



**The Risk Society and Young People: Life @ the
Intersection of Risk, Economy and Illiberal
Governmentalities**

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Abstract

This paper identifies and examines some productive intersections between the reflexive modernization and governmentality literatures to explore the ways in which young people pose particular problems for neo-liberal governmentalities in a globalising world. These mentalities of rule imagine government – of the state, of civil society, of the economy, of the self – as being made possible, to a large degree, via the actions of responsible, prudent, choice making, autonomous, individuals. The ‘fact’ that young people have not developed those capacities necessary for conducting their freedom in a well-regulated way continues to be an important element of the rationalities that structure the practices and processes of surveillance, discipline and regulation that take young people as their object—in playgrounds and classrooms in schools, in families, in shopping centres, parks and malls. The paper will analyse the systems of thought, and the techniques by which the government of Youth is made known, made possible and practised. It will highlight the sovereign and disciplinary aspects of the *illiberal governmentalities* (Dean 1999a) that seek to provoke the emergence of the well-regulated, self-fashioning autonomy of ‘normal’ adulthood.

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Introduction: The Risk Society and the Problem of Youth

You see, what I want to do is not the history of solutions...I would like to do the genealogy of problems, of *problematiques*. (Michel Foucault 2000, *On the Genealogy of Ethics*, p.256)

In this paper I want to draw on a number of papers published over the last 5 or so years to discuss the ways in which I think about doing intellectual work in the field broadly defined as Youth Studies. I have also worked with these ideas in an upcoming book titled: *Working in Jamie's Kitchen: Salvation, Passion and Young Workers* (Kelly and Harrison 2009).

My interest in much of this work is with youth as a population, as a figure that has, historically, presented itself as a problem: for adults in general, and for an array of institutions, practices and forms of expertise that give shape to the material, symbolic and imagined lives of diverse groups of young people. Taking a lead from Foucault I am interested here in the ways in which young people are made knowable, and governable in relation to a range of problems that emerge – continuously, endlessly – in the neo-liberal governmental spaces of the 21st century.

At the outset it should be acknowledged that adult anxieties about young people are not new phenomena. Rob Watts (1993–94), for example, has argued that over the past 200 years 'scientific and professional discourses about our bodies, our minds and our relationships to each other and society' have constantly reformulated ideas about, among other things; 'badness, madness, youth, health, education and sexuality' (p. 120). Youth has historically occupied what I have called the 'wild zones' of modernity. In these 'zones', certain groups of young people have been viewed as being 'ungovernable' and lacking in capacities for 'self-regulation'. The Poor, the Promiscuous, the Violent, the Abusive, the Illiterate, the Idle, the Addicts, the Binge Drinkers, the Joy Riders, the Homeless, the Drop Outs, the Unemployed, the At-Risk – these are the inhabitants of these wild zones. These representations of 'deviancy', 'delinquency' and 'ungovernability' have always been fundamentally shaped by race, class and gender, and situated in relation to particular ideas about 'normal' youth (Tait 1995; Bessant & Watts 1998; Kelly 1999).

In a number of spaces I have argued that Youth is an 'artefact of expertise', constructed at the intersection of a wide range of knowledges about Youth and so-called Youth issues: an intersection marked by institutionalised, expert representations of crime, education, family, the media, popular culture, (un)employment, transitions, the life course, risk, and so on (Kelly 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001a, 2001b; see also Tait, 1992, 1993). How we imagine these intersections produces our

understandings of Youth—and these understandings have consequences – material, symbolic and for a sense of self – in the lives of young people. In this sense we can argue that anxieties and uncertainties about youth have become increasingly governmentalized – that is, Youth is rationalized, institutionalized and abstracted under the auspices of a constellation of State agencies, quasi-autonomous non-government organizations, and non-government organizations (Foucault 1991; Rose 1999). This governmentalisation energizes processes of surveillance – surveillance that is targeted and focused, in the interests of economy, at those populations that pose, or face, the *greatest* dangers and risks.

In what follows I want to sketch two different registers – namely the risk society, reflexive modernization work associated with Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens; and the governmentality literature that owes much to Foucault. These registers provide useful, not entirely commensurable, frames for exploring the concerns that I have here with thinking about the contexts, and the rationalities that give shape to the *doing* of Youth Studies.

Processes of Individualization and Standardization in the Risk Society

The reflexive modernization narratives of Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens provide a sociological framework that attempts to identify and analyse various relationships between social processes (at the local, national and global level), and forms of selfhood that emerge from, and indeed shape, these processes. These stories about the character and transformations of our times, and the DIY self that emerges in these settings, have provoked debate on the ways in which biographies are increasingly opened up to, or by, processes of individualisation: processes that open us all to uncertainties, risks and opportunities, as we are forced to construct a life and sustain a more or less coherent narrative of this life (Beck et al 1994; Beck 1992; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002).

Processes of 'individualization' are, for Beck (1992 p.127), 'neither a phenomenon nor an invention of the second half of the twentieth century'. However processes of reflexive modernization can be characterised by the transformation of the 'systems of coordinates in which life and thinking are fastened in industrial modernity'. A variety of, largely, autonomous processes increasingly open up more and more aspects of a person's life to the idea, and to the very practice, of choice. Many aspects of life were often a matter of fate, or of duty, or were predetermined by an accident of birth. Many still are. But increasingly, for more and more people, life has become – as Giddens (1991) would argue – a reflexive project that is both a life of choice, but as a consequence of this, a life of uncertainty, risk and ongoing anxiety about the choices to be made and the consequences that flow from making these choices.

As an aside Zygmunt Bauman's liquid metaphors are, for me, increasingly interesting in terms of thinking about some of these processes. Especially, as I will discuss later, when ideas, narratives, and rationalities of choice increasingly shape the government of Youth and of Families.

Processes of reflexive modernization produce new forms of individualization and standardization. Beck (1992 pp.130-36) argues that these processes 'tend to dissolve' the 'traditional parameters of industrial society' in a 'surge of individualization'. Under these conditions, where class, gender and family coordinates recede – but do not disappear – individuals themselves become '*the reproduction unit for the social in the life world*'. Individuals are compelled to assume the role of makers of their own 'livelihood mediated by the market as well as their biographical planning and organization'. For Beck these processes of 'individualization' are carried by, and indeed, carry processes of 'standardization'. The penetration of market relations and of abstract systems into every aspect of the lifeworld compel the individual to choose. At the same time these processes promote forms of market and institutional dependency, forms of 'standardization'.

Importantly, in terms of Beck's (1994) thesis on the 'reflexive' character of these processes, these changes are occurring largely outside of the political, planning, or regulatory ambit of Liberal Democratic nation states and the 'democratic self understandings' of these societies. These processes are not the result of rational, cognitive contemplation about the progress of modernity. These processes occur 'surreptitiously and unplanned in the wake of normal, autonomized modernization' (p.3). Autonomous here refers to the manner in which these processes are generated within rationalities, frameworks, interests, forms of regulation and management peculiar to particular settings, institutions and centres of expertise. These processes answer not to a single logic or rationality, or overriding national or community interest.

Individualization processes result, argues Beck (1992, p.135-136), in individual biographies becoming 'self reflexive' and 'self produced'. The self in this sense becomes a Do-It-Yourself (DIY) project. Individuals are compelled to choose; we must choose and decide about 'education, profession, job, place of residence, spouse, number of children'. The domains of existence 'which are fundamentally closed to decision-making' are diminishing, while those aspects of individual biographies which are 'open and must be constructed personally' are increasing. Yet, as Beck argues, these individualization processes, which are institutionally structured, are also increasingly, institutionally dependent, and thus increasingly open to institutionally generated risks. In this way of thinking

schools, labour markets, physical and mental health issues (sexuality, drug and alcohol use, diet and body image) can be understood as institutionalised risk environments or spaces. The consequences these spaces and processes and practices have for individual biographies emerge as 'no longer just events and conditions' which are visited upon individuals. Rather these risks emerge – in (Neo) Liberal rationalities – as the result of individual decision making.

At this point I want to shift registers and engage with governmentality theories of (Neo) Liberalism and new forms of responsabilization: I want to suggest that in (Neo) Liberal governmentalities the prudent management of these risks is constructed as the responsibility of the individual, and, in the case of young people, their families.

(Neo)Liberalism and New Forms of Responsibilization

The governmentality literature argues that (Neo)Liberalism signals a transformation in the way that government – of the state, civil society, the economy, and the self – is conceived. These transformations structure, differently, the political rhetorics mobilised in the Anglo/European parliamentary democracies, including the rhetorics mobilised by the Social Democratic Labour Parties in these settings. Indeed, Nikolas Rose (1996a) argues that 'advanced liberal' problematisations of Liberal welfare governance 'can be observed in national contexts from Finland to Australia, advocated by political regimes from left to right, and in relation to problem domains from crime control to health' (p.53). (Neo)Liberal governmentality attempts to reconfigure the practices of liberal welfare government by conceiving the Subject as *rational, autonomous, choice making and responsible*.

In this mentality of rule 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' (Gordon 1991, p.42). (Neo)Liberal rationalities aim to govern through the behaviours and dispositions of individuals, rather than society (Rose 1996a&b). For Colin Gordon (1991, pp.41-43) neo-liberal government has, 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'.

Where the meanings of life are transformed into meanings which are structured by the market form, then the subjects of (Neo)Liberal rationalities of government emerge as 'free', 'entrepreneurial', competitive and (economically) rational individuals. However, within these arts of government, this

'form is not so much a given of human nature as a consciously contrived style of conduct' (Burchell 1996, pp.23-24). The autonomous, choice making, entrepreneurial, responsible self has to be 'made up' – that is, educated and trained – via the mobilisation of diverse techniques in a variety of spaces and relationships (Rose & Miller 1992).

This emphasis on the education and training necessary to produce the passionate, entrepreneurial worker is something that is central to our analysis of the ways in which the Fifteen Foundation and Jamie's Kitchen work with marginalised 16 to 24 year olds.

Graham Burchell (1996, p.29) argues that (Neo)Liberal *practices* of government 'offer' individuals, groups and communities new opportunities to participate 'actively' in various arenas of action 'to resolve the kind of issues hitherto held to be the responsibility of authorized governmental agencies'. Individuals, groups and communities are 'encouraged freely and rationally, to *conduct themselves*'. However, the 'contractual implication' of these processes is that individuals and communities 'must assume active responsibility for these activities, both for carrying them out, and of course, for their outcomes'. Furthermore, these processes of 'responsibilization', as institutionally dependent processes of *individualization* and *standardization*, incite and encourage the 'individual as enterprise' to 'conduct themselves in accordance with the appropriate (or approved) model of action'.

Again, the drama of Jamie's Kitchen provided often compelling evidence of the sometimes painful, difficult, and unsuccessful attempts to transform and conduct the self in ways demanded and approved by labour markets.

So how do these ideas inform my sense of the practice, and the consequences of, the governmentalisation of Youth: and the roles played by the field of Youth Studies in the arts of governing populations of young people?

As I have already indicated, Youth can be understood as an artefact of a history of various ways of thinking about the behaviours and dispositions of those who are conceived as being neither child nor adult. Indeed, as an artefact of expertise, Youth is principally about *becoming*; *becoming* an adult, *becoming* a citizen, *becoming* independent, *becoming* autonomous, *becoming* mature, *becoming* responsible. There is some sense in which *all* constructions of Youth defer to this narrative of

becoming, of transition. Moreover, there is a sense in which *becoming* automatically invokes the future.

Youth, as it is constructed in at-risk discourses, for example, is at-risk of jeopardising, through present behaviours and dispositions, desired futures. Discourses of Youth at-risk mobilise a form of probabilistic thinking, about certain *preferred, or ideal* adult futures and the present behaviours and dispositions of Youth.

Risk rationalities work to responsabilize both Youth and the Family. Youthful subjects are constructed as responsible for future life chances, choices and options within institutionalised risk environments. These processes of responsabilization, in which the subject is compelled to prudently manage the institutionally structured and dependent risks of her/his own DIY project of the Self, produce a field, argues Nikolas Rose, that is 'characterized by uncertainty, plurality and anxiety, thus continually open to the construction of new problems and the marketing of new solutions' by the array of engineers of the body, mind and soul that populate the human, psychological and social sciences (Rose 1996c, p.343).

In this sense the reflexive constitution of knowledges by Youth Studies expertise increasingly intersects with management, service delivery and budget knowledges to produce hybridized knowledges about 'appropriate' and 'economic' forms of guidance and government of Youth at risk and their families. These processes of hybridization are often contested, mediated, messy and contradictory. They open up and close off possibilities for the regulation of young people. They are reflexive in the sense that their outcomes are uncertain and provisional. They are submitted to continual processes of review, evaluation and audit. These processes of audit often mobilize rationalities that exist in tension with the knowledges and purposes implied and professed by intellectual expertise in the domain of Youth Studies. Mitchell Dean (1999b) identifies these processes as 'reflexive governmentalities' – rationalities of government in which the ends, the subjects and the techniques of government are continually problematized against a whole series of expertly identified and calculated risks. Here risk management and minimization – via individual, community and institutional capacity for responsible, rational deliberation and action – emerges as a governmental end across all aspects and arenas of human relations and action.

Young people and 'illiberal' governmentality: Intersections of sovereignty, discipline and government

It is here that we can position Youth at the intersection of what I understand as risk, economy and illiberal governmentalities. This intersection can be imagined by exploring distinctions between the different forms of power that Foucault identified as sovereignty, discipline and governmentality. In his investigations of modern Liberal governmentalities Foucault (1991, p.101-102) stressed the importance of not seeing the emergence of these *mentalities*, and associated forms of pastoral power, as signalling the disappearance of other forms of power – namely discipline and sovereignty. Foucault (1991) preserves a distinction between three forms of power, the operation and effects of which mark each as distinct from the other, at the same time as they are intimately connected through their concern with populations. Here, Foucault (1991, p.102) argued that:

we need to see things not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government; in reality one has a triangle, sovereignty-discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population and as its essential mechanism the apparatuses of security.

For Foucault (1991, p.102) a concern with arts of government makes the problems of sovereignty and discipline 'more acute than ever'. The issue of how to manage the conduct of individuals and populations across complex, diverse fields of possibilities 'renders more acute the problem of the foundation of sovereignty...and all the more acute equally the necessity for the development of discipline'.

Kevin Stenson (1996, 1999), for example, has situated youth work related practices in a 'complex of inter-related strategies of government: sovereignty, discipline and government' (1996, p.12). In doing so he argues that 'the struggle to establish and maintain a legitimated sovereignty is functionally central to Liberal rule' (1999, p.68). Further, this struggle is a 'struggle to control geographical territory in the face of internal and external threats, through a monopolisation both of the threat and use of force and attempts to establish the legitimacy of that force' (Stenson 1996, p.5). Sovereignty is exercised by, and through, a range of institutions and strategies – including the armed forces, public and private police organisations, and a range of laws, regulations and by-laws. Sovereignty is, in this sense, both territorial and metaphorical. As Stenson (1996, p.5) argues, a great deal of the historical and ongoing – actual and imagined – challenges to the legitimacy and exercise

of sovereign power – ‘from behaviour construed as ‘anti-social’ to public order, disturbances or major demonstrations’ – have emerged from, or been centred on, diverse populations of young people (see also, Garland 1996).

Disciplinary power attempts to produce relationships of regulation and forms of subjection that promise a certain *docility* in subjects and populations (Foucault 1977, 1983, 1991). In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault developed a view of emerging rationalities of government in the 18th and 19th centuries – coinciding with periods of revolution (industrial and otherwise) – that he identified as *disciplinary*: disciplinary in the sense that these rationalities operated in and through various mechanisms to produce bodies that were regulated, disciplined, *docile*. Docile, here, does not suggest *servile*, but rather indicates forms of selfhood that are developed, produced, disciplined in the pursuit of certain ends – economic production, schooling, punishment, treatment, therapy. To quote Foucault (1977, p.138):

What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act upon the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behaviour. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it. A ‘political anatomy’, which was also a ‘mechanics of power’, was being born; it defined how one may have a hold over others’ bodies, not only so that they may do what one wishes, but so that they may operate as one wishes, with the techniques, the speed and the efficiency that one determines. Thus discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies.

David Kirk and Barbara Spiller (1993) suggest, in their analysis of the disciplinary role of gymnastics in the primary school curriculum at the turn of the twentieth century, that Foucault’s use of the concept of discipline provides a ‘means of locating educational practices as one set of micro-technologies which, together with other sets of “little practices” within domains like the military, medicine and so on, make up the infrastructures of disciplinary society’ (1993, p.111).

Stenson (1996, pp.5-6) argues that, historically, the promise of much Youth focussed regulation has been to produce, ‘through surveillance and education’ – as disciplinary practices – the ‘productive skills and capacities’ that will ‘enable young people to adapt to a modern industrial society’. In this respect much of the Youth Studies work that Rob White (1993) refers to as emerging out of the changing economic, social and cultural circumstances of young people in the last decades of the twentieth century is energised by concerns about how it is possible to produce, from the *raw*

material of today's youth, subjects who are capable of exercising a well regulated, responsible, entrepreneurial, autonomy.

As I have suggested Youth has long been constructed in terms of apparent ungovernability. This apparent ungovernability has a tendency to produce a range of tensions within and for Liberal governmentalities. This is so because the *ideal* subject of Liberal governmentalities is the person who has developed the capacities of self-reflection, self-regulation and self-government (Dean 1999a&b; Hunter 1993 & 1994; Rose, 1999). As Nikolas Rose (1999) suggests this ideal does not have its origins in a generalisable philosophical discourse about the *nature* of Man. Rather this view of a subject capable of bearing a kind of 'regulated freedom' (Rose & Miller 1992) has, in Liberal arts of government, been 'articulated in a whole variety of mundane texts of social reformers, campaigners for domestic hygiene, for urban planning and the like, each of which embodied certain presuppositions' about the *nature* and *capacities* of persons to be governed in relation to these programs (Rose 1999, p.42).

This capacity for the exercise of a well regulated autonomy was, and still is in many instances, used to divide and differentiate Man from Woman, the reasonable from the unreasonable, the adult from the child, the normal from the at-risk. The *fact* that young people have not developed those capacities necessary for conducting their freedom in a well regulated way continues to be an important element of the rationalities that structure the practices and processes of surveillance, discipline and regulation that take young people as their object – in playgrounds and classrooms in schools, in families, in shopping centres, parks and malls.

These ways that we have produced for making young people knowable as *ungovernable* subjects illuminate what Mitchell Dean would call the 'illiberal' and 'authoritarian' governmentalities that continue to frame much of the practise of the government of Youth (Dean 1999a, see also Rose 1999). Authoritarian and illiberal governmentalities embrace those 'practices and rationalities immanent to liberal government itself, which are applied to certain populations held to be without the attributes of responsible freedom' (Dean 1999a, p.100). Dean (1999a) argues that the 'dividing practices' (Foucault 1983) that differentiate among the population (generally) on the basis of a capacity for well regulated autonomy result in those groups (such as young people) deemed not to have developed these faculties to be *subjected* 'to a range of disciplinary, sovereign and other interventions' (Dean 1999a, p.135).

Some Closing Thoughts on the Risky Business of Growing Up

To finish up at this point I want to stress that my concerns here are not so much that diverse surveillance and intervention strategies target young people for their own good, or for the greater good. Rather, it is that such strategies emerge at the intersection of institutionalised imaginings of danger, risk and economy. At this intersection institutionally appropriate practices of intervention for young people's own good (and the good of others) emerge as hybridized constructions in which concerns about risk, economy and normative imaginings of the capacity for certain young people to live a well regulated, autonomous, entrepreneurial, responsible life shape institutional imaginings of young people. Importantly this institutionalised imagining of youth is further structured along class, gender and ethnic lines. So the consequences, intended or otherwise, of these imaginings are differently experienced by different populations of young people.

In many respects the intellectual work that attempts to problematise institutionalised imaginings of Youth must be discursive. It is in this sense that I have argued, in a number of spaces, that there is a need to analyse the systems of thought, and the techniques by which the government of Youth is made known, made possible and practised. These interventions do not aim to claim that Youth Studies is bad, that those that do Youth Studies are bad, that if only Youth Studies was done differently it would be an unproblematic good (that would make me really clever!)

What I can offer at this point is limited to an orientation to critique and to ongoing debates about Youth; about the forms of the self and technologies of the self that institutionalised risk environments demand; and the consequences, costs and benefits for different individuals, groups and populations of conforming to these technologies in various fields of possibility. This orientation, as should be apparent by now, owes much to the contributions of Foucault, and of others who have developed and engaged with Foucault's provocations to think about the relations between knowledge, power, and subjects in the ongoing management, regulation and production of subjects. The final point I make comes from a collection – *The Politics of Truth* – that brings together a number of Foucault's later interviews and lectures (including, *What is Critique? What is Enlightenment? What our Present Is*).

In an essay – *What is Enlightenment?* – that takes its reference from Kant's (1784) essay of the same name Foucault (2007) makes a claim to think of the Enlightenment not in terms of an historical epoch, nor as a unified, transcendent philosophy, or generalised scientific or political schema

appropriate to understanding and, possibly transcending, such an epoch. Rather, enlightenment, for Foucault, invokes a sense of an attitude or a disposition to the ongoing, permanent task of critique – but critique of a particular kind (this form of critique is further outlined in the other essays in the collection). Enlightenment then, which Foucault suggests consists in the conduct of an *historical ontology of ourselves*:

has to be considered not, certainly, as a theory, a doctrine, nor even as a permanent body of knowledge that is accumulating; it is to be conceived as an attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them. (Foucault 2007, p.118)

The characteristics of this form of critique have shaped this discussion. My concerns, in closing, provide a sense of the unending nature of the work of critique. From this point of view, as Foucault (2007, p.115) argues: ‘the theoretical and practical experience that we have of our limits and of the possibility of moving beyond them is always limited and determined; thus we are always in the position of beginning again’.

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