The Post-Welfare State and the Government of Youth At-Risk

Peter Kelly

Introduction

The practice of liberal welfare government in the Anglo democracies has always been problematic. Discussions about the nature, extent, purposes, and consequences of social welfare government have been constant features of community, academic, and party political debates about social welfare solutions to various problems of liberal government. Despite some claims to the contrary, there is no end to history beyond which the practices of liberal government are rendered unproblematic. Given this reflexive history, one can argue that the last 30 years have witnessed an extensive and far-reaching series of changes in the ways in which social welfare government is thought about and made concrete. Indeed, this special volume bears witness to the scope of these transformations.¹

In this article, I do not intend to trace in fine detail the varied history of these reforms, or their consequences — intended, or unintended. Rather, my purposes are to contribute to discussions about how we might think about these changes, as well as the impacts on the populations they target. I wish to suggest that transformations in the practice of social welfare government do not indicate any end to history, but rather represent instances of the restless problematization of government that mark liberalism's "habitual suspicion" of the "means and ends of government" (Osborne, 1996). The governmentality literature that has emerged from Foucault's (1991) genealogies of power and government provides a set of tools that is useful in this context. This sort of analysis points to the significance of alliances and partnerships among a range of individuals, groups, agencies, and institutions that are central to the practice of liberal government. In this sense an examination of what might be termed the post-welfare state moves away from a focus on ideology and/or party politics towards an interrogation of the relationships between certain rationalities and techniques that promise to render reality

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knowable in ways that promise to make government possible. In this way, we can hold together a discussion that foregrounds the ways in which contemporary discourses of individual responsibility and mutual obligation appear as common themes across different party political problematizations of welfare government in the Anglo democracies (Rose, 1996a; Macintyre, 1999).

In this article, this discussion will be made more concrete through an analysis of discourses of youth at-risk. I will argue that the "popular and promiscuous" (Fine, 1995) deployment of discourses of youth at-risk since the 1980s is representative of neoliberal problematizations of social welfare government. These problematizations seek to make young people, families, and communities more responsible for the prudent management of a diverse range of institutionally generated risks. Here risk management emerges as an increasingly individualized rather than a social responsibility.

The Nation-State and Youth At-Risk

In the liberal democracies at the start of the new millennium the "crisis of youth at-risk" is a key marker in debates about young people among intellectuals, social commentators, market researchers, politicians, bureaucrats, religious groups, (self-appointed) moral guardians, and experts in various domains of expertise. Indeed, by one estimate there were over 2,500 articles on youth at-risk published in the U.S. alone between 1989 and 1995 (Swadener and Lubeck, 1995). Extensive reviews of the at-risk literature identify two central and often "competing" concerns within at-risk discourses (Withers and Batten, 1995; Batten and Russell, 1995). These concerns are central to the issues I will canvass below. These reviews identify a "humanistic intention" that is grounded in concerns about harm, danger, care, and support, for young people who might be at-risk. In the second instance, an "economic intention" foregrounds the costs and the benefits — to young people and families, but primarily to communities and the nation — of identifying risk factors and populations at-risk, and of mobilizing certain interventions on the basis of these identifications (Withers and Batten, 1995: 5–6).

Leslie Roman's (1996) reading of a Canadian government policy document that takes as its objects youth at-risk of dropping out of high school provides a useful point of entry into an examination of policy documents that problematize youth via discourses of risk. Roman's purpose is to mobilize certain tools of deconstruction to "challenge the truth" of this policy document, as well as its constructions of youth, the narrative of at-risk, and the crises that face the Canadian nation-state as a consequence of young people failing to complete high school. To challenge the truth of this at-risk discourse is "not to assert that it is all lies or that it is a conspiratorial imposition of dominant group interests." Rather, argues Roman (1996: 14), "to challenge its truth is to demonstrate how it works as text." Her strategy in this project is to frame the discursive field in which youth at-risk is articulated in terms of a "moral panic." Roman draws on a Cultural
Studies tradition in which the concept of a "moral panic" refers to the periodic phenomenon of a "manufactured crisis" that attempts to articulate concerns about social order and integration to the problematic practices, behaviors, and dispositions of certain populations (Ibid.: 3). This development of the concept of a moral panic is grounded in an analysis that identifies the discursive articulation of deviant, dangerous, threatening, and risky practices and dispositions of certain populations — for instance, working-class (male) youth, Black and Asian youth — to official and common-sense concerns about law and order, gender and sexual relations, and the state of the nation. For Roman, this understanding of moral panics as historically contingent, unstable, and contradictory processes of representation is useful in that it "addresses the articulation of a range of conflicting interests within and across such diverse sites as the family, national policies, the welfare state, and lived cultural formations of particular groups" (Ibid.: 3).

In Roman’s analysis there is an attempt to understand the historical conditions of existence that enable the Canadian government’s initiative to function as truth, and the discursive articulations that construct this truth. For Roman, the generation of these sorts of moral panics with respect to the questions of youth is “as old as the invention of adolescence itself.” Given this historical tendency, Roman is principally concerned with exploring the ways in which representations of uncertainty and risk in national and globalizing economic settings (where unemployment, international competitiveness, and national economic concerns provide a backdrop for policy formation) are articulated with notions of a “caring nation” (constituted by “caring” parents, communities, businesses, and the state). The nation here is concerned with securing continued future prosperity and economic certainty for “all Canadians.” This means in particular future generations, as represented by contemporary populations of high school students, whose prosperity is at-risk under these conditions. The construction of a moral panic with regard to youth at-risk, then, can be “seen as a metaphor for a nation at risk in a global economy” (Roman, 1996: 14).

In this discursive field, the young people most at-risk are those who “dropout” of high school. They risk being positioned by prospective employers as “functionally illiterate,” “largely untrainable,” and “mostly unemployable.” Furthermore, “Canadian industry” sees these “dropouts” as “trapped in cycles of unstable work and dependency, a situation that will perpetuate low self-esteem, and one that invites increasing problems with illiteracy, innumeracy, and poverty” (cited in Roman, 1996: 16). Represented thus, young Canadian “dropouts” become the objects of a discursively produced moral panic that positions the national government in a “leadership role” responsible for the identification of populations of young people at-risk — who also place the nation at-risk (Roman, 1996: 15–17).

This discourse is structured by the sorts of humanistic and economic narratives that appear frequently in the at-risk literature (Withers and Batten, 1995; Batten
and Russell, 1995). I have little argument with Roman’s attempt to problematize these truths of youth at-risk. Indeed, I applaud her focus on the processes of truth production about youth at-risk, and the roles that various experts and diverse centers of expertise play in producing these truths of youth as “subjects of blame, deviancy, and pathology” (Roman, 1996: 22). I would, in this context, agree with Roman that:

Talk of youth putting the nation at risk for losing its competitive edge in the global economy or failing the nation’s moral expectations is emblematic not only of the appeal of the new corporatist state and the authoritarian populism of the Right, but also the failure of the Left to offer what Hall and Jacques call a “popular modernizing rhetoric” that can capture public disenchantment with some aspects of the social democratic welfare state in order to inaugurate a new phase of socialist (and, I would add, feminist) development and alternative economic and political strategies (Ibid.).

In the following sections, my intent is to take up Roman’s challenge to think differently about the state — in ways that problematize the centrality afforded the state in Roman’s account of how the government of youth at-risk is practiced. These sections have as their purpose an engagement with various ways of thinking about the state at a time when there are both large-scale transformations in the practice of welfare government and profound ideological debates about the rights, roles, and responsibilities of the welfare state. In these sections, there is an attempt to outline an understanding of government in spaces that exist beyond the welfare state.

The Problem of Government: Beyond the State

Much contemporary discussion about the state occurs in the context of debates about processes of globalization, and the real, imagined, and possible impacts of these processes on ideas of national sovereignty (Lash and Urry, 1994; Hirst and Thompson, 1995), where these processes are claimed to place young people, communities, and the nation at-risk. It can be argued that these discourses have a tendency to be framed in a manner that foregrounds the relations between the state and its Others, and the rights, roles, and responsibilities of these seemingly autonomous, separate spheres. These discourses about the state, civil society, and the economy have a focus, in many Anglo (Australasia, North America, the U.K.) and European contexts, on reconfiguring the nature of state regulation and government of civil society and the economy. The terms of these debates can be briefly outlined using points of view that sit at opposite poles of the discussion.

From a self-described social democratic position, Michael Pusey (1991: 15) argues that Australia’s colonial and postcolonial development has been characterized by a “strong” state that “led” capital in “a direction” that “protected domestic
industries and their workers from what would have otherwise been crushing external pressures.” It is suggested that the state is “relatively autonomous” and relatively independent of “vested interests,” with a relative and “historically variable” capacity to contain “economic development and private behavior within the discipline of the ‘generalizable’ common, and public interest” (Ibid.: 13). Pusey analyzes the ways in which Australia’s federal bureaucracy has been transformed by a “new culture” of political administration (termed economic rationalism). These transformations have occurred under a succession of Social Democratic (Labour Party) and Conservative (Liberal Party) administrations since the mid-1970s. This new culture is set (nostalgically) against “what was once a friendly and intelligent Australian federal bureaucracy,” a system of public administration that occupied a “space that was once a ‘public sphere’ of constructive deliberation that the bureaucracy had itself nourished” (Ibid.: 11). For Pusey, this transformation of the culture of public administration has been marked by a process of public-sector “reform” articulated through concerns about “ungovernable democracies” and “overloaded states,” a welfare retreat framed in terms of “more individual initiative and less state provision,” and notions of “flexibility, responsiveness, and effectiveness.” This “depoliticized” language of systems efficiency modeling — which marks, for Pusey, the “intellectual triumph of formal models over practical substance” — has served to create an “insulating distance” between the poles of state and civil society. It is a distance that “protects the political administrative system from both intellectual and ‘ordinary’ culture, and so from participation, from interpretations of need, and from many of the normal and supposedly normative prerogatives and entitlements of citizenship in a liberal social democracy” (Ibid.: 3–12).

From a free-market, noninterventionist position, Milton and Rose Friedman (1980) treat the political system “symmetrically” with the economic system. Both systems are conceptualized as “markets” in which various outcomes are “determined by the interaction among persons pursuing their own self-interests (broadly interpreted), rather than the social goals the participants find it advantageous to enunciate” (Ibid.: x). Central to this view is a notion of the person as autonomous, rational, choice making, and (self) interest driven. For the Friedmans, this “self-interest” should not be interpreted as the “myopic selfishness,” of “calculating” homo economicus (Gordon, S., 1991). Instead, self-interest, “broadly interpreted,” is “whatever it is that interests the participants, whatever they value, whatever they pursue.” It is a pursuit that should be judged by them, “by their own values” (Friedman and Friedman, 1980: 27).

Central to the Friedmans’ argument is the conviction that “private initiative operating in a free market open to all” should be unencumbered by government “interference,” and further, should not rely on government “assistance.” The Friedmans suggest that this essentially 19th-century liberal view of the state as noninterventionist and as the guarantor of the rights of individual freedom and of
self-interest changed in the course of the 20th century under the intellectual influence of Fabian socialism (in the U.K.) and New Deal liberalism (in the U.S.). The Friedmans argue that the popular attraction for increased state regulation and intervention was articulated in the view that in an “imperfect world,” in which there “were still many evils,” then “good,” “strong” government in the “right” hands could fill the role of a “parent charged with the duty of coercing some to aid others” (Ibid.: 3–5).

For the Friedmans, the tremendous postwar growth of the “paternalistic” welfare state (Thatcherism’s Nanny State) is the main threat to individual freedom, autonomy, and prosperity in the liberal democracies. They find the “public waste” of large state bureaucracies “distressing” enough. However, the “major evil” of paternalistic welfare programs is their impact on the “fabric of our society.” Such programs “weaken the family; reduce the incentive to work, save, and innovate; reduce the accumulation of capital; and limit our freedom” (Ibid.: 127).

In the context of these discussions, how might it be useful to think the state (Watts, 1993–1994) and the transformations in the practices of government that are evident in widespread reconceptualizations of “social welfare” forms of government (Rose, 1999a and b)? As Nikolas Rose and Peter Miller (1992) observe, the collapse of Eastern European “party states” and contemporary transformations in Western “postwar welfare states,” have “suffused” recent debates about the state and the rightful exercise of political power with “images of the state as malign and potentially monstrous. Only ‘beyond the state,’ it appears, can life worthy of free human individuals begin” (Ibid.: 173). Indeed, these developments have served to render the question of the state, in Left discourses, “very problematic” (Hall, 1988). Writing before the collapse of Eastern European Communist states, Stuart Hall (1988: 221) argued that the experience of “actually existing socialism” suggested that far from “withering away,” the state had emerged as a “gigantic, swollen, bureaucratic, and directive force, swallowing up almost the whole of civil society, and imposing itself (sometimes with tanks), in the name of the people, on the backs of the people.” Set against this experience of the state under conditions of “actually existing socialism” is the development of the state in the liberal democracies. This development is marked, particularly in the postwar period, by a “gigantic expansion of the state complex within modern capitalism,” in which the state plays an “increasingly interventionist or regulative role in more and more areas of social life” (Ibid.).

This scenario of a convergence in certain Left and free-market critiques of the welfare state creates several significant dilemmas for the Left. In one sense, argues Hall, those who critique the welfare state from the Left are seen to be keeping company with the “Thatcherites, the new right, the free market gospellers, who seem (whisper it not too loud) to be saying rather similar things about the state” (Hall, 1988: 221–222). In another sense, certain “statist” sections of the Left, as traditional champions and defenders of the welfare state as an alternative to the
logic of the market, are positioned, politically and intellectually, as responsible for the growth of big government. Thus, the Right is able to more or less successfully articulate “widespread popular dissatisfactions” with welfare state regulatory practices to an “anti-Left, ‘roll back the state’ crusade” (Ibid.). In this political and theoretical context, in which the state and its Others are conceived as doubles, and the ideal relationship between these principled constructs is a cause for debate, Hall (1988: 222) poses some questions for the Left. “Where, to be honest, do we stand on this issue? Are we for ‘rolling back the state’ — including the welfare state? Are we for or against the management of the whole of society by the state?”

These ongoing political and theoretical debates about the rights, roles, and responsibilities of the liberal state, as a welfare state, have tended to be structured by a language that seeks to capture a sense of the exercise of power in liberal democracies through the positing of certain oppositions: “between state and civil society, public and private, government and market, coercion and consent, sovereignty and autonomy” (Rose and Miller, 1992: 174). These oppositions seek to grasp the nature of the limits of the rightful exercise of power, and to mark out the spaces in which this exercise of power can rightfully occur.

In my view, these are not the appropriate questions to pose if, as Rose and Miller (1992) argue, we are to understand contemporary “problematics of government.” This is especially so if such problematics attempt to position young people as being at-risk, and as placing the nation at-risk. Posing such questions, and responding to them in either/or ways, leads to thinking the state within the limits imposed by oppositions such as: the state/civil society, oppression/emancipation, public/private, coercion/choice, waste/efficiency, power/agency, and regulation/freedom. Thinking the state (and its Others) in this way serves to suggest a certain unity of purpose, a consensus of interests, or a cohesiveness or autonomy for each element in the binary. This unity of interests is then seen to structure the contested transformations in the relations between the state and its Others, a restructuring conceived as a clash, or contest, over differing interests: business versus national interests, public versus private interests, patriarchal state versus women’s interests, or middle-class versus working-class interests.

Again, Stuart Hall provides insight on the problems and limitations associated with thinking the state in these terms. Hall (1988: 4) argues that in the U.K. during the 1980s, the political project of Thatcherism and its transformation of the state’s relations to its Others was, in some “obvious and undeniable ways,” structured by attempts to “restore the prerogatives of ownership and profitability,” to produce the “political conditions for capital to operate more effectively,” and to attempt to encourage a culture underpinned by a view that there is “no measure of the good life other than ‘value for money.’” There is little doubt for Hall that at one level these cultural processes “profit” the “industrial and business classes of society,” the new prophets of an “enterprise culture” who (re)emerge as the “keepers of the moral conscience and guardians, inter alia, of our education system” (Ibid.: 4).
Hall also acknowledges that thinking of the "interests" served by these transformations becomes problematic when attention is focused on Thatcherism's successful articulation of "different social and economic interests within its political project." In this situation, it becomes difficult in any precise way to argue "which class interests are represented by Thatcherism," since, for Hall, it is "precisely class interests which in the process of their 're-presentation' are being politically and ideologically redefined." Moreover, this idea of class "recomposition" ought to be set against a problematization of the notion of class "interests" itself — a view that often conceives class "consciousness" as reducible to the relationships between the economic, the political, and the ideological (Ibid.: 4–55).

Faced with such difficulties, it becomes increasingly problematic to think of the state — conceived as an assemblage of apparatuses for public administration — as cohering around a common interest or purpose, or as possessing a "sovereign will," or a "unifying moral or intellectual rationale" (Hunter, 1993: 131). As Hunter suggests, the "instruments of government," that is, the "systems of management," the police, military, state schooling, public housing, had diverse origins and have developed their own "forms of expertise and ethical imperatives" (Ibid.). As Rose and Miller (1992) argue, "power is exercised through a profusion of shifting alliances between diverse authorities" in a variety of projects that seek to govern various "facets of economic activity, social life, and individual conduct" (Ibid.: 174). Nowhere is this more apparent than in the range of state agencies, NGOs, and private organizations that seek to identify and work with youth at-risk in relation to a variety of contemporary issues. The state, as a remarkably diffuse object of critique, is in this context only one of a variety of parties whose business it is to deal with youth at-risk.

In this theoretical and political context, Foucault's (1991) genealogies of government and the self emerge as potentially useful aspects of a problematizing intellectual practice. Mitchell Dean argues that these genealogies "effect a displacement" within "conventional forms of ethical and political analysis." Foucault, argues Dean (1994: 177), "juxtaposes an analysis of the practices of government to the theory of the state." Thus, in Foucault's conceptualization of governmentality, we find not a theory of the state but an analysis of the "operation of governmental power, the techniques and practices by which it works, and the rationalities and strategies invested in it" (Ibid.: 179). The next section applies Foucault's governmental framework to the ways in which discourses emerge, and suggests that the state, through various existing and invented agencies, should play a role in socializing the individual and collective risks associated with industrial modernity. The purpose is to conceptualize the welfare state in governmental terms so that contemporary (neo)liberal problematizations of liberal welfare governmentality can be introduced and critiqued in the context of understanding how discourses of youth at-risk seek to individualize the management of a range of contemporary risks.
Liberal Welfare Government: Risks and Social Insurance

Understanding neoliberalism as a series of solutions to the problem of government requires us to understand the emergence and practices of liberalism in similar terms. Foucault (1991: 96) argued that liberalism, understood not as a philosophy or coherent theory of government, but as a series of solutions to various problems of government, emerged partly in relation to “mercantilism” and the “science of police.” Seventeenth and 18th-century mercantilism was structured, argues Scott Gordon (1991: 125), by the view that the regulation of every aspect of economic activity was an “affair of state.” Further, mercantilism held that “harmony in economic progress does not spring from the natural play of individual interest, but must be created by the wise governor” (Ibid.: 224). In this sense, Adam Smith’s An Inquiry into the Nature and Cause of the Wealth of Nations (1776) can be read as a tract against “mercantilism” that takes as its objects the pervasiveness and extensiveness of economic regulation by the sovereign state, and the “corrupt and inefficient” bureaucracy that administered these regulations (Ibid.: 145–146).

Osborne (1996) argues this understanding of the science of police is a useful means for thinking the emergence of liberalism, conceived, in this sense, not as doctrine or ideology, but as a “critique of state reason”: a “kind of habitual suspicion related to the means and ends of government.” Liberalism can be thought, then, as a rationality of government made concrete through the mobilization of techniques of government capable of enabling “forms of government detached from totalizing forms of sovereignty” (Osborne, 1996: 101). Rose (1996a: 43) argues that liberalism “repudiates” the megalomaniacal and obsessive fantasy of a totally administered society. Instead, within this emerging art of government, the state must confront certain new realities. These 17th- and 18th-century realities can be situated in relation to the intellectual and philosophical project of the Scottish Enlightenment, the emerging institutional forms of modernity (Giddens, 1990), and revolutionary moments and movements in Europe and the Americas. Liberal government in these transformed material and discursive spaces is faced with “subjects equipped with rights and interests,” which are conceived as existing outside the legitimate realm of “the political.” Moreover, these various realms — the social, the private, the markets, and civil society — cannot be governed “by the exercise of sovereign will” because the state lacks “the requisite knowledge and capacities” to achieve these diverse ends. Instead, within emerging liberal rationalities of government, the “conduct of conduct” (Foucault, 1991) is reconfigured to ensure that these domains “function to the benefit of the nation as a whole” (Rose, 1996a: 44).

Rose (1996a: 48) argues that the late 19th century and the first half of the 20th century witnessed various transformations in the problematics of liberal government. These transformations witnessed the emergence of the notion of social welfare as a rationality of government that would seek to ‘“social-ize’ both
individual citizenship and economic life in the name of collective security.” These transformations in the problematics of liberal government were situated within and against various processes that rendered problematic the rationalities of early liberal arts of government. The “philanthropic and disciplinary projects” of 19th-century liberalism, which took as their object the maintenance of “moral order in urban laboring classes,” had “failed” in the “face of the forces of social fragmentation and individualization of modern society” (Ibid.: 47–48). In this sense, the welfare state emerges, in a contested fashion, as a consequence of these transformations in the liberal arts of government. Understood thus, the liberal welfare state appears as the result of diverse attempts to “recode,” across a variety of domains, “the relations between the political field and the management of economic and social affairs” (Ibid.: 48).

Social insurance, as one key aspect of this transformed practice of government, is indicative of the nature of the new domains that are marked out within these reconceived political, moral, and economic rationalities. Rose (1996a) argues that social insurance is an “inclusive” technology of government, insofar as it has as its object contested notions of “social solidarity” (Ibid.: 48). These “inclusive” technologies of government — the schooling system, child welfare practices, unemployment benefits, widows’ pensions, and supporting parents’ benefits — attempt to “collectivize” the regulation of the “dangers” and “risks” associated with a “capricious system of wage labour, and the corporeal riskiness of a body subject to sickness and health.” These risks are reconfigured, within the problematics of welfare government, as rightfully falling under the “stewardship of a ‘social’ state” (Ibid.). As a practice of liberal welfare government, social insurance is an attempt to establish new articulations “between ‘public’ norms and procedures and the fate of individuals in their ‘private’ economic and personal conduct” (Ibid.). As a consequence of these emerging problematics of government, which found expression in such diverse schemes and procedures as public housing development, health and safety legislation, and laws on childcare, there was a diminution in the relative “autonomy of both economic and familial spaces” (Ibid.: 49). For Rose, the emerging practices of the welfare state can also be thought as promoting “new vectors of responsibility and obligation” between “state and parent, child or employee” (Ibid.).

Contemporary problematizations of liberal welfare governmentality, understood here as signaling the emergence of a post-welfare state, have witnessed new articulations of risk, and of the rights, roles, and responsibilities that attach to a range of state agencies, NGOs, communities, and individuals for managing these risks. As we will see, these problematizations have particular consequences for young people and their families, who emerge as being responsible for managing a range of risks associated with schooling, employment, sexuality, diets, peer relations, etc.
(Neo)Liberal Governmentality: Risk and Individual Prudentialism

The post-World War II emergence of a problematization of liberal welfare practices of government is traced, within Foucault's investigations, primarily through the work of the German Ordoliberalen and the American Chicago School of Economics. These investigations indicate that problematizations of the practice of welfare government exist alongside the institutionalization of many of the practices of welfare government. Welfare governmentality is, in this sense, a contested space of competing ideas about the subjects, practices, and consequences of social forms of government. For the American and German (neo)liberals, the market is no longer constructed, argues Colin Gordon (1991), as "being a spontaneous (albeit historically conditioned) quasi-natural reality." An attachment to this classical liberal view would "constrain government to the practice of laissez-faire" (Ibid.: 41). Within emerging (neo)liberal problematizations of the relations between the state and the economy, it becomes "incumbent" on government "to conduct a policy towards society such that it is possible for a market to exist and function" (Ibid.).

In this intellectual framework, there is a sense that the central problematic of government "is not the anti-social effects of the economic market, but the anti-competitive effects of society" (Ibid.: 42). The idea of the death of the social, given expression in Margaret Thatcher's proclamation that there is no such thing as society, signals an attempt within (neo)liberal rationalities to govern through the behaviors and dispositions of individuals, rather than society (Rose, 1996a). Government, as it is conceived here, ought to have as its object a furthering of "the game of enterprise as a pervasive style of conduct, diffusing the enterprise-form throughout the social fabric as its generalized principle of functioning" (Gordon, C., 1991: 42). Citing Alexander von Rustow, an important member of the Ordoliberalen, Colin Gordon (1991: 42) argues that this particular problematization of government "proposes that the whole ensemble of individual life be structured as the pursuit of a range of different enterprises." These enterprises are diverse, ranging from the number of possible relations of oneself to oneself as a "reflexive project" (Giddens, 1990) to the conduct of professional, family, work, and cultural relations. In youth at-risk initiatives, we see diverse attempts to promote practices of the self that can assist young people to develop skills and capacities vital to these forms of rational, choice-making entrepreneurship (Kelly, 2000b).

Colin Gordon (1991: 43) argues that homo economicus, as the subject of (neo)liberalism, is "both a reactivation and a radical inversion" of the subject of Scottish Enlightenment liberalism. This "reactivation" centers on conceiving human behaviors and dispositions in terms of rational, choice-making man. For early liberalism, this male noun was an entirely appropriate way of constructing the subject as a "rational, interest-motivated economic ego," engaged in "private, individual, atomistic, egoistic" exchange relations that emerge from a particular
"natural and historical milieu" (Burchell, 1996: 24). In this sense, argues Burchell, liberal rationalities of government must take as their object, "the natural private-interest-motivated conduct of free, market exchanging individuals," insofar as the behaviors and dispositions of such individuals are the foundation that "enables the market to function optimally in accordance with its nature" (Ibid.: 23). The "radical inversion" of this principle of liberal rationalities of government takes a number of forms. Colin Gordon (1991) argues that the subject of liberal governmentality originally signified a subject whose motivation "must remain forever untouchable by government." Within (neo)liberal governmentalties, however, "homo economicus is manipulable man," a subject who is "perpetually responsive" to environmental "modifications." Within this way of thinking the subject, "economic government joins hands with behaviourism" (Ibid.: 43). This articulation works to construct a view of the subject as an "individual producer-consumer" who, in certain quite fundamentally new ways is "not just an enterprise, but the entrepreneur of himself or herself" (Ibid.: 44). In this sense, certain at-risk populations of young people need to be targeted via various programs — in schools, health centers, on the streets — so that they might develop the capacities necessary to become more active in, and responsible for, the development of their entrepreneurial biographies, as well as to meet certain new obligations to not place the nation at risk.

Governing Youth At-Risk: Individualization and Responsibilization

Youth, as an object of diverse forms of regulation seeking to incite, encourage, and provoke certain practices of the self and certain capacities necessary for active, autonomous, responsible citizenship, is increasingly positioned within new forms of "responsibilization" (Burchell, 1996). Pat O'Malley (1992, 1996) argues that within (neo)liberal problematizations of government, the management of risk by active, responsible citizens signals a new "prudentialism" that "removes the key conception of regulating individuals by collectivist risk management, and throws back upon the individual the responsibility for managing risk" (O'Malley, 1992: 261). These processes of responsibilization, in which the subject is compelled to prudently manage the institutionally structured and dependent risks of her/his own Do-It-Yourself (DIY) project of the self (Beck, 1992), "produces a field characterized by uncertainty, plurality, and anxiety, thus continually open to the construction of new problems and the marketing of new solutions" (Rose, 1996b: 343).

Only in the last 30 years, for example, has an institutionalized intellectual domain called youth studies emerged (White, 1993). This admittedly diverse domain of expertise emerged so that youth can be made knowable in ways that promise to make managing them possible (Kelly, 2000a). For instance, transitions from school to work were, in a less "reflexive modernity" (Beck, 1992; Beck et al., 1994), relatively simple processes to manage for large populations of young people. Indeed, the concept of youth, as a transitional process and phase of life,
emerges as a truth that dominates governmental horizons when these transitions become problematic, and when the practices for regulating these transitions become problematic. From these problem spaces emerges the truth of youth at-risk who do not effect a secure transition to adulthood (Freeland, 1996). The nature of these transitions emerges as uncertain and risky due to a range of largely autonomous processes. In the Australian context, the return of large numbers of women to the labor market, the decline in entry-level jobs and a withdrawal from training by employers, the decline in labor-intensive manufacturing and service jobs, as well as casualization, flexibility, and core and periphery workforces, are processes that, directly and indirectly, in intended and unforeseen ways, render youth transitions uncertain and risky. This uncertainty provokes the mobilization of various forms of expertise in assorted attempts to govern the risks of previously stable processes of transition. Various forms of expertise, energized by the institutional reflexivity that characterizes processes of reflexive modernization, seek to tell the truths of youth transitions and the risks associated with these transitions, in ways that render the regulation of transitions an increasingly complex and uncertain affair. The choices and the lifelong consequences of the choices made within schooling and vocational education and training (VET) systems become, within (neo)liberalism’s problematization of government of the self, the responsibility of youth and their families (Kelly, 1999; Kelly and Kenway, 2001).

Youthful subjects are constructed as responsible for future life chances, choices, and options within institutionally structured risk environments. The future consequences of these choices, about schooling, diet, sexuality, and substance use, are outcomes for which young people are responsible. However, they are not solely responsible. The family, as the setting of nurturance, care, and child/adolescent development is increasingly responsibilized, within (neo)liberalism’s reconfigurations of government, for the care of the youthful self (Kelly, 2000b).

The pedagogic family (Donzelot, 1979), with the assistance of the truths produced by various forms of expertise (about the raising of children and adolescents), is responsible for making the right choices for the sake of the children. Schools and health services, as examples of social insurance institutions, are institutions inherited from an earlier problematization of the art of governing (through society). Historically, these and similar centers of expertise sought to regulate the social and corporeal risks that characterize modernity by socializing these risks. In the case of those who were dependent on these institutions, this meant removing elements of choice and responsibility from families and individuals. Within emerging practices of regulation, these institutions increasingly attempt (within the contingencies of the past and the present) to responsibilize youth and the family as autonomous, choice-making customers. For those who remain dependent on these social insurance institutions, the narrative of choice and the consequences of responsibility can be life damaging and limiting; choice
continues to be a problematic truth. Indeed, the logic of the market and increasingly globalized “economies of signs and spaces” (Lash and Urry, 1994) structure the life options, choices, and chances of youth and families. However, youth and families, by adopting freely and by choice the practices of the responsible self, can attempt to ward off the uncertainty generated in and by institutionally structured risk environments. Families and young people whose behaviors and dispositions fall outside the regulatory boundaries rendered knowable by the practices of expertise are those who are identified and targeted as being at-risk in these settings (Kelly, 2000b).

This process of responsibilization of the family is of a different order to the narrative of traditional family values, which structures the political rhetorics of many Conservative and Social Democratic political parties in the liberal democracies. New forms of prudentialism indicate deeper transformations in the ways in which subjects are conceived as choice making and responsible. These transformations are not solely the province of political rhetorics. They are structured by the activities of various experts in diverse centers of expertise that restlessly monitor and problematize the nature and truths of the subject and the forms of regulation that promise to “make up” this subject (Rose and Miller, 1992). In this sense, analysis of the changes in the practice of liberal welfare government must move from concerns about “ideology” and “party politics” towards concerns about the rationalities that promise to render reality knowable (in ways that seek to responsibilize youth and the family for the management of individual biographies in institutionally structured risk environments) (Kelly, 2000b).

Conclusion

Burchell (1996) argues that tensions between the practices of freedom and government, which are inherent in liberalism, do not disappear within neoliberal problematics of government. Here the relations between “government and the governed” increasingly depend upon the ways in which “individuals are required to assume the status of being the subjects of their lives, upon the ways in which they fashion themselves as certain kinds of subjects, upon the ways in which they practice their freedom” (Ibid.: 29–30). Although the practices of government increasingly “impinge on individuals in their individuality,” the outcomes of these practices of freedom and responsibility are unstable and uncertain. According to Burchell, there is a sense in which practices that structure autonomy, choice, and responsibility, though institutionally structured, dependent, and conceived, often in narrow limits, open up a new “uncertain, often critical and unstable domain of relationships between politics and ethics, between the government of others and practices of the self” (Ibid.: 30). Rose (1996a) identifies similar tensions in the changing nature of the relations between the experts and the subjects of neoliberal rationalities. Although practices of the self remain institutionally dependent, subjects are to become “experts of themselves,” to adopt an educated and
knowledgeable relation of self-care with respect to their bodies, their minds, their forms of conduct, and that of the members of their own families (Ibid.: 59).

These changing relations of authority, Rose (1996a) argues, structure, and are structured by, their own “complexities” and “logics of incorporation and exclusion.” However, the “power effects” of these emerging relations “do not answer to a simple logic of domination” (Ibid.: 59). Rather, within these new relationships between practices of government and practices of the self (as enterprise), which can see youth recoded, for instance, as at-risk, there is a sense in which the “marginalized” or “excluded” subject becomes “potentially and ideally an active agent in the fabrication of their own existence” (Ibid.). Rose here identifies potentially positive articulations between psychological narratives of self-empowerment, neoliberal constructions of the self as enterprise, and Left discourses of emancipation and autonomy from structures of domination. However, he also expresses his “cynicism” and “repugnance” at the processes of renaming that recode the unemployed as jobseekers, or the homeless as roughsleepers. Further, he does not discount the “misery” and “impoverishment” that is visited upon certain individuals and groups by practices of government that construct subjects as autonomous, choice making, and responsible for their own fate. Rather, Rose argues that these transformations do not merely reflect the “vicissitudes of a single political ideology” (Thatcherism, the New Right, or the Third Way). This reconfiguration of the “ethics of personhood” around concerns of self-actualization, self-empowerment, self-responsibility, and mutual obligation signals, instead, transformations in the practices of regulation that are “complex, and have no single origin or cause” (Ibid.: 66).

In this sense, there exists a profound challenge to think about the management of risk in spaces that are beyond the welfare state — and beyond a limiting analytical focus on ideology or political rhetoric. This challenge is not just discursive — a truth game with no material consequences for populations of young people and their families. Indeed, the challenge is to constitute new truth games that are grounded in the complexities, contingencies, and consequences of the many sites and practices of government — where such games promise to have material consequences for young people’s life chances and choices. A politics of risk that exists beyond the welfare state would make problematic the discourses that seek to visit new forms of responsibility on young people and their families for the prudent management of DIY biographies in a range of institutionally structured, and regulated, risk environments.

NOTES

1. The term “liberal government” can be confusing since it is used differently in various Anglo-speaking contexts. In this article, the term refers to a way of thinking about the nature of government that is grounded in contested and changing ideas of free citizens, free markets, and a limited role for
the state in the management of everyday affairs. This generalizable *formula of rule* has been mobilized — with different intents and consequences — in the myriad processes that have structured the practices of government in Anglo-European-style democracies over the past 200 years.


3. Roman (1996) here refers to the tradition in British Cultural Studies of this use of "moral panics" as an analytic. See Cohen (1972), Hall et al. (1978), Hall and Jacques (1990), Gilroy (1987), and McRobbie (1994).

4. The *Ordo-liberalen* are so named due to their involvement in the journal *Ordo* (Gordon, C., 1991).

5. Fraser (1989) and Fraser and Gordon (1994) have argued that this view of the subject, as masculine, rational, choice-making *homo economicus*, underpinned the development of liberal welfare practices of government. Such practices most often position women and children in relations of dependence to this subject.

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