YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT AND CRIME:

Policy, Work and the ‘Risk Society’

Judith Bessant

Youth Research Centre

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CONTENTS

Introduction ............................................................................................................................................... 3

Part 1. The Claims .................................................................................................................................. 5

The Unemployment and Crime-Delinquency Link .......................................................... 5
The ‘Underclass’ Idea .................................................................................................................. 7
Re-inventing the Wheel: Classical Deviance Theory ................................................... 10

Part 2. A Critique .................................................................................................................................. 14

The Empirical Status of the Claims:
The Youth Unemployment - Crime Nexus ............................................. 14
Knowing Youth Unemployment ................................................................. 20
‘Knowing’ Crime ................................................................................................. 23

Part 3. The Issues and Implications: Governance, Work and a Risk Society ......................... 29

Questions of Integration and the Governmentality of Work ........................................ 29
Implications for Policy ......................................................................................... 34

Conclusion ............................................................................................................................................. 43

End Notes .............................................................................................................................................. 45

Bibliography ................................................................................................................................. 46
Introduction

Since the 1970s, many ‘youth problems’ have been ‘discovered’ in Australia. Concern about young people is not new. Ours is a history in which young people have often been simultaneously the objects of censorious adult anxiety and worry, and also the repositories of adult fantasies and hope (Finnane 1993: 7-26). Understanding that longer history we now confront the fact that since the 1980s academics, and members of the policy community and the media, have constituted unemployment as a key causal determinant of youth crime, and/or constructed a picture of an unemployed ‘youth underclass’ wracked by ill-health, self-destructive behaviours and criminal and anti-social dispositions (Polk 1984; Eckersley 1988; White 1994). Contesting the claim made frequently that a youth unemployment problem is causally linked to increased juvenile criminal and anti-social activities is a central objective of this paper.

It begins by reviewing the considerable body of current theory and research which asserts that jobless young people are likely to enter what has been called ‘the criminal economy’ (White 1989). It argues that such claims are often little different from those advanced in such ‘classical’ theories of delinquency as Merton’s ‘anomic’ theory and Cloward and Ohlin’s ‘strain theory’. Firstly, the empirical status of such claims is highly dubious. Secondly, these claims are also politically and personally detrimental to young people who are already paying a significant price for the shifts that have taken place in the labour market as well as carrying the social stigma of unemployment. In particular assertions that young people when unemployed are more likely to engage in crime underpin and exacerbate public anxiety, while legitimating neo-conservative law and order campaigns and ‘popular’ calls for increased regulation of young peoples’ lives. Much of the research from which these assertions derive also makes unemployment status an ‘indicator’ of potential criminality as it gets added to the already over-crowded matrix of predictors with which both the state and professionals legitimate their interventions into the lives of those defined as being ‘at risk’.

This monograph interrogates the ways in which such claims inform the making of youth policy. Yeatman (1990) argues that contests over meaning are a major form of contemporary political struggle. The way in which problems are defined to a considerable extent informs the responses of the state and professionals. The framing of problems prepares the way for the development of policy ‘solutions’. In this case, as a ‘knowledge product’ the constructive schemes developed to establish the ‘youth unemployment-crime link’ have a significant effect in shaping policy discourses and policy development. In the context of interrogating contemporary youth policy, the purpose of this text is to undermine the privileging, especially within the policy
community, of the ‘naturalness’ of the alleged causal relation between youth unemployment and criminality.

Challenging that causal relation also gives rise to questions about our preconceptions regarding industrial culture. As we reach the end of the twentieth century the old certainties about full-time wage labour are disappearing and we face a future where full-time wage labour may even become a minority option for most people of working age. The perpetuation of political and moral economic frameworks based on assumptions about an indefinite continuation of, or return to, the labour markets of the past is a major problem that calls out for a major re-think on the questions of social integration, the role of labour and the places of young people.

Judith Bessant
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Part 1. The Claims

The Unemployment and Crime-Delinquency Link

One of the modern verities in today’s political and policy terrain is the claim that unemployment causes crime, and more specifically that youth unemployment is a key factor in juvenile crime and delinquency.

In Australia as youth unemployment increased dramatically from the mid 1970s through the 1980s the media have been tireless in making the link between crime and unemployment. Readers of the Age have got used to reading headlines like ‘Warning on Jobless Crime’ with reports from ‘criminologists’ claiming that:

Our fear ... is ... two or three decades of continued relegation of more than 300,000 Australians to long term unemployment may put us at risk of crime problems closer to the US ... (Age 18 January 1994).

The article went on to draw a direct causal connection for readers between joblessness and murder. ‘[L]ess than 33% of convicted murderers in 1991 were in paid jobs at the time they killed’ (Age 18 January 1994). Typical were such reports that claimed that, ‘As local youth unemployment escalates ... crime is becoming a simpler more effective life alternative for a legion of kids’ (Herald-Sun 14 July 1989). Reportedly this growing number of young people, when ‘provoked’, ‘quickly’ turn ‘mindlessly violent’ (Age 25 May 1992). Persistently portrayals of unemployed youth took the form of a duality in which ‘they’ (young people) were/are seen as both victims and perpetrators of violence and crime (Sunday Age 12 April 1992; Age 15 June 1992).

In Australia the unemployment-crime link has often relied on few detailed Australian studies, and more usually on an extensive international literature (Weatherburn 1992: 4). Many researchers and academics have been prepared to make the link between unemployment and crime (Herald-Sun 3 May 1986). Eckersley drew attention to the plight of young people in terms of the ‘casualties of change’. ‘Research in Australia and overseas has linked unemployment to mental and physical ill health, suicide, drugs and crime’ (Eckersley 1987: 27). This he argued was all part of a bleak social context confronting today’s young people (Eckersley 1993: 8-12). Windschuttle maintained that unemployed people were significantly over-represented in criminal court statistics. ‘There is virtually no dispute among criminologist about this’ (Windschuttle 1980: 72). In the late 1980s White too has maintained that: ‘At the economic level, it can be suggested
that more and more young men will turn to crime to make ends meet’ (White 1989: 146). Polk and Tait argue for a deterministic relationship between youth unemployment and criminality, maintaining that:

One potential consequence of the resultant large pool of new marginal youth has been a turn to illegal forms of activity ... (Polk & Tait 1990: 21).

Polk has also been reported in the media as saying that: ‘more and more young people would become increasingly desperate and turn to crime if youth unemployment levels remain high’ (Polk Age 13 August 1991; Age 15 June 1992). Wilson has argued that if juvenile crime is to be prevented then politicians need to turn their attention to unemployment (Eckersley 1988: 12; Youth Policy Development Council 1988: 5; Wilson 1988). It is not clear whether Jamrozik and Cunneen also see a causal connection between joblessness and crime (Cunneen 1991: 324). Jamrozik refers to the high rates of unemployed and Aboriginal people appearing in our criminal justice systems (Jamrozik 1995). Braithwaite and Chappell intervening in the policy-making process before the release of the Federal government’s 1994 White Paper on Employment claimed that:

The Green Paper [Restoring Full Employment] ... neglects crime as a consequence of long term unemployment. ... Given the economic importance of crime and the effect of long term unemployment on crime, we consider this neglect of considerable economic importance in the way it shifts the balancing of the benefits and costs of the Job Compact proposal (Braithwaite and Chappell 1994: 2).

Their submission was also picked up by the media. Readers of the Age were informed that: ‘the jobs compact ... [was] a way of stopping crime from adding further to unemployment’ (Age 18 January 1994). Braithwaite and Chappell also argued that unemployment is a causal determinant of domestic violence:

There is strong reason for suspecting that [unemployment] applies to the most important part of our hidden crime problem, domestic violence (Braithwaite and Chappell 1994: 2).

Walker too argued that high levels of youth unemployment are to blame for an increase in crime in country areas. According to Walker, youth unemployment underpins the greater number of ‘soft option’ robberies on service stations, shops and pizza parlours (Sunday Age, 24 October 1993). Janunkar and Kapucinski also argued for a causal connection between youth unemployment and crime (Janunkar and Kapucinski 1992: 59). Numerous international studies are adduced to support these claims. Some have suggested that if unemployment did not automatically switch young people onto criminality, it did impel those already showing ‘delinquent tendencies’ to move into crime (Farrington et al 1986: 335-65). Chiricos also concluded from his research that unemployment rates are positively linked to crime rates; distinguishing between the different types of crime (that is, property crimes versus violent crime), and between
periods in which the crime was committed. Chiricos argued that a strong relationship existed between property crime and unemployment rates (Chiricos 1987: 187-211). In the early 1990s Europeans like Freeman and Soete indicated the ‘unmistakable association’ between crime and unemployment (Freeman & Soete 1994: 12). In the United Kingdom Dickinson claimed he could demonstrate a clear link for young males under 25 between rising unemployment and increased incidence of burglary (Dickinson 1994). Kirby argued that the single and most effective way to reduce British crime is to increase employment (Kirby 1994).

Before examining the validity of the supposed juvenile unemployment-crime link, it is worth looking at the way this particular claim is extended into a more inclusive argument to the emergence of something called an ‘underclass’. Such arguments rely on a long and hardy tradition of theorising criminality and delinquency. It may be that one can defend the youth unemployment and youth crime rate link by shifting to a larger set of arguments about a ‘juvenile underclass’, and the role of unemployment, and poverty, in producing juvenile criminality and/or delinquency (Bessant 1994 and 1995).

The ‘Underclass’ Idea

In the context of a disappearing youth labour market and a global process of economic and cultural transformation (Beck 1993), ‘the crime problem’ has been incorporated and elaborated into wide ranging political, cultural and even religious debates (Bessant 1995).

The alleged link between youth crime and youth unemployment can be defended via the claim that Australia, like the USA, is experiencing the emergence of a ‘juvenile underclass’ (White 1994: 19-23; White 1995). ‘As youth unemployment escalates and its associated underclass mushrooms in sympathy, crime is becoming a simpler more effective life alternative for a legion of kids’ (Bulletin 14 April 1993; Bessant 1993b). The juvenile underclass is a synonym for a section of the population who are much more than just poor; it refers to what has been called ‘a culture of poverty’, and welfare-dependency grounded in the experience of long term and possibly even intergenerational unemployment. Historically identified with different tags (‘the Black people’, ‘the masses’, the ‘lumpen proletariat’ or simply as ‘the Poor’) the idea of an emergent ‘underclass’ has helped to focus these debates with both ‘left’ and ‘right’ versions (Payne & Payne 1994).

From the neo-conservatives we hear predictions of lower levels of crime if only the welfare state could be ‘rationalised’ - possibly to the point of extinction. In some instances claims are made that the complete abolition of all welfare and related benefits will not
only produce a more moral society, breaking the cycles of dependency and poverty, but also result in a more vibrant and productive nation (Novack 1994: 37). From the neo-conservative perspective social security benefits not only offer disincentives to work but they also make ‘out of wedlock births’ an economic life support option (The Economist 1994: 19; Love 1994). From conservative quarters we also see a reliance on deterrence theory as calls are made for the reintroduction of the death penalty and more severe sentencing as a disincentive to crime (Sawer: 1982).

From the liberal-progressive perspective crime is similarly linked to larger political projects. Part of the liberal-progressive argument is that the predicted increase of crime will be reduced only if new employment programs are established and existing ones extended, if state support for the jobless is increased, and if there is greater social equity and justice. Similar arguments are applied by those operating with a religious agenda. If we had more emphasis on Christianity, if more people went to church, if we taught children Christian values and morality in school as well as the home there would be less crime (Felson 1994). If for example you are interested in institutionalising Aboriginal youth seen to be ‘at risk’, why not argue that such measures will reduce crime? What is needed in the debate is at least a declaration of the respective political agendas that motivate and inform those making such claims to truth about jobless youth. Raising questions about whether such claims have any validity must include querying whether those making such causal links claims are more interested in producing knowledge about jobless young people as part of their own moral and political projects, rather than in understanding the experiences of being young and excluded from the full-time labour market.

Conservative moralising about the perceived self-inflicted misery of ‘the underclass’ combined with notions of a cross-generational transmission of poverty, joblessness and welfare dependency is not a new argument. It is part of an older eugenicist tradition that saw certain genetic qualities and environments responsible for delinquency, low IQ, poverty and crime. These ‘attributes’ it was argued were passed from one generation to the next. This notion of eugenics is not to be read in a narrow exclusionary sense; but rather it is one which encompassed the projects of both conservatives and liberal, even radical, progressives (Bessant 1991: 8-28; Lewis 1987). Most of the Australian liberal-progressives involved in the eugenics projects of the earlier part of this century were motivated by progressive principles of the day in the same way that those of the left involved in contemporary debates share an enthusiasm about the enlightenment commitment to science, rationality and formative civic development (Lewis 1987; Bessant 1995; Watts 1994). It speaks to the ‘natural’ scientific authority of experts who work in areas like education, fertility-control, biology, demography and measurable characteristics of intelligence (Bessant, 1991; Watts 1994; Bessant 1995a).
We see today the transference of this logic within both the neo-conservative and progressive accounts of ‘youth unemployment = juvenile crime’. It is also alive in the related debates around the emergence of a juvenile underclass; accounts of the inter-generational transmission of social disadvantage and cycles of welfare dependency-deprivation. Such debates can be seen as an uncritical ‘recycling’ of older discourses about pauperism in the nineteenth century and of the early twentieth century ‘discovery’ of the adolescent-as-delinquent. As Macnicol explains:

The ideological thrust of this rediscovery had a curious combination of reformists social engineering ... and a conservative ‘social pathology’ perspective which emphasised cultural deprivation (Macnicol 1987: 295).

I will defer to later a discussion of the possibility that the youth unemployment - crime link, and/or the emergence of an underclass of socially disruptive youth, are important components in our constructive schemes directed towards producing categories of governance. Foucault once argued that power lies in the capacity to shape the ways reality gets talked about and known - this is evident in our ability to categorise and determine how certain individuals and groups such as ‘the unemployed’ and ‘the juvenile underclass’ are perceived. Much of the debate about the emergence of a juvenile underclass is but a small part of a more general system of governance targeted at particular groups with the view to regulate potentially disruptive sections of the population (Rose 1989). Inherent in discussions about social order and the threat posed to it by jobless young people is a will to regulate, a will at least as prominent amongst the left as it is amongst the right.

Re-inventing the Wheel: Classical Deviance Theory

Contemporary arguments about youth unemployment and criminality bear a striking resemblance to the classical theoretical models of deviancy and delinquency. The underclass has long been a focal point for the anxiety of the respectable classes. Furthermore, the notion of an underclass in conjunction with old discursive traditions around a lumpen proletariat, ‘the poor’, adolescence-as-delinquent is a sure-fire and secure foundation for heightened popular anxiety which gives credence to ‘the need’ for increased regulation of those seen to constitute a threat to social order. Media analysis has also drawn heavily on academic and expert interest in the linking of economic-material deprivation and the incidence of crime (Bessant 1993).
Whatever else has changed, our fundamental ways of seeing ‘the poor’, in this case ‘the underclass’ and ‘the adolescent-as-delinquent’, maintain strong continuities with older traditions (Marshall 1950; Foucault 1965; Hirschi 1969; Townsend 1979). Today’s debates draw in part on the legacy of economic liberalism from ‘authorities’ like Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham and David Ricardo who argued that policies which rewarded jobless and poor people for their fecundity were bad in both economic and moral terms (Smith 1853; Bentham 1843; Ricardo 1951). It is also built on the work of late nineteenth century social liberals like Booth and even on contemporary progressives like Hollingworth who aimed to reform the living conditions and well-being of ‘the poor’ (Booth 1903; Hollingworth 1979).

Contemporary arguments about youth unemployment and criminality often unwittingly reinstate arguments from older theoretical paradigms whose shelf-life might be thought to have expired long ago. Certainly the many similarities between these contemporary claims and the older classical theories on delinquency - such as Merton’s work on crime and delinquency - may come as a surprise especially to those who see themselves as progressives.

Merton draws on Durkheim’s theory of deviance and in particular his concept of anomie or normlessness (Merton, 1957).(1) Durkheim used the idea of anomie to refer to a condition which results when there are major and rapid upheavals in ‘society’ leading to a diminished allegiance by individuals to traditional rules and notions of social order. Merton adapted the concept of anomie and spoke of the strain felt by people when the accepted norms they adhered to contrasted violently with their lived experiences. A disjunction between the socially accepted goals and the means available to achieve those goals causes a strain within certain individuals. That strain is allegedly dealt with by means of criminality; the accepted goals are achieved through unlawful means. According to Merton, inhabitants of industrial western cultures internalised values orientated around material success, individualism and economic status. These he argued were seen to be achievable through discipline, sacrifice and a commitment to the work ethic, but not necessarily obtainable for all citizens. Given the competition and inequity that resulted from this, the pressure to achieve was considerable; whether by legitimate or illegitimate means. It was thought inevitable therefore that many forms of deviance might emerge in order to realise those objectives of material success.(2)

Cloward and Ohlin followed Merton’s model in developing their ‘strain theory’. Basically, ‘strain theorists’ claim that poverty and inequality produce crime. Cloward and Ohlin argued in the 1960s that young people (especially those in poverty) who could not obtain material wealth by legitimate means turned instead to illegitimate methods
involving criminal activities (Cloward and Ohlin 1960). They asserted that one method of coping with the stresses and frustrations of being thwarted in attempts to achieve ‘success’ is to develop alternative avenues of success like crime. According to them ‘the poor’:

... experience desperation born of the certainty that their positions in the economic structure is relatively fixed and immutable - a desperation made all the more poignant by their exposure to a cultural ideology in which failure to orient oneself upward is regarded as a moral defect ... (Cloward & Ohlin 1960: 35).

Given these conditions they argue, we can safely predict strong pressure to separate from the institutional norms and adopt ‘illegitimate’ alternatives. Furthermore, according to strain theory crime prevention relies on reducing poverty. Strain theory also shares some commonality with ‘differential association theory’ that relies on the assumption that delinquency is passed on by associations with ‘bad’ company. This means that if there are many ‘poor’ unemployed young people, they are likely to ‘infect’ others and create a culture of crime or a juvenile underclass.

Today’s experts on young people and crime appear to argue in a similar vein by suggesting that ‘to survive economically they [young people] may have to turn to crime as a means of making ends meet’ (White 1989: 137). According to the Age, experts give credence to the youth joblessness-crime equation.

The causal connection between unemployment and crime is not clear, but there seems to be little doubt in the minds of criminologists and youth workers that there has been a sharp increase in the number of young people who feel marginalised and who have furious, if inchoate, despair about the future (Age 5 May 1992).

It is said of today’s young unemployed people that they are likely to engage in criminal activity because legitimate means to achieving socially legitimate goals have been blocked. Government policy-making bodies warn of ‘gangs of unemployed youths [who] could form guerilla groups out of frustration and despair’ (Herald-Sun 14 July 1989). Such explanations are strikingly similar to those of the classical theorists referred to above. Revised North American approaches of the 1960s continue to be offered up. White for example argues that: ‘...crime is endemic to capitalism ... but it is the well-socialised person who is most liable to crime’. In line with the classic theories on delinquency, White also maintains that the values and goals of most ‘working class’ people are overwhelmingly conventional (White 1989: 147). And again in conformity with classical delinquency theory we are informed that despite the illegitimate means, the goals of the young person remain conventional:

... the young person who takes to street crime often does so because of the prevalent ideology of competitive individualism (White 1989: 146).
These universal goals hold that ‘competition is the ‘name of the game’, and that survival of the fittest governs the rules of competition …’ (White 1989: 146). The competitive nature of ‘society’ provides a context where if unemployment is the only other option to having a full-time job then it is assumed that jobless youth living within a culture of competitiveness will be compelled to engage in violence and crime. That is, one assumes young people commit crimes because their experiences as unemployed causes them to become detached or marginalised and therefore anomic and/or rebellious (Eckersley 1988; Wilson and Arnold 1986). As unemployment affects people financially it therefore follows that young people commit crime when they are materially deprived. Polk and Tait argue:

One potential consequence of the resultant large pool of new marginalised youth has been a turn to illegal forms of activity both for economic and social reasons (Polk & Tait 1990: 21).

Insistence on this causal connection encourages a neglect of other possibilities - the numerous other explanations, besides poverty, resistance or detachment, for why young people engage in acts of crime or violence.

White, for example, sees a link between unemployment and crime especially for the ‘working class’ because they face, as Merton, Cloward and Ohlin had also previously argued, contradictions between the conventional goals they have internalised and the legitimate means available for them to realise those objectives. If we add the structural imperatives of gender (via the idioms of aggressive masculinity) we find similar contemporary explanations:

Like young women, … [young men] too are conditioned by both patriarchal ideologies and practices, and this is reflected in the ways in which particular types of crime are constructed in masculine terms and in the material conditions which allow young men the freedom and social networks to engage in particular kinds of criminal activity … Car theft, drug dealing, break and enter - such are the crimes of the working-class poor (White 1989: 147).

Braithwaite too, in his anomic theory of deviance, relied on a modern version of the ideas of Durkheim and Parsons, and of Merton’s famous revision of their work. (He claims (1988) to have moved beyond this in his later theory of shame and reintegration). In his earlier work, however, it had become a demonstrated fact that poverty and powerlessness encouraged crime, and that factors like having a job, reasonable income and the like would in company with a redistribution of wealth and power do much to diminish crime and re-establish social order (Braithwaite 1979).
Part 2. A Critique

The Empirical Status of the Claims: The Youth Unemployment - Crime Nexus

How well then does the argument that juvenile unemployment causes juvenile crime stand up to sustained critical scrutiny? In this part of the paper I turn to some strong reasons for not accepting this link as well grounded.

In most of the scholarship and polemic arguing for a youth unemployment-crime nexus, there is little if any discussion on the difficulties of relying on statistical and other empirical data when arguing to evidence that joblessness equals involvement in crime. (3) Duster for example acknowledged what most criminologists who have looked closely at the matter know, that:

... unemployment surely does not cause crime in any simple linear fashion, and certainly not in any direct one-to-one relationship. In [North America] the easy demonstration is the Great Depression (Duster 198: 302).

Watts more recently suggested that:

... any close scrutiny of the research done into the unemployment-crime link...soon indicates that any simple links between unemployment rates and crime rates cannot be drawn (Watts 1994: 7).

Other criminologists have made much the same point over the past two decades. Braithwaite long before his 1994 interventions, argued that socio-economic inequality rather than unemployment was the major factor behind high crime rates (Braithwaite & Biles 1979: 192-200). Similarly Belknap maintains that comparisons of trends in crime and unemployment rates produce at best ambivalent results (Belknap 1989: 140-157). In England Carr-Hill and Stern also queried claims that unemployment which causes financial hardship results in people committing crimes in order to alleviate those material hardships (Carr-Hill & Stern 1983: 341). North American research by Little, Villemez and Smith also undermines the apparent naturalness of assumptions that unemployed young people are at risk of becoming criminal (Little, Villemez & Smith 1982: 435-8). Alder also argues that: ‘Clearly there is not a simple, direct, inevitable relationship between unemployment and crime, and until very recently, criminologists had put the topic in the too-hard basket’ (Alder 1986: 212). By 1993 Australian commentators Wilson and Lincoln were also being quite cautious:
... the view that hordes of young people who are not in jobs or in school will create huge crime waves is contradicted by sufficient evidence that shows that correlates of crime are much more complex (Lincoln & Wilson 1993: 8).

Weatherburn and Watts point to Australian studies by Devery suggesting why that caution is justified, noting that much of the research does not show a consistent disposition on the part of crime rates to closely shadow changes in unemployment rates (Weatherburn 1992; Watts 1994). Devery argues that even though the correlation between those who are materially deprived and criminality may seem obvious there is no evidence to demonstrate that it is their disadvantaged position which causes them to commit crime (Devery 1991). Blakers also argues there is no evidence of a causal connection to be found in statistical data on youth unemployment and reported juvenile offences (Blakers 1986: 71-101). In Queensland, O'Connor notes that ‘popular mythology suggests that juveniles are responsible for the majority of crimes committed and that the rate of youth crime is increasing’ (O'Connor 1993: 29), but he contests this ‘mythology’. O'Connor analysed the Queensland Juvenile Justice system, arguing that juvenile crime is essentially property-related crime. This involves offences such as shop-lifting, break and entering, and other stealing offences. Offences against the person comprise a small proportion of juvenile criminality and furthermore many of the property-related offences are minor ones:

So while a small number of juveniles are involved in serious crime, most juvenile offenders commit petty opportunistic offences (O'Connor 1993: 28-29).

Wundersitz’s comparative analysis of inter-jurisdictional statistics on young offenders goes further than merely outlining some of the problems in dealing with statistics. She argues also that the empirical evidence does not support popular and expert views that young people are now more violent and engage in more criminal activities than before.

Despite the difficulties of comparing juvenile justice processing across state jurisdictions, this analysis found little empirical evidence to substantiate various media claims that juvenile crime is ‘out of control’. Overall only a very small portion of young people came in contact with the official justice system. Moreover, in the five or six states examined, the rate of official intervention either remained constant during the 1980s or showed only a slight increase (Wundersitz 1993: 18-37).

While considering the social costs of youth unemployment Winefield et al similarly advised caution when looking for ‘causal’ connections between youth unemployment and criminal activity:

Much has been written, much of it speculative, about the link between unemployment and crime as well as other forms of anti-social activity including increased hostility to minority groups. It is frequently assumed, for example, that unemployment is the cause of increased criminality but this is a contentious issue (Winefield et al 1993: 17).
Surveying the international evidence Felson questions the logic that suggests bad things come from other bad things, or what he refers to as the ‘pestilence fallacy’. He queries the idea that if crime is bad then it must result from other social ills such as poverty and unemployment. Based on such logic the assumption seems to be that prosperity for ‘the poor’ and greater equity will reduce the crime rates. If this is the case then the obvious question is why do poorer nations have crime rates that are lower than those of the more affluent nations such as the USA, Australia, and the UK? Felson makes his point succinctly with three simple questions:

Why does the Netherlands, despite its high levels of welfare spending and emphasis on social equality, also have high violent crime rates? Why was the major period of crime rate increase in the United States, 1963 to 1975, also a period of healthy economic growth and relatively low unemployment? Why did Sweden’s crime rates increase greatly as its Social Democratic government brought more and more programs to enhance equality and protect the poor? (Felson 1994: 11-12).

It is relevant here to comment on the contemporary explanations of juvenile crime and delinquency couched in terms of unemployment and emiseration. Since 1975 the claims about unemployed, poverty stricken young people ‘at risk’ engaging in unlawful activities and joining the ranks of ‘juvenile underclass’ have again proliferated. Yet, barely three decades before in the 1950s, precisely the opposite claim was being deployed to explain the ‘outbreak of delinquency’, which was then the object of heated media commentary.

With the end of wartime hostilities in 1945 the ‘delinquency problem’ was frequently explained in terms of the ‘too-easy access’ young people had to work and high incomes and their subsequent buying power. The prosperity of parents was also to blame. In contrast to claims advanced in the 1990s, in the 1950s experts and authoritative commentators held that poverty, material deprivation and unemployment were positive influences that made young people more appreciative, respectful and more resourceful and less inclined to behave in anti-social ways. In the mid-1950s the Adelaide Juvenile Court Annual Report stated:

All one can say [about the causes of delinquency] in a brief space is to mention some of those influences...[This included]: over indulgence of children by parents during the present prosperity, independence of children due to the high wages they receive at early ages... (1955: 4)

One of many government Inquiries into ‘the delinquency-youth problem’ of the 1950s, the Barry Committee report (1956), considered the perceived connection between poverty-unemployment and low levels of delinquency, a correlation apparently grounded in the 1930’s depression. Periods of economic severity and material deprivation allegedly produced minimal levels of juvenile criminality. The ‘Barry Report’ suggested that times of economic downturn produced social solidarity which in turn strengthened family
cohesiveness, guaranteeing a healthy ‘adjustment’ to adulthood through those notoriously ‘turbulent’ adolescent years (Barry Report 1956: 48).

Commentators in the 1950s agreed and held that ‘things were too good’. Readers of the *Bulletin*, were informed that:

> The school-leaving age is higher; secondary education is available to a larger percentage of the population... Youth-in-industry is no less favoured. Not for many years has the lad leaving school had to face the problems of job seeking that confronted earlier generations. Well-paid jobs with good conditions have been his for the taking...(19 August 1953).

Young people had money to spend on corrupting themselves. Money bought ‘premature’ exposure to the ‘unseemly’ aspects of adult life. According to police, ‘fun parlours’ and ‘billiard saloons’ ‘needed to be cleaned up’. The proliferation of ‘sordid’ ‘penny arcades’ meant that youth were at risk of ‘immoral delinquency’ and even a life of gambling: ‘...young children look[ed] at nude pictures and paying money into ‘oomph’ and ‘love’ meters’. With money in their pockets the attraction was overwhelming especially to the machines which produced’...cards saying ‘You are among rogues’. ‘How to kiss’ and ‘Rules for Lovers’.(*Sun* 1 August 1951, *Sun* 21 February 1952). Educationists such as the principal of Fintona Girls’ School (M. E. Cunningham) went public in condemnation of the detrimental affects affluence had on ‘modern children’; arguing that it made them disregardful of others feelings, lacking manners and ‘disgustingly vulgar’ (*Sun* 19 December 1951).

Some historians have noted the apparent shift in the logic of the poverty and crime link. Pearson in his insightful historical analysis of British public fears of ‘hooliganism’ pointed to claims made in the 1950s that: ‘The ‘easy money’ available to young people under conditions of full employment was the object of widespread condemnation’(1983: 16). Young people were seen by many to be worst ‘afflicted’ by the ‘weakening temptations of affluence’.

> ... nor does it matter a great deal, in the way in which the complaint has been phrased, whether this refers to the ‘affluence’ of the eighteenth century, the young factory slaves of the Industrial Revolution, the Edwardian van-boys, the irresponsible pleasures said to have been heaped upon the young during the 1930’s depression, or the dazzling entrance of ‘war babies’ in their Teddy Boy suits, and the other monstrous apparitions that constitute this history of the British Hooligan (1983: 208-9).

Even into the 1960s the proposition that full-employment and affluence caused ‘pathological youth’ continued to be heard. ‘The argument was pivoted upon the assumption that the impact of ‘affluence’ had conspired to produce a novel disorientation among the nation’s youth’ (Pearson 1983: 16). In Australia ‘radical university students’ of
the sixties were seen to be unappreciative of the tremendous opportunities they enjoyed and were said to be ‘acting out’ like spoilt and indulged children. The ending of the long post-war boom after 1974 has had a remarkable effect on the way explanations for delinquency are now constituted.

A contemporary critic Felson returns to the arguments of the 1950s when he argues that crime rates seem to largely ignore issues such as poverty, unemployment, government policy, inequity, or the welfare system. He maintains that to the ‘... extent that crime rates seem to respond at all to these phenomena, they may actually rise somewhat with prosperity’ (Felson 1994: 12). Yet this stands in stark contrast to today’s received wisdom which is very much a reiteration of the ‘discoveries’ made in the 1880s that poor economic and social environments breed criminals. For generations now such claims have been privileged - informing policies such as ‘slum clearance’ (now urban renewal-redevelopment programs) and the removal of children from parents deemed ‘unsuitable’ parents.

Today it seems to be ‘obvious’ that unemployment and material deprivation means that ‘...young people of both sexes are being forced to be active in the criminal economy’ (White 1989: 140). As Katz (1988) points out many of those young people who fall into the supposed causal categories constituted by this argument do not commit the crime that the research predicts they will. Furthermore, many of those who do commit the crime do not fit the designated causal categories of ‘being at risk’. Many who do fit the indicators of criminality, and who later committed the predicted crime, go for long periods without committing the crimes to which theory directs them. That is, such accounts do not explain why some young people are violent, or why they are violent in particular ways and in particular contexts, and why others are not. Such explanations too often fail to consider the lived quality of young peoples lives and the complex imbrication of internal rationales (including moral emotions like pride, a sense of injustice, righteous anger and revenge) (Katz 1988: 2-3; Cohen 1992: 46-53). Furthermore, arguing a determinist relationship to structure does not explain why all those who are young, unemployed and poor do not engage in crime. Nor does it explain why those who are in paid full-time work, and especially those occupying the highest paid and most responsible of corporate or government positions, can also thieve, embezzle, engage in heroin trafficking or even in homicide.

The focus on deterministic relationships between structures -like unemployment- and agency -committing a crime- leaves little if any room for considering the possibility that there may be many other reasons for why people commit crime and violence; reasons that have no relationship with factors such as material deprivation or employment status.
In fact given the enormous effort spent on objective measurement of factors said to be likely to best predict and explain juvenile delinquency, the results are very disappointing.

This type of deterministic research claims that delinquency occurs because young people are constrained to engage in ‘delinquent’ acts because they are unemployed. Such investigative projects provide little insight into the lived experiences of young people. They provide no awareness of why it is that young people knife each other, fight, thief and vandalise. This absence may indicate (amongst other things) a need for an alternative approach that can establish why young people do criminal violent things. Some young people for example fight and shop lift because it provides a rarely experienced chance to feel strong, effective and adventurous.

Bessant and Watts illustrate this by way of a particular informant’s experience of shoplifting:

Such attractions appear to be extremely seductive for many young people who now spend most of their lives within social settings that are characterised by inequitable power relations, and within institutions, such as school where dependence is deliberately prolonged and the ability to take risks limited. The severe limitations of explanations that link economic deprivation to crime and violence are evident in cases such as Rebecca’s. She is a secondary state school student from an affluent, high status household, whose parents are anglo-saxon professionals, living in a renovated terrace house in an inner bay-side suburb of Melbourne. Rebecca explained some of the techniques and excitement involved in what she referred to as ‘racking’ - shop lifting:

Kids in my school engage fully in shop lifting everyday...they steal something that is worth a lot of money... the next day you go in and say that your grandmother gave it to me and it doesn’t fit and I’m also not happy with the colour, can I have my money back? Its like a bank, its really cool. ...It really works, I can’t believe it.

(Bessant and Watts 1993: 7)

Simply put, unemployment and material deprivation do not explain why young people become involved in crimes. The prevalence of the belief that it is the ‘poor’, young and unemployed people who steal and do unlawful things is not only simplistic but it also misrepresents individuals and groups already disproportionately subject to coercive practices and gazes of professionals and the state.

**Knowing Youth Unemployment**

If we push the level of analysis deeper then we find there are a number of issues that must lead one to the view that there is not an ‘obvious’ basis for claiming any simple or direct ‘causal link’ between ‘unemployment’ and ‘crime’.

Part of the problem with much of the ‘popular’ academic argument for the crime-unemployment link seems to be the persistence on the part of a continuing majority academic disposition to rely on a simple empiricism as the basis for their claim to ‘know’. Academic, expert and media representations of jobless young people as criminal or
delinquents relies heavily on an empiricist episteme. Most of the arguments made claim that what is described is therefore true because it is based on ‘the facts’. However, because something is ‘known’ this way does not mean it is true. Empiricist data confer a rarely questioned status of truth on research claims made about what is actually happening out there in the ‘real world’.

For example it has been ‘empirically’ demonstrated not that long ago that certain sections of the population, like ‘working class’ and/or Aboriginal people, were ‘intellectually inferior’ and thus prone to criminality (Kemp 1932; Tennison-Wood 1937; McRae 1934). Empirically and scientifically it was ‘proven’ that by virtue of their lower levels of intelligence ‘working class’ and Aboriginal children were more likely to become delinquent. Young people demonstrated to have lower IQs were seen to have been candidates for delinquency.

Today those who wish to claim it is empirically true that unemployed young people are ‘at risk’ of becoming criminal must first deal with the problems involved in knowing ‘the unemployed’ and knowing ‘the offender’. As Wickham has argued persuasively, the modes of ‘knowing’ discrete elements of a population are dependent at least as much on political and administrative practices as they are on some allegedly ontological secure grasp of ‘reality’ (Wickham 1993). As will become clear very quickly the current methods of ‘knowing’ the unemployed and the criminal leave much to be desired.

Criminologists and others have for a long time questioned how it is that we come to ‘know’ crime through the measurement of crime rates reliant on often problematic or inconsistent ways of conceptualising and measuring crime. Criminologists seem to have paid less attention to the prior question: how do we come to know unemployment? Any interrogation of how governments collect unemployment data in Australia suggests that there are equally basic problems with both what and how we ‘know’ about unemployment.

Examining Australia’s unemployment counting exercises, Watts pointed out that we do not have a consistent longitudinal data set that would enable us to say much about links between unemployment and crime on an historical-comparative basis, contrasting for example the unemployment of 1929-36 and the unemployment of post-1975 recessions. He maintained that we are not entitled to place over-much confidence in the ‘historical’ unemployment data up to the 1940s. In the same vein Watts argues that:

... allowing for all the problems with unemployment statistics before 1945, we don’t actually ‘know’ who the unemployed are, even in the period since 1975. We confront the general problem of much social science and administrative research that apparently objective statistics are simply research - or administrative - artefacts which exemplify the general proposition that many social science and administrative categories ‘constitute’ the reality to which the category can then be applied (Watts 1994b: 11).
There are three agencies in Australia that produce data on unemployment though only one (the ABS data set) is used by governments and researchers because it is widely regarded as supplying the most valid estimate of unemployment. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) uses a large household sample of 30,000 households said to be representative of the entire population. The ABS also uses International Labour Organisation definitions of ‘employment’ and ‘unemployment’ to estimate size of the ‘labour force’ and the percentage of the Labour Force who are definitionally ‘unemployed’ -which is a different status to being ‘jobless’ (ABS 1987; Garratty 1984).

How unemployment is conceptualised and the data collected determine the size and nature of the problem. Currently definitions of what counts as employed exclude many from the statistics. For example if a person is unemployed they must be over 15 years of age. They must also have ‘actively’ looked for work in the prior four weeks and be able to start work in the survey week. They must also have not worked for more than one hour during the survey week (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993). Those young people who have stayed on within the schooling system because they cannot find work are also not counted as unemployed: ‘... the labour force does not include those who prefer to continue their full-time education...’ (ABS 1987).

Comparing the three major government sources of unemployment data (that is the ABS, Department of Social Security and Commonwealth Employment Service) led Norris to conclude that they are different in terms of the criteria used to determine who meets the requirements to be counted as unemployed and secondly produce very different estimates (Norris 1989:172-5).

It has been acknowledged since the early 1980s that the ABS data set has to be treated with care and scepticism. This is so because it is based on a sample (albeit a large one) and worse because it uses criteria that exclude large numbers of its sample. It excludes from the ‘labour market’, and hence from the ‘unemployed’ data set, all those jobless for example who have given up actively looking for work and puts them into another category altogether: the ‘discouraged worker’ category (Sheehan & Stricker 1981; Steinke 1984). There are also problems with counting the ‘hidden unemployed’ and ‘underemployed’ people who don’t meet the prescribed requirements that allow them to be categorised and therefore counted as unemployed. There are many jobless people not officially counted as unemployed simply because they have worked in the survey period, or they are under or over the appropriate age, or they have not ‘actively’ sought work, or because they are in some form of training or education etc. There are also significant gender effects embedded in the assumptions that go into the various research and administrative categories, some of which bear heavily on the presumed links between
unemployment and crime; women are significantly ‘discounted’ in the various counts of unemployment (Committee on Employment Opportunities 1993: 8).

Finally there are the conceptual problems facing the ABS as it struggles through a conceptual minefield trying to measure youth unemployment (ABS 1987). As Praetz and others have noted there are significant difficulties in using the ABS data set in any simple way or as if it gives us an uncomplicated picture of youth unemployment (Praetz 1983). There is a tendency to evade these problems and to represent the ABS youth unemployment data as if they were simply counting the numbers of young unemployed persons (Dwyer et al 1984: 16-24).

The primary difficulty here is conceptual: when is someone a member of the labour force -employed or unemployed - and when are they to be excluded from the labour force?

To be ‘counted’ in the Labour Force a respondent to the ABS questionnaire needs to be able to say that they have worked for at least one hour in the survey period for income, and/or that they have actively sought work in that period if they did not work for at least one hour for income. This is an extremely fraught matter when it comes to measuring or estimating school or education participation rates for young people, alongside their Labour Force participation rates and hence arrive at some estimation of the youth unemployment rate. The problem is this: when is a full time student only a full-time student and not a member of the 15-19 labour force, whether employed or unemployed?

We know that there has been a near complete disintegration of the full-time youth labour market throughout the 1980s and 1990s for the young and especially for young women. This has been accompanied by an immense increase in school participation and school retention rates through this period. We also need to take into account the decision by the ABS to count as ‘employed’ those young people who are involved in study and on-the-job training alongside the decision taken by ABS to count students enrolled as full-time students at universities and colleges as ‘not employed’ even though many now work part-time for income. Given these factors and the significant increases in part-time male junior (15-19) employment, maintaining conceptual clarity let alone measuring something called ‘youth unemployment’ in clear and meaningful ways may now be impossible (ABS 1987).

What are relatively clear are the statistical measures used to establish the numbers of students engaged in education and training since these are usually censuses of real persons. What this implies about the employment/unemployment status of the same people is very unclear when it comes to sorting out Labour Force Participation rates and unemployment rates for young people. Praetz allows that:

... the classification of the labour market activity of young people in Victoria is complicated because of the overlap between participation in an educational
Youth Unemployment and Crime:

institution full- or part-time and being employed or unemployed on a full- or part-time basis (Praetz 1983: 19).

In one sense large numbers of young people are ‘obviously’ not in the full-time labour force, but equally obviously this does not mean they are ‘unemployed’ since so many are now working on a casual or part-time basis alongside their full time schooling activities. In short we are not entitled to make conclusive statements about the actual numbers of young unemployed persons aged 15-19 in Australia or to attempt to strike a realistic youth unemployment rate from which we can proceed to assess any deterministic relationship with criminality or delinquency.

In the same ways that there are major problems of relying on current sources of data for youth unemployment, so too are there problems about how we best measure rates of juvenile crime.

‘Knowing’ Crime

The area of juvenile crime measurement is equally highly problematic, and is as much a mine-field as ‘measuring’ juvenile unemployment. As Arie Freiberg suggests it is a problem that goes with any consideration of the ‘crime rate’ - ‘...the problem is we don’t really know what the true state of criminality is’ (Freiberg 1991: 2). The problems of ‘measuring’ the extent or ‘rate’ of crime are notorious and are the cause of many complaints by both academics and officials about the paucity of credible data and the need for more resources and better funded agencies to rectify the problem. As Wundersitz points out: ‘there is no national uniform data collection system’ (Wundersitz 1993: 19).

In Australia with its federal structure there are the usual problems of six state governments each with their own criminal code and different definitions of what constitutes an offence. Add to this the major variations in legal and policing philosophies and practices across the nation, and the various jurisdictions, and we can begin to understand the nature of the problem. To this can then be added the usual problems found in any modern legal system.

There are the questions to be asked about how infractions of the law are not only named, but also how or in fact whether they get to be officially recorded and classified. Many crimes go unreported in the same way that many crimes go undetected. In the same way that very minor criminalised acts go towards the development of our profiles on crime so too do many quite serious illegal actions, even those causing loss of life, or of vast sums of money, go unrecorded. Other non-penal agencies come into play often with the result that criminal proceedings do not eventuate. The courts and the police are not the only institutions that make official decisions about violations of the law. Commissions,
administrative-arbitration boards, safety boards-inspectorates, public complaint bodies, and school boards consider cases that involve unlawful behaviour.

Sutherland canvassed many of the issues about assuming that official statistics tell us anything ‘real’ about the state of crime. He argued strongly against the thesis that criminal behaviour derived from unemployment, poverty or even psychopathic and sociopathic conditions associated with poverty. He argued this essentially for three reasons.

First, the generalisation [unemployment/poverty = crime] is based on a bias sample which omits almost entirely the behaviour of white collar criminals. The criminologists have restricted their data, for reasons of convenience and ignorance rather than principle, largely to cases dealt with in criminal courts and juvenile courts, and these are principally for criminals from the lower economic strata. Consequently their data are grossly biased from the point of view of the economic status of criminals and their generalisation that criminality is associated with poverty is not justified.

Secondly, the generalisation that criminality is closely associated with poverty obviously does not apply to white-collar criminals. With a small number of exceptions, they are not in poverty, were not reared in slums or badly deteriorated families ... They were seldom problem children in their earlier years and did not appear in juvenile courts or child guidance clinics.... Even if poverty is extended to include the economic stresses which afflict business in a period of depression, it is not correlated with white collar criminality. Probably at no time within fifty years have white collar crimes in the field of investment and corporate management been so extensive as during the boom period of the twenties.

Third the conventional theories do not even explain lower class criminality. The sociopathic and psychopathic factors which have been emphasised ... have not been related to a general process which is found in white collar criminality of either class (Sutherland 1994: 24-25).

In relation to adult (white-collar crime) Sutherland points out how many who commit criminal acts are never convicted and thus their crimes never recorded. Out of court settlements when the injured party is more interested in securing damages rather than seeing punishment inflicted result in non-convictions. Furthermore, unlike the deeds of many young people, specially those from materially deprived backgrounds and Aboriginal children, the unlawful acts of white collar criminals are often less visible and relatively:

... immune because of the class bias of the courts and the power of their class to influence the administration of the law (Sutherland 1994: 23).

Sutherland’s remarks open up the larger issue of the ways that traditional practices and attitudes of those given authority to report crime also discourage the formalised reporting of unlawful acts. When the individuals or groups are not seen by the recording officials as having legitimate status, when the complainant is not seen as possessing full rights by
virtue of their age or ethnicity, or when they are identified as a member of a stigmatised group (as homosexuals, illegal immigrants or prostitutes), the credibility of their complaints is often diminished. Melcher makes the point that ‘in operational terms, such systematic lack of recognition occurs, for example, as negative judgements about the credibility of testimony...’ (1993: 150). He goes on to consider factors that influence the decision to report. These include the insistence of the complainant that the police officer pursue the matter; the complainant’s deference to and demonstrated respect for the authority of the police officer; the officer’s perception of the social status and resources of the complainant to successfully support the complaint. Such factors influence the likelihood of reporting and the selection and representation of elements of the report that define the substance of the report. However no matter what factors exert influence, the central issue relates to: ‘the capacity of the actors to mobilise various social resources in the pursuit of a claim for intervention’ (Melcher 1993: 150).

On the other hand many crimes go unreported simply due to a lack of confidence or trust in the official means of redress, or due to an inability by the individual or group to report the incident. In some cases also it is simply too dangerous to report crimes to official authorities; the repercussions can often cause more injury to the complainant. For example reporting fraud committed by an estranged husband could result in the loss of his employment and thus of the amount of child maintenance received. Similarly, reporting domestic abuse may increase the risk of further assault or other forms of retribution. In the same way some young people, who may already be perceived by the responding officer as having low social status and a lack of resources to support their complaints, may not report crimes because they may also be implicated in them. This occurs in relation to illicit drug sales when payment is not received. Similarly ‘illegitimate victims’ like young male or female street prostitutes are not likely to automatically lodge complaints.

All of this is not to deny what is just as ‘obvious’: that juveniles constitute a large and disproportionate number of recorded offenders. However, what do the juvenile crime statistics tell us? Furthermore, are we in a position to reconstruct the ways in which young people are ‘known’ by the police or by ‘the law’? There are for example issues to consider regarding the precise nature of offences committed by juveniles. As Tait argues:

...most of the ‘offences’ relate to fairly minor thefts or property offences particularly shop lifting. They [young people] also generally get filtered out of the legal system, with only about 10-20 percent of young ‘offenders’ being convicted. But by agreeing to be cautioned, a sizeable fraction carry a ‘guilty’ tag as the price for this early exit. Even though the legal process has avoided the stigma of a conviction, the police statistical process has effectively criminalised large groups of young people by branding them as ‘offenders’ (Tait 1994: 73).
The Children’s Court statistics produced for example in Victoria support the ‘popular’ view that we have been experiencing a major increase in juvenile crime. These official statistics for the early 1990s for example, indicate a major increase in juvenile crime rates. However, what is not revealed, especially on a superficial reading, is the nature of the offences that have caused the increase. These offences included failure to wear an approved bike helmet, travelling on public transport without a valid ticket, failure to provide an address, misbehaviour like placing feet on public transit vehicle’s seats, or smoking cigarettes. These are the offences that have caused the hike in the crime figures, while the rate of the more serious crimes, such as unlawful assault, rape and homicide remain unchanged (Department of Justice 1992).

These official rates of juvenile crime also do not indicate whether the figures are the product of an increase in offences or are an artefact of policy or policing changes. Increased juvenile crime rates may have nothing to do with unlawful activities of young people. They may for example reflect increased police attention given to certain groups due to media or public concern about their perceived potential threat to social order. (Thus in the late 1980s media attention given to ‘young louts’ drinking in public led to police operations and local council curfews). Or, it may reflect other factors such as an increased allocation of police or transit officers to patrol or to police new policies.

In Victoria for example the dramatic 1990s increase in Children’s Court appearances by young people, particularly low-income juveniles, was very much the consequence of changes in policy and policing. Young people became the target of ‘crack downs’ on fare evasion and misbehaviour in the public transport system. As O’Grady explains:

The [Public Transport Corporation’s] determined pursuit of young offenders who fail to pay hefty on-the-spot fines for minor offences has led to a dramatic rise in the number of cases brought before the Children’s Court. Because PTC prosecutions are included in the state’s juvenile crime statistics, the uninformed readers may conclude that Victoria is experiencing a dramatic increase in juvenile crime (O’Grady 1992: 40).

Ultimately any unquestioning acceptance of official statistics will, as Cicourel argued in 1967, lead to a significant intellectual inability to grasp the real social processes and interactions that constitute the basis for statistical records.

Statistical records are said to measure or to record the nation’s welfare and the population’s state of health. Patterns of unemployment and crime are said to reveal the moral condition of the people. However, despite our confidence in the naturalness of the knowledge claims based on statistical measurement, the information obtained generally tells us little if anything about the conditions of its actual production. What statistical records do not reveal is the gap between the ways in which we know about youth unemployment and juvenile legal infractions within our institutional and professional...
practices and the actual events or experiences that are recorded and measured. Wundersitz provides an important insight into the large numbers of young and/or Aboriginal unemployed people within the juvenile justice system. They suggest that it is the young person’s unemployment status which may actually cause them to be apprehended and convicted:

.. factors such as unemployment influenced the decision taken at each level [of the juvenile justice system], and this applied irrespective of the nature or circumstances of the young person’s prior offending record.... over-representation of Aboriginal and unemployed youth in the system was, at least in part, a product of class bias (Wundersitz 1993: 34).

The policing practices that lie behind the recording and record collecting practices are neither obvious nor reflected in what we see as the final data. Similarly police statistics or criminal justice figures tell how those institutions perceive and constitute young offenders. In appearing to be a simple activity, record keeping depends on an ability to follow simple ‘bureaucratic’ rules; in practice however social and normative judgements lie behind each and every crime statistic. Cicourel’s work (1967) reminds us that there is much research needed to help establish how and why some young people become police statistics and others do not.

Large data sets like the ABS unemployment statistics reflect how governments, political parties and even ‘the community’ feel and think about and see young people who are excluded from the full-time labour market. It might be that the confusions which abound in the area of youth unemployment statistics reflect the lack of clarity in the social world about the links between activities (like going to school/university or working for income).

Statistics do not encourage us to remember the ineffably normative and social and historical character of those processes which lead to someone and their activities becoming a ‘number’. Nor do they help us recollect the ways in which generic types of social actors, like the ‘juvenile delinquent’, are constituted.

That historical type, the youth-as-delinquent, emerges out of a long history. Policing youth is an idea and practice covering many fields in which adolescence as a category emerged as the object of centralised political and administrative power that intervened into the daily lives of young people. This is most clearly evident in the subsequent development of professional interests and institutional activities reliant on ‘adolescence’ as their own subject matter. It emerges from the many constitutive schemes of the intellectually-trained who produced adolescence-as-delinquency as the object of a disciplinary gaze. It was a development characterised by a fascination with and concern about the perceived negative aspects of a ‘phase in the life-cycle’ (adolescence), constituted as precarious and inherently problematic; a transitionary period said to
require adult help and regulation. The reporting of youthful normative and legal infractions were/are directional indicators especially for securing the young person’s moral career.

The evidence examined in this section challenges such historical constructs. What it clearly indicates is that claims of some simple link between juvenile crime and youth unemployment are vulnerable to a number of methodological and substantive objections. In the final part of this paper I open up the framework of discussion further concerning the perpetuation of misleading historical constructs. Questioning the unemployment = crime assumption leads to a reconsideration of larger policy, social and cultural issues which are inevitably raised by this topic.
Part 3. The Issues and Implications: Governance, Work and a Risk Society

Questions of Integration and the Governmentality of Work

Law and order campaigns incorporate more than ‘moral panics’ justifying calls for increased powers of law enforcement agencies such as the police. Identifying jobless young people as potentially criminal has very effectively drawn on age old fantasies and fears about ‘idle youth’, producing a booming industry of professionals who rally behind the ‘youth unemployment problem’.

In the mass media over recent years we can observe what Stanley Cohen referred to as a ‘moral panic’ about youth unemployment, its perceived link to juvenile crime and the threat to social order. Popular anxiety about this particular ‘folk devil’ (adolescent-as-criminal) is about the near wholesale and permanent exclusion of young people from the full-time waged economy. The application of Cohen’s moral panic model is in this instance useful for illuminating complementary work of the media and some experts in setting the ‘youth-crime-problems’. According to Cohen it is a condition, episode, person or group of persons which emerge to become defined as a threat to social order and societal values.

Its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media. The moral brigades are manned by editors, bishops, politicians and other right thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or more often resorted to...(Cohen 1980).

Cohen’s model shows how folk devils get made with the assistance of what he calls ‘right thinking’ people. His account is useful for understanding the current proliferation of law and order campaigns, popular concerns around youth unemployment, crime and the emergence of a juvenile underclass.

Given the primacy of the role of the intellectually trained in producing social science research, cultural forms and images as objects of policy, an adequate theory of policy needs to deal with the intellectually trained and to identify what is specific to their work (Perkin 1990). The idea of constitutive abstraction indicates some of the distinctive features of intellectual work. Emerging out of a history of theory on social policy has developed what is called a ‘policy community model’. This model is useful in this instance for pointing to the political influence of ideas and in particular the influence of professionals in the making of policy (Brooks 1994). This approach in association with theorists such as Heclo and Hall is about the intellectually trained (Heclo and Masden 1987; Hall 1990). In this paradigm, intellectuals in their roles as activists or experts
endeavouring to influence elite public opinion, or in their work as architects of policy discourses, help shape communication and representations of policy problems as well as the subsequent solutions.

The constitutive role intellectuals play in ensuring that certain things/groups get to be seen as a social problem or as a public issue occurs on a number of levels. Kingdon argued that some things enter the public realm because of a number of ‘circumstances and politics’ (Kingdon 1984). By circumstances he meant that particular issues impact on the state and become so important that governments have to be seen to be responding effectively, and thus take action. This involves considerable work on behalf of actors or groups who work towards making sure that particular state interventions do or do not happen. This is what Kingdon referred to as ‘politics’. Brooks argued that interventions by the intellectually-trained ensured the selection of particular issues and guaranteed that they became the object of policy interventions (Brooks 1994). He also maintained that conceptual or discursive innovations are a prelude to policy responses.

Claims by some of the intellectually trained that unemployed youth are likely to become criminal within the socio-economic context since the mid-1970s have had profound consequences in terms of debate and policy. Increasingly since the 1970s jobless youth have become objects for the exercise of extensive socio-political power (Danziger, 1990). It is what Foucault called the power of discipline (Foucault 1978). Knowledge produced about unemployed youth by some criminologists and other experts in psychology, sociology, education and youth studies, not only directly informs policy, but also feeds back into disciplinary institutions (universities, state agencies etc) and enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of their administrating. This becomes administratively useful knowledge used to rationalise and extend techniques of governance.

The influence of those knowledge claims on our social practices and cultural expressivity also has a detrimental impact on the lives of unemployed young people. While the state is certainly affected it is but one aspect of government; governmentality however extends into a range of areas such as the school, the family, community associations, and the workplace. Research enterprises which speak of unemployed young people as likely criminal-delinquents count as knowledge by producing a ‘truth’ that has very practical effects on the way people see and relate to each other. It is not just internal regimes of the state, professionals and state agencies that are influenced; the ‘productive’ effects of those knowledge claims are dispersed through the social body.

What makes this particularly problematic in the context of this paper is that we now live in a period of major economic, social and cultural transformation, much of it centring on the dramatic restructuring of the labour market and of the kinds of work that are done. One far-reaching effect of labour market restructuring has been its effects on the social
distribution of paid employment especially in relation to women, young people, and traditionally defined ‘blue-collar’ male and female workers (Beck 1993; Probert 1994). While much of the ‘popular’ discussion has focussed on the economic effects of underemployment and unemployment, increasingly in emergent post-industrial societies there has been more attention given to the cultural, political and psychological implications of what Beck has called ‘permanent underemployment’ (Beck 1993: 79; Frankel 1989; Gorz 1991). These changes have provoked intellectual and political debate about the relationship between employment and citizenship (Pixley 1993).

The problem is that claims about unemployment = crime and the re-ignition of fears of an emergent ‘underclass’ relate to older discursive traditions about work and the disciplinary and integrative value of labour. Discussions about an emerging juvenile ‘underclass’ reflect how we now try to come to terms with long-term unemployment and the disappearance of the youth labour market. Polk has argued that the situation is ‘creating a new class of marginal youth’ (Polk 1984: 469), and maintained that such groups are not subject to the governmentality operating in the workplace and school and thus can be identified by the ‘problematic aspects of [their] youth culture’. Without supervisory monitoring of their conduct these young people are said to ‘drift’ into activities a long way removed from the agenda set by the regulating mechanisms of state agencies - such as the schooling system or the workplace. Describing the problems of this group Polk has indicated how ‘[t]heir interests are organised around cars, parties, dating, surfing, alcohol, drugs and the like’ (Polk 1984: 471). Paying attention to the tradition of ‘respectable fears’ in what can only be described at best as a romantic understanding of the history of youth cultures (at least in Australia) Polk continued:

New patterns of youth culture are being generated as a consequence, which many adults view as both bizarre and threatening. For example, the more extreme forms of punk culture, with its emphasis on physical violence, sexual degradation, and mutilation seem far removed from the ‘hell-raising’ of the semi-delinquent youth cultures of the past decades (Polk 1984: 472).

Such statements reflect a very specific understanding of ‘threatening’ collective youth action, violence and crime.

From a neo-Marxist perspective the causal relationship between unemployment-crime is set within a quite distinctive political framework. The causal connection is due to ‘the individualism of bourgeois culture built into the very nature of capitalist economic activity’(White 1989: 146). Left-progressive critical perspectives are heavily reliant on explanations through structural factors, of class relations and the contradictions of capitalism, that apparently produce underclass cultures of delinquency and criminality. Capitalism, economic rationalism and global restructuring of the labour market and the economy are creating a class of paupers, prone to criminality. ‘Alienated behaviour’ and
crime are explained in terms of being ‘linked to the substantive changes that have taken place in the political economy of late capitalism’ (White 1994; Macnicol 1987: 292-31). Such arguments reinforce those already entrenched and popular beliefs in the naturalness of the idea that a combination of youth and unemployment inevitably results in criminality. Unfortunately, and I expect unintentionally, such claims also legitimate the political projects of neo-conservatives preoccupied with increasing policing and the better regulation of ‘unrestrained’ young people identified as ‘at risk’. Linking crime to aspects of one political agenda transforms such knowledge claims into political strategies rather than statements or research that is centred on understanding better the lives of young people. (Much of the debate centres around the politics of resource allocation).

Debates about a growing ‘culture’ or ‘underclass’ of detached, long term jobless, rebellious youth have a symbolic importance as well. They form but a small part of a more general attempt at governance of specific groups with the view to regulating the perceived potentially disruptive sub-section of the population (Rose 1989).

They symbolise a situation of crisis that needs to be managed or contained: a crisis not simply of the labour market but of industrial culture itself. Within that culture paid work has been widely seen not only as an economic necessity but as a moral vehicle, ensuring the smooth assimilation and transition of adolescents into their communities as ‘well adjusted’ young adults. The ethical values assigned to labour in conjunction with the perception that ‘the unemployed’ are unable to integrate into ‘society’ gives a powerful moral meaning to being without work. As Foucault pointed out, the origins of poverty were not seen to have been scarcity of commodity, but rather the weakening of morality and discipline (Foucault 1965: 35). The source of misrule triumphant amongst ‘the young’ is said to lie in a lack of instruction and disregard for social order. Insistence on work is not defined just by economic conditions, but also out of a recognition of its morally integrative function.

Given the popularity of this view, it is little wonder that we now see widespread anxiety about the significant reduction in the full-time youth labour market. In presenting their case for a full employment program in 1994 Braithwaite and Chappell refer to the ‘ empirically established’ relationships between anomie and crime:

Hagen (1993) has shown that youths who are embedded in criminal networks become isolated from the networks that enable legitimate adult employment (Braithwaite and Chappell 1994: 3).

If work secures the ‘proper’ socialisation of young people into their respective ‘roles’ as workers and citizens, then it follows that if young people ‘go off the tracks’ in adolescence we will have major social order problems for the future.
It is a popular belief that the absence of the constraining influence of work threatens social order. According to Hirschi’s ‘control theory’, delinquency occurs when a person’s ‘bond to society’ is weak, and thus young people commit unlawful acts because they have failed to develop the attachments, aspirations or morality that causes others to behave as good citizens. The social controls that influence people to obey the rules are absent or weak. Given that full-time employment inducted youth into ‘society’ by offering attachment to integrative practices and institutions, unemployment logically weakens or destroys that bond and all too often results in criminality (Hirschi 1971; Polk 1984: 462-480; Polk 1994).

The power of the narratives of adolescence-as-delinquent and unrestrained youth in the context of high youth unemployment is nowhere more evident than in Braithwaite and Chappell’s claim that we have some reason for optimism in the future:

Fortunately, the crime-reducing effects of the changing age structure of the Australian population will probably buffer Australia from the substantial increases in crime that we might otherwise expect to occur as a result of chronic long term unemployment. That is, as the average age of the Australian population increases, the percentage of the population in high crime 15-25 age group drops, so an aging population benefits significantly from a declining crime rate (Braithwaite and Chappell 1994: 2).

(What Braithwaite and Chappell neglect to say is that although the percentage of 15-25 years old may decline in relation to other age categories within the population, the actual number of young people will not decrease in the foreseeable future).

The apparent integrative value of paid-work for adolescents adds weight to concerns about the absence of such a guiding vehicle for teenagers on their ‘precarious’ path towards responsible adulthood. As Currie argued: ‘Whether work can avert crime in short depends on whether it is part of a larger process through which the young are gradually integrated into a productive and valued role in the community’. (Currie 1985: 117).

In the same vein Windschuttle had argued for the alienating effects of unemployment, maintaining that unemployment triggers off negative psycho-social effects:

... unemployment itself is an important cause of increases in drug addiction, teenage alcoholism and mental illness. Poor job prospects do not sit at the end of the causal sequence for these social problems. Very often they are the reason for the start of them (Windschuttle 1980: 93).

Similarly Alder talks about how ‘People who cannot see the opportunity to work in either the present or the future, have little incentive to abide by the rules of a society which has rejected them’ (Alder 1991: 11).
Implications for Policy

Yeatman, Beilharz and Watts have argued that a range of policies are discursively constituted: that is, through a process of discourses, policies are produced and set in place and acted upon (Beilharz 1987: 388-407; Yeatman 1990; Watts 1992: 35-5, 255). It is thus important to give attention to debates (such as youth unemployment = crime), because such contests constitute the problems to which the state and professionals then respond. As Yeatman explained:

Political activity itself becomes preeminently a politics of contests over meaning: it compromises the disputes, debates and struggle about how the identities of the participants should be named and thereby constituted, how their needs should be named and thereby constituted, how their relationships should be named and thereby constituted (Yeatman 1990: 155).

Central to understanding social and public policy is how and what we think about certain groups of young people, how we make sense of our own realities and what sets of problems we produce in order to then find the solutions and determine policy. The state problematises by naming and thereby focussing on aspects of our lives that define and extend the jurisdictional scope of the state (Yeatman 1990: 153). Basic to this process are intellectuals and professionals generally.

If the ‘problem’ is that unemployed teenagers are a threat to social order because they are potentially delinquent, then new forms of regulation need to be set in place and existing ones extended. The problem has been ‘discovered’ and comes to be more accurately known through both academic and popular discourses. Furthermore, the ‘problem’ is said to warrant immediate and urgent state intervention. Amongst other things we have seen the introduction of quite draconian legislation in Western Australia and Victoria severely restricting rights traditionally associated with juvenile status. We have also seen quite dramatic changes in the nature of interactions and relationships between young people and those adults around them. Many young people have become increasingly dependent and subject to the authority of professionals such as teachers, counsellors, psychologists and government officers all of whom have the power to effect increased governance and reduced autonomy.

Many commentators particularly those on the left, argue that ‘the state’ (and ‘business’) should solve ‘the problem’ by creating more jobs - calls are made for’ more jobs not gaols’. However, the supply of new jobs required to meet the needs of young people wanting jobs is highly questionable given the contemporary hegemony of economic rationalism and the aversion of the Keating government to investment in public infrastructure and
services in the context of contractionary fiscal policy. It is also likely that we cannot expect the private sector to run against the grain of current practices of ‘down-sizing’ in the hope that business will add to its ‘costs’ for the sake of creating large numbers of new jobs for young people.

But what if the crisis symbolised by youth unemployment is in effect a turning point, in the sense that the transformation of the labour market entails a transformation of its accompanying industrial culture? Part of the ‘problem’ of youth unemployment relates to the morality of work and the fact that culturally and psychologically the work ethic remains deeply ingrained in our collective existence. Structurally the transformation of work has been swift, but in terms of many of our normative and cultural perceptions and practices we lag a long way behind that which has already taken place in the work place and economy. Beck suggests that the importance that work acquired during the industrial era has no parallel in history. The meaning we attribute to work is tied to the fact that it is the basis of earning a living. However, as Beck argues this only explains part of the shock resulting from the decline of a labour society (Beck 1993: 139); it also affects the basic ways in which we organise our daily lives. It is

... a transition [that] is occurring in industrial society from a uniform system of lifelong full-time work organised in single industrial locations, with the radical alternative of unemployment, to a risk-fraught system of flexible, pluralised underemployment, which, however, will possibly no longer raise the problem of unemployment in the sense of being without a paid job (Beck 1993: 143).

If this is the case, what the proponents of the crime/youth unemployment nexus are attempting to do is to force a relatively new development (a restructured labour market) into an old paradigm which takes industrial culture as a ‘given’ and assumes that full employment is non-problematic:

...and so even the left is trying to find evidence and argument for the ‘problem’ of youth unemployment, without seeing that perhaps a new paradigm needs to be developed ... (Dwyer: 1994).

The post war period (1945) saw a system founded on very particular notions of economic and social progress. It was a period typified by what Beck refers to as ‘the ‘feudal character of industrial society’. It was also a time of relative economic prosperity, notable for its popular commitment to the work ethic, full (male) employment, low interest rates, low inflation, and stability in terms of our balance of payments. Full-employment and economic prosperity were at the expense of not only women (most of whom were excluded from full-time paid work and who were required to sustain the work-force through unpaid domestic work) but also of ‘developing countries’ that provided cheap labour and other forms of exploitation.
Amongst other things Beck argues is that the nuclear family, feudal based gender roles for both males and females, and unpaid housework sustained the capitalist industrial society. ‘Industrial society’ was dependent on the acceptance of feudal dictates and inequality. Waged labour for men presupposed an unequal access for women to areas such as education and civic rights. According to Beck industrial society and full employment have been dependent upon the unequal positions of men and women, but the dynamics of individualisation which accompanied that have meant that people have been progressively removed from the ‘constraints of gender’. ‘Under conditions of modernity women have been released from their ascribed roles in search of ‘a life of their own’.’ Modernisation not only dissolves the notion of full-time waged labour, it also dissolves conditions of feudal based role assignments (Beck 1993). This directly challenges the ‘givens’ of industrial culture.

In fairness to the proponents of the crime/youth unemployment nexus, it is very likely that many of them are also critical of ‘industrial society’ (particularly those operating from neo Marxist frameworks). If we accept this likelihood, we are still left with the fact that their pre-occupation with the crime-unemployment nexus presupposes a return to the past as a valid option. There remains an absence of will to question industrial culture itself and explore possible future alternatives to work, ways of securing an income and the fundamental experiences traditionally offered by waged labour. It gets us back to the question of whether more time ought to be spent on rethinking not only the crime-youth unemployment nexus, but also how we can best separate income from waged labour as well as provide the fundamental experiences once inherent in the young person’s initial work experiences. Surely we must ask: given the changes that have taken place, on what basis are young people going to receive an income? And, how are young people going to participate in those fundamental experiences previously provided by wage work?

In the 1930s Bertrand Russell argued that the morality of work was the morality of slaves and that ‘modern, civilised society’ had no place for slavery. We now see that the new labour systems emerging since the 1970s remove the traditional risks of a scarcity of work. This is not necessarily a bad thing if handled thoughtfully. As Beck argues, such labour systems redistribute and transform unemployment into a developmental productive force.

... the risks accompanying the forms of underemployment compete with the partial freedom and sovereignty gained in being able to arrange their own lives (Beck 1993: 148).

At the same time as underemployment challenges the individual it also presents new questions about the models of social order and social integration we have traditionally
relied on - and which are deeply inscribed into disciplines such as criminology and sociology.

It seems that even within the context of a post-industrial economy, where there is an ever diminishing demand for human labour, we continue to insist that employment, apart from its economic effects, has a primary moral role with unemployment threatening a weakening of discipline and a relaxation of social order and individual morality.

Employment has traditionally played an important role in finding young people a place within their communities as financially independent ‘citizens’. Paid work provided not only an income and relative economic autonomy, but was also seen to assist in the process of ushering ‘the adolescent’ into ‘the adult world’ of responsibility. Work has provided an inner stability; as Beck explains: ‘the occupation ... guarantees fundamental social experiences’ (Beck 1993: 140). Paid employment, however, as Beck claims is in many cases no longer likely today or probable in the future. It is unlikely he argues that paid employment will provide a basic form or means of security that it is said to have provided in the past.

Just like the family ... the occupation has lost many of its former assurances and protective functions. Along with their occupations, people lose an inner backbone of life that originated in the industrial epoch. ... Even outside of work, industrial society is a wage labour society through and through ... in its joys and sorrows, in its concept of achievement, in its justification of inequality, in its social welfare laws in its balance of power and in its politics and culture (Beck 1993: 140).

A significant part of what is seen as ‘the youth problem’ since the mid-1970s has been framed in terms of the absence of that reliable means of integration. However and unlike previous periods of economic crises in the 1890s and the 1930s it is highly unlikely that we will see a return to the kind of ‘full (male) employment’ that briefly we enjoyed after 1945, even should the contemporary economic transformation come to some kind of fruition and we enjoy renewed stability. The youth labour market will not re-appear nor are we likely to see a return to full adult employment.

The changes brought about in both the economy and labour market have significantly and probably permanently reduced the demand for human labour as we have known it. Automation, the exportation of labour off-shore, the entry of women to the labour market, and changes in management practices ensure that full-time paid labour as we have traditionally known it may well become a minority activity. (It is likely that we will continue to see a shift to reinvent old forms of domestic service as a sort of ‘filler’ activity offering low paid, menial work to the young and to women workers who will be employed by a minority of highly paid fulltime income earners). Given this one may wonder why we continue with the insistence on the need to work. The work ethic, the
need to work in the old sense, and the morality of work are the product of an industrial age.

Despite the disjunction taking place, and whatever we may think about the worthiness of the work ethic, many young people still think getting a job is very important. As Dwyer (1994) asks ‘...does that [priority given to work] derive from a work ethic or rather from a sense of ‘livelihood’?’ Why is work still so important? Wilson and Wyn talk of the concerns many young people’s express about their futures in terms of material resources, social relationships and participation in a range of activities they value. For example, livelihood as a ‘future pathway’ means more to the young people they interviewed than simply a decent income and work for them was defined in terms of the opportunity to demonstrate competence and make a contribution; not simply for an employment or training opportunity but to have a say in how it will be established; not simply to be part of the workforce, but to meet people and develop friendships; not for schooling or training which might in some general way prepare them for work but for specific experiences which in themselves have some value as well as preparing them for subsequent job opportunities (Wilson & Wyn 1987: 12).

This point gets us back to the point Beck made in relation to work and its capacity to provide those fundamental experiences. How then given the disappearance of waged labour, as we have known it, can we provide those opportunities/experiences for young people?

Part of the solution in terms of livelihood is to separate income from labour. There is a clear role for major changes in income security policy involving the introduction of a Basic Income Scheme (van Parijs 1993; Watts 1992; Frankel 1987). The more difficult question is how do we provide for or structure experiences that present opportunities to our young people for citizenship, for full involvement in important social experiences and relationships, to be effective, autonomous and competent in our social, political and economic worlds? On what basis are young people going to develop ‘future pathways’ in relation to developing social and other relationships previously provided in sites of wage labour? Constraint, moral panic, and increased governance cannot be said to provide any lasting basis for hope.

Governance is about more than what governments do. It is about the processes and politics of control and management that go far beyond the jurisdiction of the state and reach into the very being of ‘civil society’ for so long held up by bourgeois social theory as the terrain of freedom. It is about the ‘need’ to realise a wide range of political-moral objectives (whether they be conservative or liberal) by developing and using information about sections of the population to manage and regulate the lives of those people. Those
being investigated become the objects for exercising forms of social power; it is what Foucault referred to as the power of discipline. Contemporary debates like the crime-unemployment nexus are about constituting categories within the processes of governmentality. This is so whether those doing the naming are conservative or liberal-progressive. The consequences of their enterprises even if unintended, can often be the same.

Throughout the past few centuries and reaching a peak in the nineteenth century, we assigned the same homelands to ‘the poor’, to the unemployed, the prisoner and the insane. Houses of confinement and establishments of religious public order provided the semi-judicial structures required to deal with ‘all that man is able to invent in the way of irregularities about his conduct’ (Foucault, 1965). With the exception of schools, gaols, and hospitals, no longer do we rely on the physical walls of institutional confinement. Yet in an era of de-institutionalisation, the formulas and patterns of exclusion continue to be repeated in strangely similar ways to those practiced since the 1600s and rely on formulae about the ‘social bonds’ and the continuing need for social order and integration.

In the late twentieth century we continue to rely on a ‘social’ sensibility. In a similar way we have developed a sensibility that isolated certain categories (the unemployed, the young offender, or member of the underclass) all of whom are destined to have no work as we have traditionally known it at least since the onset of ‘full employment’ after 1945.

We provide new homelands for the young unemployed and the juvenile delinquent. We have also organised new sensibilities to poverty and to our ‘duties of assistance’. We have new forms of reaction to economic problems of unemployment and idleness. Despite the transformations happening around us we continue to maintain a work ethic that is at odds with the actual availability of work and we continue to dream of a city joined to civil law within the authoritarian forms of constraint. Instead of the ‘hospital general’ which set itself the task of preventing mendicancy and idleness as the source of social disorder, we have today governance though administrative entities such as the Department of Social Security and the Commonwealth Employment Service, assisted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics which perform the important task of measuring, defining and categorising particular sections of the population.

One other administrative entity called into action which resembles the old institutions of confinement is the schooling system. The education system now segregates and retains thousands of otherwise unemployed and (thus allegedly otherwise potentially criminal) young people. Contemporary arguments that youth unemployment results in juvenile crime seem to place much emphasis on the numbers of young people who have been excluded from the full-time labour market. However, in terms of the alleged integrative role of work, those who worry about this need to remember the enormous increases in
secondary and post secondary education participation rates for that same period and the possible integrative-socialising functions of education (DEET 1993). Such sites of constraint where morality continues to castigate by means of administrative enforcement and where much of its space is devoted to surveillance are vital for the governance of ‘idle’, jobless and ‘unruly’ juveniles.

No longer do we drive the unemployed away from the city walls, nor do we physically confine them in workhouses, labour camps or hospital generals as a means of correcting moral transgressions. At the end of the twentieth century we maintain that same discipline through administrative entities and procedures such as the obligatory ‘activity tests’ prior to receipt of a form of unemployment benefit, or the signing of ‘contacts’ and restrictions on movement which are allegedly intended to maintain the obligation to work as well as provide a basis for assessing the desire to ‘reform’ from a life of idleness. Officially no matter whether there is work available or not, the unemployed must remain ever ‘active’ and ready for regular employment. Our modern administrative apparatuses have power of authority to direct and to police. To accomplish this task they have at their disposal the ability to withdraw income security, that is a means to basic sustenance, as well as to penalise with the full force of the law. It is in this context that the obligation to work takes on a meaning that is both an ethical exercise and a moral guarantee.

At the end of the twentieth century we should by now be able to see that the fantasies of a purely rational, fully socialised command economy reliant on (amongst other things) administrative governance to achieve obedience hasn’t worked and does not deserve to work. There are major problems in perpetuating the belief that liberal capitalism of the kind represented by the American Republic represents ‘the end of history’ (Fukuyama 1989). The United States of America, as the most fully realised individualist capitalist economy, is a failure with its millions of dispossessed homeless, its domestic wars on the streets, its habitual and seemingly mindless consumption of commodities and its ecological despoiling of the globe.

Lasch argued that the traditional political vocabulary of ‘left’ and ‘right’ is exhausted and we need to re-think what a decent, humane civic culture might look like. For those who claim a continuing involvement in a left politics one of the tasks is to re-consider our position. My concern is that claims which causally link crime to youth unemployment reinforce and strengthen deeply conservative political projects which have as their basis a need to extend the regulation of young peoples lives, young people who are already subject to a phenomenal growth in the governance of their lives now at least until well into their mid-twenties.
What do we achieve by extending the dependence of young people by holding them now until their mid twenties in education-schooling institutions said to position them for a future of work when it seems that we are undergoing a major social transformation that will see permanent full-time work a minority activity. Ought not our energy be more productively directed towards considering realistic options that accept the changed conditions in which we live? (Spelling out the possibilities of this is beyond the scope of this particular paper). In a sense we remain locked into an insistence that we must remain faithful to the work ethic and work as a primary means for identity, status, social integration and income. Perhaps it is time we began to question the ethical meanings attributed to employment and reflect on our rarely questioned assumption that joblessness is idleness or slothfulness and implicitly a form of anti-social life or of resistance to order. Perhaps it is time we began to query more seriously government and professional interventions that are shaped by such thinking, those which force ‘the idle’, ‘the unemployed’ to work or at least constantly search for work in an endless labour of ‘active’ pursuit without utility or profit.
Conclusion

As we reach the end of the twentieth century it is becoming apparent that the old certainties about full-time wage labour are disappearing and that we face a future where full-time wage labour may become a minority option for most people of working age. The perpetuation of political and moral economic frameworks based on assumptions about an indefinite continuation of wage labour when that is not likely to be a reality is a major problem that calls out for a major re-think on the questions of social integration, the role of labour and the places of young people.

The current credibility of claims that jobless young people are likely to involve themselves in the criminal economy is not only due to the fact that it draws on long standing discursive traditions about adolescence-as-delinquents and ‘the poor’, but also because it is valuable knowledge for the formation of certain political alliances. Claims that youth unemployment equals increased crime are important components in the construction of categories for governance by the state and professionals (Rose 1989). It is about the politics of management that goes well beyond the jurisdiction of the state. It is about the ‘need’ to reach and realise a wide range of political objectives. Although the developers of these constructive schemes, which equate youth unemployment with involvement in criminal economies, may be well intentioned and ‘on the side of’ young people, the primary outcome of their scholarship is the extended governance of young people’s lives. Conservatives interpret arguments linking youth unemployment to crime as proof of the need for a strengthening of the law and order agenda, a return to traditional values and increased regulation of those young jobless people identified as being ‘at risk’.

Acceptance of an alleged causal relationship between youth joblessness and crime means that the young person’s employment status becomes a ‘predictor’ or indicator of delinquency. Young people without full-time waged labour thus come to be identified by the state, professionals and others as having a higher probability of becoming delinquent. Youth unemployment becomes an important determining variable for predicting criminality. Thus, one’s exclusion from the full-time labour market gets added to the already questionable and over-crowded matrix used for guessing who will and who will not become criminal. Unemployment comes to sit alongside inadequate parental supervision, parental anti-social behaviour, ‘acting up at home’, truancy and ‘below average IQ’ (Potas, Vining & Wilson 1990: 52-53).

The alternative to young people not in full-time work has traditionally been unemployment. Given the large scale exclusion of young people from the work-force since the mid 1970s that alternative (unemployment) has become an undesirable option.
While the designation of unrestrained or ‘idle’ youth as problematic certainly is not a new post 1975 invention, the exclusion of young people from the labour market since has led to massive increases in the governance of young peoples lives through education and training. This has also seen the growth and consolidation of an industry around young people no longer required on a full-time basis in the waged economy (Bessant 1995b). Central to the responses of any problem around young people have been the inheritors of the nineteenth child savers: the professionals and those in related occupations that have for a long time been deeply implicated in the constitution and maintenance of youth problems (Platt 1977). The personal and social dependency and regulation have often been the unintended consequence of professional and state interventions.

Governance is about much more that just what governments do (Rose 1989). It is about the politics of management that goes well beyond the jurisdiction of the state. It is about ‘the need’ to reach and realise a wide range of political-moral objectives (whether they be neo-conservative, liberal-progressive or radical versions of either) by gathering, developing and deploying information about certain sections of the population. As was the case in the past, contemporary arguments that make truth claims about indicators and the predictability of juvenile crime are essentially directed towards securing processes of governmentality, whether those doing the naming and involved in the problem setting take a conservative or left stance. Whatever the theoretical stance, the predictable outcome is that those under investigation become subject to the exercise of particular forms of social power.
End Notes.

1. Durkeim’s understanding of anomie made reference to the disappearance of certain traditional values that were not replaced. Without any guidelines to inform social behaviour anomie existed. This meant that people felt detached, disoriented and adrift and it was one reason why they committed suicide.

2. Merton went on to develop a matrix consisting of five possible reactions to the conventional values and the restricted means of achieving them: conformism, innovation, ritualism, retreatism and rebellion.

3. In some instances this apparent reluctance to be cautious about the empirical basis of a youth unemployment = crime link is surprising given the astute critical commentary of statistics: See (Tait, 1994).


5. This is particularly important given the federal government’s case management strategy for dealing with the long term unemployed. See: Working Nation: Policies and Programs, 1994.

6. Historically we can observe that the evolution of new institutions, professional groups and practices is related to the exclusion of young people from the labour market. For a brief account of this process see: (Polk, 1993, pp. 99-106).
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Youth Research Centre

The Youth Research Centre is located within the Faculty of Education and at The University of Melbourne. It was established in 1988 in response to a recognised need by the youth affairs sector for relevant and up to date research on the issues facing young people today.

The aims of the YRC are to:

• conduct relevant, coherent and reliable research on young people in Australia, with a state, national and international focus;
• assist with the development of policy and the implementation of initiatives based on research findings;
• develop strong links with the youth affairs sector, with particular attention to helping to identify and address the sector's research needs;
• facilitate communication between educators, researchers, policy makers and youth workers;
• support the research activities of university staff and post-graduate students who have a specific interest in youth affairs; and,
• enhance the professional development of staff and students by assisting them to be informed about the broader context of young people's lives.

Youth Research Centre Activities

The YRC has particular expertise in research on education, transition pathways, social justice, gender equity and employment issues as they affect young people.

The main YRC activities are:

• undertaking research and publishing the outcomes in a manner accessible to policy makers and the youth sector;
• providing information and policy advice to governments and other organisations;
• assisting and encouraging individuals or groups who work with young people.

YRC activities involve:

• undertaking small projects for groups lacking the capacity or opportunity to do so themselves;
• providing a base for post-graduate students wishing to undertake Masters or PhD research on topics related to young people and the youth sector;
• enabling academics to participate in established YRC projects, and/or undertake their own research on youth related issues;
• maintaining a youth sector resource library;
• publishing series of Working Papers and Research Reports;
• conducting public seminars and conferences on a variety of issues relevant to those working in the youth sector.