, I am referring to the work of Walkerdine et al (2001). In their analysis of class and gender, these authors push the boundaries of the concept of *assujettir* through the introduction of the concept of hybrid subjectivity to their analysis of class and gender. They describe contemporary hybrid subjectivity as 'instability of identity' (p 55); as 'contradictory'; as a crossing of boundaries located in 'new spaces'; as being involved in 'new work practices'; and as a 'problematic' conceptualisation (pp 54–60). Hybrid subjectivity implies the twin processes of becoming subject and of subjectification, and is a useful concept in thinking about contemporary working class young women in Australia.

⁴ The Reference Group on Welfare Reform was appointed by the Australian Commonwealth Government in October 1999 and reported to the Minister in March 2000 (interim report, 2000a) and July 2000 (final report, 2000b). Patrick McClure chaired the Committee.

⁵ I do not mean to suggest that the gaze is limited to the observation of these alone, however, my study is principally concerned with the concepts as outlined.

⁶ The various representations of these issues have been discussed by Connell (1996), Kenway (1995, 1997), Kenway et al (1997), Lingard (1998), Mills (1997) and Teese et al (1995).

⁷ In *Governmentality*, Foucault (1994, p 214) discusses 'Mercantilism' as 'the first rationalization of exercise of power as a practice of government; for the first time

with mercantilism we see the development of knowledge [savoir] of state that can be used as a tactic of government'. According to Foucault (1994, pp 213–214), mercantilism 'might be described as the first sanctioned effort to apply this art of government at the level of political practices and knowledge of the state; in this sense one can say that mercantilism represents a first threshold of rationality in this art of government which La Perriere's text had defined in terms more moral than real'.

⁸ Bacchi (1999, p 42) cites Edelman (1988, p 12) as suggesting that there are no solutions – only new ways of describing existing problems. I take up this point in greater detail in my thesis.

⁹ Foucault refers to power as being productive, or positive – not only repressive: 'If power was never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but say no, do you really believe that we should manage to obey it?' (Foucault 1979e cited in Mills 1997, p 36). Here, I am concerned with policies that produce the power to act; where policies require something of the recipient, the objective is to coerce the subject.

¹⁰ Other countries have similar strategies, where members of the community are enlisted in observing the behaviour of people in their geographical area, in an effort to reduce the number of break and enter offences.

¹¹ See, for example, the Australian Department of Family and Community Services' media releases celebrating the technology of data matching (2002a) and communities' assistance with these observation programs (2002b).

¹² The hybrid subject implies the process of subjectification; for contemporary subjects, hybridisation means that they will do this more automatically than in the past.

¹³ In Australia, car logs and other written records are used to substantiate the claims made by tax payers.

¹⁴ In Australia, the unemployed and other welfare recipients are required to complete 'dole diaries' (activity diaries) – a documentation of their activities under mutual obligations.

¹⁵ Businesses in Australia are required to submit a Business Activity Statement every three months. This form of accountability was introduced by the Australian Taxation Office with the introduction of the Goods and Services Tax in 2000. This is an example of cycles of regulation within set timeframes, and there are penalties for non-compliance.

¹⁶ Centrelink, who manage welfare payments in Australia, announced a plan (7 June 2002) to use mobile phone technology to communicate with young people. In a media release, Senator Amanda Vanstone (Minister for Family and Community Services) announced a trail of SMS messaging to 'remind young jobseekers and students on Youth Allowance or AUSTUDY of appointments with Centrelink, the

need to return forms and that payments have been made'. (<http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/minfacs.nsf/549ed30c27042062ca2569e900837d9c/5e15730e5ed47bc6ca256bd5001724c0?OpenDocument>) Accessed 22 October 2002.

¹⁷ I discuss 'governmentality', 'art of government' and 'political form of government' below.

¹⁸ Institutions outside of government include the church and schools, however, contemporary forms of government extend to the church, with churches and other charitable agencies enlisted as contractors in the 'Jobs Network' and other modes of organising and regulating individuals. Schools are also enlisted in organising and regulating individuals and reporting to the government on things such as attendance, and these aspects of individual behaviour in Australia are linked to Youth Allowance payments and other welfare benefits.

¹⁹ I interpret three terms here with reference to government policy: the art of government, governmentality conceptualised by Foucault and 'political form of government'. My discussion will clarify the differences between these three concepts.

²⁰ Mitchell Dean (1999, p 209) defines 'government' as:

the conduct of conduct. Any more or less calculated and rational activity, undertaken by a multiplicity of authorities and agencies, employing a variety of techniques and forms of knowledge, that seeks to shape our conduct by working through our desires, aspirations, interests and beliefs for definite but shifting ends and with a diverse set of relatively unpredictable consequences, effects and outcomes. Agencies of government, in this sense, can be local, regional, national, international or global; they can be philanthropic, for profit or public.

²¹ It is this gap I intend to address.

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