



Author:	Kay Cook
Title:	The Devaluing and Disciplining of Single Mothers in Australian Child Support Policy
Editor:	Pascoe Leahy C., Bueskens P.
Book title:	Australian Mothering
Publisher:	Palgrave Macmillan, Cham
Year:	2019
Pages:	382-402
URL:	http://hdl.handle.net/1959.3/455643

Copyright:	Copyright © The Author(s) 2019. The accepted manuscript is reproduced here in accordance with publisher policy.
------------	---

This is the author's version of the work, posted here with the permission of the publisher for your personal use. No further distribution is permitted. You may also be able to access the published version from your library.

The definitive version is available at:	https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20267-5_18
---	---

The devaluing and disciplining of single mothers in Australian child support policy

Kay Cook

Cite as: Cook, K. (forthcoming, 2019). The devaluing and disciplining of single mothers in Australian child support policy. In C Pascoe & P Bueskens (Eds.) *Mothering Australia*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Abstract

This chapter takes a governmental perspective to examine how the gendered social contract that exists in Australian couple-headed families pre-separation is preserved and enforced post-separation through child support policy. Assessing recent policy and administrative reform from this perspective reveals the explicit and implicit valuation of motherhood in circumstances that lie beyond the normative male-breadwinner nuclear family model. As a result, child support is revealed as a gendered governance practice that reflects and reinforces the social hierarchy in which mothers remain financially and socially subordinate to their ex-partners. Prior to separation, this hierarchy is achieved through the gendered division of labour and gender wage gap that position fathers as primary earners and mothers as primary carers. Upon separation, this contract is broken, yet child support administration works to preserve and reinforce this model, diluting the redistributive – and thus socially liberating – aims and effects of the original child support scheme.

Contributor note

Kay Cook is an ARC Future Fellow and Associate Professor in the Department of Social Sciences at Swinburne University. Her work explores how new and developing social policies such as welfare-to-work, child support and child care policies, transform

relationships between individuals, families and the state. Kay's Future Fellowship project examines the personal, practical and institutional barriers to child support faced by women internationally. This project will build on her gender critique of child support policymaking, data practices and implementation in order to strike a more equitable balance between women's responsibility for managing child support payments and the social, administrative and political context in which this responsibility exists.

Introduction

This chapter examines Australian child support policy to examine the explicit and implicit valuation of motherhood in circumstances that lie beyond the normative male-breadwinner nuclear family model.¹ While the policy examples examined here are particular to the Australian case, the gender norms and expectations on which child support is based are often shared across countries, particularly English-speaking liberal regimes² where there is relatively less support for working mothers, and thus a much more gendered distribution of labour in both couple-headed and single-parent households³. To tease out these issues, in the following analysis, I focus on single mothers, as they head more than 80 per cent of Australian single parent households⁴, and experience poverty disproportionately to other

¹ Lyn Craig, Killian Mullan, and Megan Blaxland, "Parenthood, policy, and work-family time in Australia 1992-2006," *Work, Employment and Society* 24, no. 1 (2010): 27-45.

Irina Hondralis, "Does Maternity Leave Pay Off? Evidence from a Recent Reform in Australia," *Social Politics* 24, no. 1 (2017): 29-54.

Roger Wilkins and Mark Wooden, "Two Decades of Change: The Australian Labour Market, 1993-2013," *The Australian Economics Review* 47, no. 4 (2014): 417-431.

² Kay Cook, "The governance of single mothers and the conversion of child support into a technical and personal issue," Paper presented at the *European Social Policy Analysis Network* conference, 28-30 August 2018.

³ Hondralis, "Does Maternity Leave Pay Off? Evidence from a Recent Reform in Australia".

⁴ Australia Bureau of Statistics, *Labour force, Australia: labour force status and other characteristics of families, June 2016*, Cat. No. 6224.0.55.001, Canberra, 2017, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001June%202016/>.

household types⁵. Further, single mother-headed household poverty and disadvantage has increased over recent decades in Australia, in part attributable to this policy reform⁶.

To contextualise the analysis, while each country operationalises child support differently,⁷ child support can be regarded as the transfer of money from a non-resident parent (typically a father) to a resident parent (typically a mother) for the purpose of supporting children financially following parental relationship breakdown.⁸ In Australia, the child support scheme is administered by government, as opposed to court-based systems that exist in a majority of countries, excluding Norway, the US, UK, and New Zealand.⁹ The amount of child support to be paid in Australia is determined using a formula, which takes into consideration the costs of children scaled for their age and number, the income of each parent and their proportion of overnight care time.¹⁰ Resultant child support payments interact with government benefit calculations, ultimately reducing the value to recipients.¹¹

⁵ Australian Council of Social Services and the Social Policy Research Centre, *Poverty in Australia* (Strawberry Hills, NSW: 2016).

⁶ Vu Son, Bryan Rogers and Bruce Smyth, "The impact of child support changes on the financial living standards of separated families in Australia," *Australian Journal of Family Law* 28, no.2 (2014): 193-232. Tracey Summerfield, Lisa Young, Jade Harman and Paul Flatau, "Child Support and Welfare to Work reforms," *Family Matters* 84, (2010): 68-78.

Michelle Brady and Kay Cook, "The impact of welfare to work on parents and their children," *Evidence Base* 3, (2015):1-23.

⁷ Christine Skinner, Jonathan Bradshaw and Jenny Davidson, *Child Support Policy: An International Perspective*, Department for Work and Pensions Research Report No. 405. (Leeds, UK: Corporate Document Services, 2007).

⁸ International Network of Child Support Scholars, *Glossary* (INCSS, 2018). <https://incss.org/glossary.html>

⁹ Skinner et al., "*Child Support Policy: An International Perspective*".

¹⁰ Department of Social Services (DSS), *Child Support Guide* (Australian Government, 2018). <http://guides.dss.gov.au/child-support-guide>

¹¹ For a review of benefit 'claw backs' as a result of child support payments in the UK, USA, Australia and New Zealand, see: Christine Skinner, Daniel Meyer, Kay Cook and Michael Fletcher, "Child maintenance and social security interactions: the poverty reduction effects in model lone parent families across four countries," *Journal of Social Policy* 46 no. 3 (2017): 495-516.

While the Australian child support formula – like formulae operating elsewhere – is regarded as a ‘fair’ arbiter of payments,¹² research has revealed how previous¹³ and proposed¹⁴ modifications have served to entrench masculine financial autonomy and authority beyond the couple relationship. As a result, the operation of child support in Australia is implicated in preserving and perpetuating gendered power structures, which is contrary to why child support was first enacted. While the technical amendments described here are specific to Australia, they gendered processes they illustrate with respect to mothers’ responsibility for payment collection and reporting, alongside fathers’ lack of accountability, will have resonance across administrative child support regimes.

To examine these issues, I take a governmental perspective, conceiving of child support as a gendered governance practice.¹⁵ I regard child support as regulating separated mothers’ and fathers’ behaviour, intervening through procedures and programs¹⁶ to subtly discipline parents into behaving ‘appropriately’; in ways that reinforce the extant social order.¹⁷ While the state’s oversight and management of the poor is nothing new¹⁸, what is new in this analysis is an articulation of how single mothers are expected to behave in relation to the fathers on whom they previously depended. My analysis finds that single mothers who are not dependent on, and thus subordinate to, a male breadwinner within a couple household, are

¹² Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support, *In the best interests of children – Reforming the Child Support Scheme* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2005)

¹³ Kay Cook, and Kristin Natalier, “The gendered framing of Australia’s child support reforms,” *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 27, no. 1 (2013): 28-50.

¹⁴ Kay Cook and Christine Skinner, “Gender equality in child support policy: Fathers’ rhetoric of ‘fairness’ in a parliamentary inquiry,” *Social Politics*, (2018): 1-41, <https://academic.oup.com/sp/advance-article/doi/10.1093/sp/jxy014/4993841/>.

¹⁵ Lisa Bush, *Gender and governance* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003).

¹⁶ Tania Murray Li, *The will to improve: Governmentality, development, and the practice of politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007).

¹⁷ Adam Jamrozik and Luisa Nocella, *The Sociology of Social Problems: Theoretical Perspectives and Methodological Innovations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

¹⁸ For a review of the state’s surveillance of the poor see: John Gilliom, *Overseers of the Poor: Surveillance, Resistance, and the Limits of Privacy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

compelled by child support policy to remain dependent upon and subordinate to these men. Low-income single mothers bear the financial responsibility for and costs of their ex-partner's financial autonomy, which can be exercised through private child support transfers, non-compliance, and tax-return non-lodgement. As a result, rather than providing the gendered, redistributive benefits for which it was established,¹⁹ contemporary Australian child support policy can be seen to reinforce traditional gender roles and distribution of power beyond the couple relationship.

The child support formula provides an explicit valuation of the opportunity and financial costs of motherhood, made visible by women's departure from Australia's normative 1.5-earner household.²⁰ However, these processes do not apply to all separated parents. Those whose incomes fall above the threshold for receiving government payments are free to conduct their financial affairs outside of state oversight.²¹ As a result, the valuing and disciplining effects of child support are preserved only for those parents whose income, and thus financial behaviour, is regarded as requiring state 'intervention' and 'improvement'.²²

Given that separated mothers with caring responsibilities are far more likely than separated fathers to be on low-incomes and thus access government benefits²³, it is typically on the basis of mothers' financial dependence on the state that they are compelled to engage in the

¹⁹ Meredith Edwards, "Child Support," in *Successful Public Policy: Lessons from Australia and New Zealand*, eds. Joannah Luetjens, Michael Mintrom, and Paul 'd Hart (Canberra: ANU Press, in press).

²⁰ Work hours in Australian couple-headed families typically comprise a father working full-time hours and a mother working part-time hours, combining to 1.5 of two full-time earners. This is internationally unusual compared to other countries, see: Hondralis, "Does Maternity Leave Pay Off? Evidence from a Recent Reform in Australia".

²¹ DSS, "Child Support Guide".

²² Li, *The will to improve*.

²³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Household income and wealth, Australia, 2013–14*, Cat. No. 6532.0, Canberra, 2015, <https://secure.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/6523.0~2013-14~Main%20Features~Introduction~2/>.

child support scheme. While framed in policy in terms of ‘limiting state expenditure’²⁴, I argue that child support provides insight into the disciplining of low-income mothers who are dependent on the state. These women, I argue, contravene social norms regarding their ‘appropriate’ social position as financially dependent upon – and thus subordinate to – male breadwinners in couple-headed families. Applying the words of Eriksson and Hester²⁵ to this socio-financial context, as families separate, child support replaces male breadwinning as the social institution maintaining fathers’ control over separated mothers.

The examples provided in this chapter illustrate the state’s implicit reference to separated mothers’ ‘appropriate’ position as subordinate to their ex-partners, and interventions to reinforce this. At the same time, the state’s position on whether separated mothers should remain dependent on their former partner is conflicted, as while child support policy compels such women to seek child support, a lack of enforcement, the recouping of state benefits irrespective of payments being received, and encouragement of private agreements renders women’s practical financial dependence on their ex-partner problematic. As a result, through the operation of the Australian child support scheme, separated mothers are instead disciplined to be dependent upon the *financial discretion* of their ex-partners. The symbolic, albeit materially ineffective, provision of income through the child support scheme lessens the state’s need to provide separated mothers with other forms of income, thus hampering their financial independence. Child support’s policies and procedures reinforce Australia’s hegemonic patriarchal system, and the financial interests and discretion of the state and fathers therein, to the detriment of low-income separated mothers.

²⁴ Cabinet Sub-Committee on Maintenance, *Child support: a discussion paper on child maintenance. Parliamentary paper No. 292* (Canberra: Australian Government, 1986).

²⁵ Maria Eriksson and Marianne Hester, “Violent Men as Good Enough Fathers? A Look at England and Sweden,” *Violence Against Women* 7, (2001): 779-792.

I begin the task of disentangling the interests served by child support policy and the value of mothers therein by first describing child support as originally introduced and moves to promote private payments. I then examine three more recent, technical changes that were introduced without significant public scrutiny and without any acknowledgement of their (perhaps intended) effects.

The evolution of Australian child support policy

Henderson's 1970 Melbourne poverty survey²⁶ was among the first studies to identify single mothers as a particularly disadvantaged group. The subsequent federal Whitlam government set out a comprehensive inquiry²⁷ and reform program, including the establishment of single parent benefits. Following the introduction of no-fault divorce laws in 1975, and reduced social stigma of single parenthood, the number of single-mother-headed families rapidly escalated.²⁸

During this period, the government cost of supporting single mothers was becoming unsustainable, while single parent poverty rates continued to climb from 38 per cent in 1972-3 to 50 per cent in 1981-2.²⁹ At the same time, a Social Security Review in the 1980s recommended higher payments for low-income families; putting further pressure on state

²⁶ Ronald F. Henderson, Alison Harcourt, and R. J. A. Harper, *People in Poverty: A Melbourne Survey* (Melbourne: Cheshire, 1970).

²⁷ Ronald F. Henderson, *Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty: First Main Report*, research report prepared for the Australian Government, (Canberra, c1975).

²⁸ Matthew Gray, Lixia Qu, David Stanton, and Ruth Weston, "Fifty years of changing families: Implications for income support," in *Social security and poverty in Australia: social policy after Henderson*, ed. Peter Saunders (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, in press).

²⁹ Alison McClelland, "No child..." *Child Poverty in Australia* (Brunswick, VIC: Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2000).

resources.³⁰ In governmental terms, the social problem of single parent and child poverty needed to be contained and depoliticised³¹. Here, a technical and expert-driven reform package in the form of the Child Support Scheme offered a solution.³² The administrative scheme provided a way to reduce state expenditure while seemingly providing more money to low-income single mother-headed households.

At the time of its introduction, and given the predominance of a primary, male breadwinner in dual parent households pre-separation³³, the child support formula used to calculate liabilities relied almost exclusively on the non-resident parent's income³⁴, who was almost always the father. Where the resident mother's income was also included in instances of high maternal incomes, they received a substantially more generous amount of 'disregarded income' to take into account their higher costs of providing care, and the opportunity costs that this labour entailed.³⁵

Given the politically and culturally enforced male breadwinner family model that existed at this time³⁶, child support recipients were, and continue to be, almost exclusively single mothers, with mothers representing more than 85 per cent of recipients in the current

³⁰ Edwards, "Child Support".

³¹ Jamrozik and Nocella, *The Sociology of Social Problems*.

Li, *The will to improve*.

³² Edwards, "Child Support".

³³ Linda Hancock, "Reforming the child support agenda? Who benefits?" *Just Policy* 12, (1998): 20-31.

³⁴ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, *Every picture tells a story: report on the inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2003).

³⁵ Child Support Consultative Group, *Child Support Formula for Australia* (Canberra: Australian Government Publication Service, 1998).

³⁶ Kay Cook, "Gender, social security and poverty," in *Social security and poverty in Australia: social policy after Henderson*, ed. Peter Saunders (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, in press).

system.³⁷ As such, the formula sought to replicate the male-breadwinner model across households and the gendered distribution of care that this typically entailed. The formula thus provided an explicit valuation of the caring labour of mothers, and financially supported separated mothers to continue in what was deemed their appropriate role: remaining at home with their children, supported by the state and their ex-partner.

However, while first introduced by ‘femocrats’ to improve the financial status of children living in single mother-headed households³⁸, the financially redistributive aims of child support were always only partial, due to the concurrent withdrawal of other benefits. These redistributive effects, which inherently challenged the extant social order, have been further eroded over time through major policy reform and minor technical changes, most of which have responded to government and fathers’ concerns regarding state expenditure³⁹ and financial autonomy and authority post-separation⁴⁰, respectively. I suggest that the reason underpinning three decades of challenge to the child support system is that child support’s redistributive aims are fundamentally incompatible with Australia’s normative, nuclear-family, patriarchal social hierarchy and mothers’ subordinate role therein.

³⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *From conflict to cooperation: Inquiry into the child support program* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2015). Lixia Qu, Ruth Weston, Lawrie Moloney, Rae Kaspiew, and Jessie Dunstan, *Post-separation parenting, property and relationship dynamics after five years*, research report prepared for the Attorney General’s Department, (Canberra: Australian Government, 2014).

³⁸ Meredith Edwards, “Child Support: Assessment, Collection and Enforcement Issues and Possible Directions for Reform,” *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 6, (1986): 93-140. Meredith Edwards, Cosmo Howard, and Robin Miller, *Social Policy, Public Policy: From Problem to Practice*, (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2001).

³⁹ Commonwealth of Australia, ‘Budget measures’, *Budget Paper No. 2 2011–2012* (Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2011).

⁴⁰ Kay Cook, and Kristin Natalier, “The gendered framing of Australia’s child support reforms”.

Given low-income separated mothers' requirement to seek child support, the compulsory continuation of fathers' breadwinning role – while mothers are 'freed' from their wifely labour – has been an ongoing source of men's frustration. Such concerns have underpinned fathers' rights advocates' calls for child support policy review and reform since the inception.⁴¹ Ongoing government efforts to ensure 'public confidence in the scheme'⁴² have aligned with fathers' understandings and expressions of the issues, resulting in reforms that have typically buttressed men's concerns.⁴³

Given the challenge that redistributing finances to mothers post-separation through the child support scheme poses to fathers' sense of financial autonomy and authority, the state has been required to continually assuage men's concerns. Put simply, fathers' interests have been needed to be met by both mothers and the state in order for child support payments and policies to be provided and supported. For example, in establishing the scheme, such appeasement was achieved by including a vocal non-resident parent and Lone Fathers Association founder and president, Barry Williams, in the Consultative Group commissioned to design the original formula.⁴⁴ In their early evaluation of the scheme, the Joint Select Committee (JSC), despite seeking "to have a representative spread of witnesses giving oral

⁴¹ Edwards, "Child Support".

Belinda Fehlberg and Mavis Maclean, "Child support policy in Australia and the United Kingdom: changing priorities but a similar tough deal for children?" *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 23, no.1 (2009): 1-24.

⁴² Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*. (Canberra: Australian Government, 1994); Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support, "*In the best interests of children – Reforming the Child Support Scheme*"; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *From conflict to cooperation: Inquiry into the child support program*, 132.

⁴³ See for example Belinda Neal's dissenting report to the Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*, 603. Cook and Natalier, "The gendered framing of Australia's child support reforms".

⁴⁴ Edwards, "Child Support".

Child Support Consultative Group, *Child Support Formula for Australia*.

evidence”⁴⁵, privileged non-custodial parent witnesses (n = 75) over custodial parent witnesses (n = 31) at a rate of more than two to one, and invited the testimony of an additional eight spouses and one aunt of a non-custodial parent.

Similarly, in the early 2000s, the Howard government heeded men’s calls for reform⁴⁶ and initiated a 2003 parliamentary inquiry into the child support and family court systems, where Barry Williams and the Lone Fathers Association again featured prominently.⁴⁷ This inquiry precipitated a re-working of the child support formula. Research shows that the 2003 inquiry committee was predisposed to hear the concerns of fathers⁴⁸, and disproportionately privileged their evidence over that provided by mothers⁴⁹; echoing the treatment of fathers in the Joint Select Committee review. The subsequent legislative reforms were then found to have prioritised recommendations that benefitted fathers, with those that benefitted mothers amended downwards or abandoned.⁵⁰ These processes precipitated fundamental change to child support that were introduced in 2006.

In the new formula⁵¹, both parents’ incomes were included, with an equal ‘self-support’ amount of excluded income, erasing any compensation for the opportunity cost of providing

⁴⁵ Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*, 5.

⁴⁶ Fehlberg and MacLean, “Child support policy in Australia and the United Kingdom: changing priorities but a similar tough deal for children?”.

⁴⁷ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, *Every picture tells a story: report on the inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation*.

⁴⁸ Kay Cook and Kristin Natalier, “Selective hearing: The gendered construction and reception of inquiry evidence,” *Critical Social Policy* 34, no. 4 (2014):515-537.

⁴⁹ Kay Cook and Kristin Natalier, “Gender and evidence in family law reform: A case study of quantification and anecdote in framing and legitimising the ‘problems’ with child support in Australia,” *Feminist Legal Studies* 24, no. 2 (2016): 147-167.

⁵⁰ Cook and Natalier, “The gendered framing of Australia’s child support reforms”.

⁵¹ Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support (MTCS), *In the best interests of children – Reforming the Child Support*.

care, as set out in the original formula.⁵² As a result, mothers and fathers were positioned as equally responsible for and capable of earning and caring; ignoring the persistent reality of the gendered division of labour in Australia⁵³, which sees fathers working some of the longest hours in the world⁵⁴, and their post-separation care-time confined to times that interfere least with their earning capacity, such as the persistently normative pattern of ‘every second weekend and half the school holidays’.⁵⁵

Not surprisingly, the outcomes of the inquiry and subsequent policy reform symbolically and materially devalued post-separation motherhood⁵⁶; and coincided with the other major policy devaluation of poor women’s mothering – the introduction of ‘welfare to work’.⁵⁷ Work-tests were required for mothers with school-aged children, while up to 100 per cent of child support could be provided by fathers ‘in kind’ for prescribed items with consent, or up to 30

⁵²Child Support Consultative Group, *Child Support Formula for Australia*, 79.

⁵³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Family characteristics and transitions, Australia, 2012–13*, Cat. No. 4442.0, Canberra, 2015, <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4442.0Explanatory%20Notes12012-13/>. Lyn Craig, “Does father care mean fathers share? A comparison of how mothers and fathers in intact families spend time with children,” *Gender and Society* 20, no.2 (2006): 259-281.

⁵⁴Wilkins and Wooden, “Two Decades of Change: The Australian Labour Market, 1993-2013”.
Huong Dinh, Lyndall Strazdins, and Jennifer Welsh, “Hour-glass ceilings: work-hour thresholds, gendered health inequities,” *Social Science & Medicine* 176, (2017): 42-51.

⁵⁵ Qu et al., *Post-separation parenting, property and relationship dynamics after five years*.
Kristin Natalier and Belinda Hewitt, “It’s not just about the money”: Non-resident fathers’ perspectives on paying child support,” *Sociology* 44, no.3 (2010): 489-505.

⁵⁶ For a review of the financial impacts of the reforms see:
Bruce Smyth and Paul Henman, “The distribution and financial impacts of the new Australian Child Support Scheme: A ‘before and day-after reform’ comparison of assessed liability,” *Journal of Family Studies* 16, no 1. (2010): 5-32.

Summerfield et al., “Child Support and Welfare to Work reforms”.

Son et al., “The impact of child support changes on the financial living standards of separated families in Australia.”

⁵⁷ For a review of the wellbeing impact of welfare to work policy introduced in 2005 see: Brady & Cook, “The impact of welfare to work on parents and their children”.

per cent without the mothers' consent.⁵⁸ These changes have seen the value of low-income single mothers' child support payments decline⁵⁹ and poverty increase.⁶⁰

Taken together, low-income single mothers faced increasing surveillance and control from both the state and their ex-partner, and any compensation for the opportunity cost of providing care, as set out in the original formula, was erased. While mothers retained some control over the nature and value of in-kind support provided, the reform served to lessen mothers' autonomy while providing increased opportunities for fathers to exert control. However, the political project of disciplining low-income separated mothers continued.

Technical changes implemented after the 2006 formula change have further reinforced fathers' financial discretion and mothers' financial and social subordination while reducing state expenditure. These changes have been made possible – and simultaneously rendered opaque – by the growing uptake of private child support payments, the history of which I now turn to describe.

The opacity and gendered social context of private transfers

The ability to transfer child support payments privately has always existed within the child support scheme, but was originally only available to parents with incomes above the benefit

⁵⁸ Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support, "In the best interests of children – Reforming the Child Support Scheme".

⁵⁹ Smyth and Henman, "The distribution and financial impacts of the new Australian Child Support Scheme: A 'before and day-after reform' comparison of assessed liability".
Summerfield et al., "Child Support and Welfare to Work reforms".

⁶⁰ Son et al., "The impact of child support changes on the financial living standards of separated families in Australia."

threshold.⁶¹ However, as the committee notes, very few parents were able to make private agreements due to mothers' reliance on state benefits and thus their compulsion to have the amount of child support to be collected determined by the state so as to limit state expenditure. According to the JSC review conducted 6 years after the scheme's implementation, "the effect of this [private agreements] would be to minimise the intervention of Government as well as the CSA's cost of administering the Scheme".⁶² Here, minimising state intervention can be seen as a gendered concept. Low-income single mothers – for whom the child support scheme was devised – were already subject to state surveillance. Rather, it was otherwise financially independent fathers being caught up in state surveillance that drew negative political attention.

In 1994, Australian Institute of Family Studies research cited by the JSC noted that 66 per cent of custodial parents received no child support at all – due either to having no agreement in place, or non-payment.⁶³ Non-payment, they concluded, was due either to "an informal agreement or other collection arrangement outside the CSA or as a result of ineffective CSA collection". Further, the committee's research showed that only 56 per cent of liabilities were paid on time, almost half of which were paid through involuntary wage-withholding. These figures, the committee noted, were the "one of the great successes"⁶⁴ of changing community attitudes, leading to improved voluntary payments. Evidence of increasing *voluntary* compliance, however, was not forthcoming.

⁶¹ Child Support Evaluation Advisory Group, *Child Support in Australia: Final report of the evaluation. Volume one – main report* (Canberra, Australian Government Publication Service: 1992).

⁶² Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*, 229.

⁶³ Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*, 44.

⁶⁴ Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*, 603.

Despite the less than stellar endorsements of voluntary payments, the JSC recommended:

- that advice on how to make private collection arrangements be given to new applicants for a child support assessment, “so that private collection, rather than CSA collection, is encouraged as much as possible under the Scheme”⁶⁵ (Recommendation 52);
- that automatic wage-withholding be made optional (Recommendation 55, in response to 221 submissions from non-custodial parents who opposed the ‘invasive nature’ of the practice), again so that “intrusiveness of the Scheme be minimised” and “the current reliance on CSA collection and the cost of administering the Scheme can be reduced”⁶⁶;
- the Registrar be given powers to remove non-custodial parents from the wage withholding system in favour of direct payments to the CSA (Recommendation 56), and return to the to the wage withholding system should the non-custodial parent default on their direct payments (Recommendation 57);
- allow the Registrar to substitute private payments to the custodial parent for payments made to the CSA, where payments have been compliant for six months (Recommendation 69). “The introduction of opting out would then generally enable these parents to leave CSA collection once the liable parent has demonstrated a regular payment record. The end result would be a less intrusive Scheme and further reductions in the CSA's administration costs”⁶⁷; and

⁶⁵ Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*, 192.

⁶⁶ Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*, 196.

⁶⁷ Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*, 244.

— that private collections be favoured in all cases, except where there were special circumstances (Recommendation 70).

The benefits of these changes accrue to fathers and the state, but there is no evident benefit to mothers and their children. In none of the pages of text that proceeded these recommendations were the interests of custodial parents (mothers) specifically considered. Indeed, the term ‘custodial parent’ was not mentioned. Only once, with respect to opting out of payments to the CSA, were mothers’ concerns raised, and only in passing, when the committee mentioned, “there will be some special cases, such as those involving duress or domestic violence, where private collection will not be appropriate”. For all other cases, private payments were seen as unproblematic and indeed, favourable. As a result, the internationally innovative and effective system⁶⁸ of wage-withholding was undermined. At the same time, concerns were raised regarding the administrative treatment of all private agreements as 100 per cent compliant, but the promotion of private payments proceeded unabated.⁶⁹ Now, more than half of the caseload transfer their payments privately, outside of the government’s purview, making oversight impossible.⁷⁰

As the previous excerpts from the JSC indicate, the decision to introduce, promote and default to private collection arrangements, just five years after the scheme’s introduction,

⁶⁸ Edwards, “Child Support”.

⁶⁹ Liz Alexander, “Australia’s child support scheme: Much promised, little delivered?” *Family Matters* 42, Spring/Summer (1995):6-11.
Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support, “In the best interests of children – Reforming the Child Support Scheme”.

⁷⁰ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *From conflict to cooperation: Inquiry into the child support program* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2015).
Kay Cook, Hayley Mckenzie, Kristin Natalier and Lisa Young, “Institutional processes and the production of gender inequalities: The case of Australian child support research and administration,” *Critical Social Policy* 35, no. 4 (2015): 512-534.

were done on the grounds of lessening state intrusion into men's affairs and reducing state expenditure. Not once were the practical, temporal and relational difficulties of low-income mothers collecting payments from their ex-partners given due attention; and never were the financial impacts of non-compliance in the form of unjustly reduced benefits considered. Such issues were again raised twenty years later at the 2014-15 parliamentary inquiry into the Child Support Scheme, but no policy or procedural changes subsequently occurred.⁷¹ While mothers have the option to return to departmental collection, this becomes a personal decision rather than one made by the state, rendering mothers personally responsible for subjecting their ex-partners to state surveillance. This may explain why private collection rates remain high.

From a governmental perspective, the lack of available data on private non-compliance becomes seen as a necessary tool, rather than the coincidental and unintended outcome of individuals freely choosing to manage their arrangements privately. I argue that this 'invisibility' is both politically and culturally desirable, as it obscures the full impact of policy changes that devalue low-income separated mothers' caring labour and renders these women more susceptible to the financial discretion of their ex-partners. The lack of scrutiny afforded to private payments also makes it possible for minor, technical amendments to child support to be implemented without significant review or revolt.

Technical amendments to the workings of the child support scheme

⁷¹ Australian Government, *Australian Government response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs report: From conflict to cooperation – Inquiry into the Child Support Program* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2016).

While the 2006 revised formula decreased the value of expected child support payments for low-income mothers⁷², a number of technical amendments or omissions have likely had more adverse impacts on single-mothers' income security and financial independence. These changes have not occurred as a result of parliamentary inquiries and have been largely free from public debate and scrutiny; introduced in budget papers⁷³ and as administrative adjustments. Striking illustrations include the mis-reporting of child support non-compliance, the treatment of non-compliance in the calculation of Family Tax Benefits, and differential levels of state intervention to ensure accurate reports of each parent's income used to determine child support obligations.

I argue that these changes illustrate 'compromises'⁷⁴ that the state has made to maintain their legitimacy and appease the influential fathers' rights lobby. Each of these processes illustrates the preservation of fathers' financial autonomy post-separation and the state's reluctance to interfere in fathers' financial affairs. However, given the state's concurrent interest in reducing welfare state expenditure, the 'cost' of these concessions has been borne by low-income single mothers. This reveals the implicit valuation of single mothers, as they are held responsible for the state's and fathers' failure to comply with child support policy. As Li remarks with respect to governmental compromises to appease dominant social groups, "these compromises expos[e] the fragility of [the state's] authority"⁷⁵, as the state's legitimacy to act requires: (1) the agreement of the social elites; and (2) sufficient compromises to ensure that the powerful party's terms are met. In the case of child support, fathers represent the powerful elites whose interest in financial autonomy need to be assured.

⁷² Smyth and Henman, "The distributional and financial impacts of the new Australian Child Support Scheme".

⁷³ Commonwealth of Australia, Budget measures, Budget Paper No. 2 2011–2012.

⁷⁴ Li, *The will to improve*.

⁷⁵ Li, *The will to improve*, 82.

In appeasing fathers, the state is complicit in subordinating separated mothers and subjecting them to fathers' financial discretion and control, symbolically devaluing the work of motherhood when it occurs outside of the gendered social contract that applies to couple households.⁷⁶ The following sections set out the compromises made by the state in terms of compliance, benefit and income calculations, all of which are obscured by private child support payments, rendering their effects invisible and thus beyond state intervention.

The fallacy of child support compliance

As noted, the child support scheme was first introduced to intervene in the high rates of child poverty in the 1980s. Given the government's significant financial investment in the scheme, and the need to ensure public confidence, demonstrating compliance and the value of payments being transferred was pivotal. At the same time, I argue that there was an equal need to avoid heavy-handed enforcement methods, so as to appease fathers. To balance these competing interests, since the inception of the scheme in 1989, compliance figures have been obscured to increase the purported rates of compliance while also lessening the need for harsh enforcement measures.

As Alexander⁷⁷ described with respect to the scheme's early operation:

One of the most surprising accusations levelled at the Scheme is that it may not in fact have improved the child support collection rate as substantially as is claimed ... The Joint Select Committee ... claim[s]

⁷⁶ Petra Bueskens, *Modern Motherhood and Women's Dual Identities: Rewriting the Sexual Contract* (UK: Routledge, 2018).

⁷⁷ Liz Alexander, "Australia's child support scheme: Much promised, little delivered?," 9

... that the calculation method used is questionable. Put simply, the Agency does not calculate its collection rate by comparing the total amount of child support collected with the total amount owed (as could reasonably be expected). Rather, the Agency compares the total amount collected with what it calls the ‘estimated collectable amount’, a number based on highly questionable premises.

Here, only the amount that could ‘reasonably be expected to be collected’ by the CSA was included in their calculations. Subsequent compliance figures, as described above, have also include private collections, deemed to be 100 per cent compliant. For example, in the 2001-02 financial year, the CSA reported an overall collection rate of 93.5 per cent.⁷⁸ This comprised a rate of 87.7 per cent for CSA collections and 100 per cent compliance for the 49.4 per cent of the caseload who transferred payments privately. However, independent research suggests that compliance rates are far from fully compliant – or even 87.7 per cent compliant⁷⁹, with only 73 per cent of paying fathers and 42 per cent of recipient mothers reporting that payments are made in full and on-time.⁸⁰

The penalties borne by low-income mothers as a result of non-compliance

Most reviews of the scheme have identified the lack of payment oversight and the erroneous treatment of private payments as fully compliant.⁸¹ Given that the department has no

⁷⁸ Department of Family and Community Services, *Annual Report 2001-02 Volume 2* (Canberra: Australia Government, 2002), 59.

⁷⁹ Qu et al., Post-separation parenting, property and relationship dynamics after five years.

⁸⁰ Qu et al., Post-separation parenting, property and relationship dynamics after five years.

⁸¹ Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, *Every picture tells a story: report on the inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family*

oversight of private payments, it and Centrelink (Australia's government welfare benefit administrator) continues to regard these as 100 per cent compliant. Rather than solely a matter of accounting, the assumption of full compliance makes it possible for non-recipient mothers to be financially penalised for their failure to enforce father's financial responsibilities; a task that the state, with all the legislative and administrative resources at its disposal, has also failed to achieve. This lack of oversight confers benefits upon fathers and the state, while mothers and their children are once again disadvantaged. The interests of mothers or children in low-income families have never been at stake in the calculation and reporting of compliance, revealing the lack of value attributed to mothers and motherhood in child support and welfare policy.

The increase in private collections, and the treatment of these as 100 per cent compliant in order to reduce state expenditure has disproportionately affected low-income single mothers. However, the government continues to obscure the treatment of mothers in its reporting of child support policy 'success'. For example, in its most recent annual report, the Department of Social Services notes that:

In the 2014–15 entitlement year, the amount of child support received has reduced the amount of Family Tax Benefit Part A paid by \$743 million, a small increase on the \$740 million reduction in the 2013–14 entitlement year.⁸²

separation; House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *From conflict to cooperation: Inquiry into the child support program*.

⁸² Department of Social Services, *Annual Report 2016-17, Part 2 Annual Performance Statement* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2017), 36.

For more than half of the caseload, these savings have been made through the treatment of privately collected child support as 100 per cent compliant, but also through the default use of the ‘Modified Entitlement Method’ of calculating Family Tax Benefits when child support is received through the department. As the department notes,

Using this method, we’ll compare the amount of FTB you would get if you got your full child support assessment, to the amount of FTB you would get based on the amount of child support you actually get. We’ll use *which ever results in the most maintenance income* to work out your ongoing FTB Part A rate. We do this to reduce the risk of an overpayment. We’ll use this method unless you ask us to use the disbursement method.⁸³

Here, even when collecting via the department, when child support is underpaid, the department will typically use the higher, expected amount to determine FTB payments. In both private collect and when using the department’s default Modified Entitlement Method, non-compliance is obscured in order to yield state savings; while preserving the interests of fathers to maintain authority over when and if payments will be made. The result of the compromise between fathers and the state, however, is that low-income mothers receive less income than they are entitled to, from both their ex-partners and the state. Fathers’ non-

⁸³ “Child support and your Family Tax Benefit Part A,” Department of Human Services, last modified May 23, 2018, <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/enablers/child-support-and-your-family-tax-benefit-part/29646>, emphasis added.

payment is thus condoned by the state's promotion of private collections and their erasure of non-compliance in FTB calculations.

Measures which have been criticised by the Australian Law Reform Commission⁸⁴ as offering ex-partners tools for perpetuating financial abuse beyond the couple relationship, such as the calculation of FTB entitlements, have been lauded as a means of generating government savings. In no instance is the income insecurity and poverty of single mothers decried. Rather, mothers are positioned as responsible for their own failing, as the Department of Human Services⁸⁵ website describes: "Where possible parents should take primary responsibility for the cost of looking after their children. This is why we ask you to apply for child support". The 'parents' referred to here are mothers, who are asked to apply for (not pay) child support or suffer the consequences in the form of only being eligible for the base amount of Family Tax Benefits. The responsibility for the costs of children is not located with the father, or the state, who are freed to take these responsibilities up on their own terms. Fathers, while being nominally subject to child support obligations and enforcement, have their financial autonomy preserved through defaults to private payments and the Modified Entitlement Method. The state saves money and maintains the veneer that it is reducing child poverty through the operation of the child support scheme. Mothers are coercively compelled yet disempowered and rendered financially vulnerable. The social status quo is reinforced. Single mothers remain in their place; subordinate to the financial discretion of their ex-partners, and to deliberately erroneous state definitions of their child support incomes.

⁸⁴ Australian Law Reform Commission, *Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws—Improving Legal Frameworks, Final Report* (Canberra: Australian Government, 2013).

⁸⁵ Department of Human Services, "Child support and your Family Tax Benefit Part A."

The penalties to mothers as a result of tax-return non-compliance

While Family Tax Benefits calculations illustrate how mothers are disciplined within child support and welfare policy, the compromises made to fathers are evident in the ‘work-arounds’ applied when tax returns are not lodged. Here, the selective enforcement of federal tax law makes it possible for fathers to exercise their autonomy to avoid their responsibilities, the results of which are once again welfare state savings and the explicit perpetuation – or causation – of single mothers’ financial hardship.

The child support formula relies on a ‘timely and accurate’ assessment of each parent’s income, as determined by an annual tax return.⁸⁶ However, while the department notes that “if you pay or get child support you must lodge a tax return”⁸⁷, the department has introduced and amended measures to ‘work around’ payers do not comply.

In earlier versions of the child support formula, when fathers failed to lodge tax returns, rather than taking enforcement action, the state would impute their income as the male total average weekly earnings (MTAWE).⁸⁸ Later, in 2012, rather than compel these men to lodge tax returns, an amendment passed through the federal budget process to change the MTAWE figure to the payer’s last known tax return, indexed for growth in real wages; on average increasing the imputed income. As a result, the government announced that it expected to

⁸⁶ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), *Child Support Arrangements between the Australian Taxation Office and the Department of Human Services* (Canberra: Australian Taxation Office, 2017).
<https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/child-support-collection-arrangements-between-ato-and-dhs/>.

⁸⁷ “Recovering child support payments,” Department of Human Services, last modified August 7, 2018,
<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/enablers/recovering-child-support-payments/29946>.

⁸⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, Budget measures, Budget Paper No. 2 2011–2012.

save \$78.7 million over the four-year budget forward estimates, all of which would be recouped from reduced Family Tax Benefits paid as a result of mothers' higher expected child support payments⁸⁹; irrespective of whether this higher child support was paid or not given the FTB calculation methods outlined above. As earlier research had revealed a correlation between tax-return non-filing and child support non-compliance⁹⁰, this budget measure was not likely to result in significant child support income gains for single mothers.

Conclusions

This chapter has sought to illustrate the symbolic and material devaluation of mothers within the child support formula and, in doing so, identify how low-income mothers are disciplined to be both socially and financially responsible for, yet subordinate to, their typically wealthier and financially independent ex-partners. Amendments to the original workings of Australia's child support scheme have all served to reduce government control over what fathers have to pay. Compromises, in the form of: how payments can be made (privately); how unpaid child support is treated in the determination of FTBs (as compliant); and how income is calculated (without state oversight) all serve to provide fathers with greater financial autonomy, reducing state interference in men's financial affairs. These measures show the implicit prioritising of men's financial autonomy, whereby their discretion to not abide by tax or child support law is preserved, while mothers face financial consequences as a result of this behaviour.⁹¹ The consequences of the government's failure to ensure that fathers comply with federal laws are born by mothers. This is a striking example of the gender of governance⁹²

⁸⁹ Commonwealth of Australia, Budget measures, Budget Paper No. 2 2011–2012.

⁹⁰ Allan Shephard, "The Australian Child Support Agency," *Family Court Review* 43, no. 3 (2005): 387-401.

⁹¹ Kay Cook, "Child support compliance and tax return non-filing: a feminist analysis," *Australian Review of Public Affairs* 11, no.2 (2013): 696-710.

⁹² Bush, *Gender and governance*.

and the gender of child support policy that renders single mothers subordinate to both fathers' and state interests.

While the state has compromised to appease fathers' concerns regarding state encroachment into their private affairs, the state has also needed to reign in welfare state expenditure on a social group who are increasingly deemed as undeserving of support. Here, while fathers have been freed up to define what income is used within the child support formula, and what and how any income will be provided, women bear the responsibility for not only managing the relationships that underpin men's payment or non-payment, but also the financial consequences of the state's lax enforcement. Private payments provide the perfect foil. They locate responsibility with individual parents, and thus outside of state surveillance and control, but also make it difficult to determine the extent of, and thus intervene in, non-compliance. As a result, privately collected child support can go unpaid and without consequence. Rather, penalties are borne by low-income mothers who face reduced FTBs and a lack of data regarding the extent of their personal or collective child support debts.⁹³

The processes described here and their effects reflect and reinforce the social hierarchy whereby mothers remain financially and socially subordinate to their (ex-)partners. In couple households this hierarchy is achieved through the gendered social contract⁹⁴ and its attendant gendered division of labour and gender wage gap.⁹⁵ When this contract is broken upon separation, the administration of child support in Australia illustrates that the state works to

⁹³ Cook, McKenzie, Natalier and Young, "Institutional processes and the production of gender inequalities".

⁹⁴ Bueskens, *Modern Motherhood and Women's Dual Identities*.

⁹⁵ Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) and the Workplace Gender Equity Agency (WGEA), *Gender Equity Insights 2018: Inside Australia's Gender Pay Gap* (Sydney: Workplace Gender Equity Agency, 2018). https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/97249_Gender-Equity-Insights-2018.pdf/.

preserve and reinforce this model, diluting the redistributive – and thus socially liberating – aims and effects of the original child support scheme.⁹⁶

⁹⁶ Cook and Skinner, “Gender equality in child support policy: Fathers’ rhetoric of ‘fairness’ in a parliamentary inquiry”.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Alexander, Liz. “Australia’s child support scheme: Much promised, little delivered?” *Family Matters* 42, Spring/Summer (1995):6-11.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Household income and wealth, Australia, 2013–14*. Cat. No. 6532.0, Canberra, 2015. <https://secure.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/by%20Subject/6523.0~2013-14~Main%20Features~Introduction~2/>.

Australian Bureau of Statistics. *Family characteristics and transitions, Australia, 2012–13*. Cat. No. 4442.0, Canberra, 2015. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4442.0Explanatory%20Notes12012-13/>.

Australia Bureau of Statistics. *Labour force, Australia: labour force status and other characteristics of families, June 2016*. Cat. No. 6224.0.55.001, Canberra, 2017. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/6224.0.55.001June%202016/>.

Australian Council of Social Services and the Social Policy Research Centre, *Poverty in Australia*. Strawberry Hills, NSW: 2016.

Australian Government. *Australian Government response to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs report: From conflict to cooperation – Inquiry into the Child Support Program*. Canberra: Australian Government, 2016.

Australian Law Reform Commission, *Family Violence and Commonwealth Laws— Improving Legal Frameworks, Final Report*. Canberra: Australian Government, 2013.

Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). *Child Support Arrangements between the Australian Taxation Office and the Department of Human Services*. Canberra: Australian Taxation Office. May 2017. <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/child-support-collection-arrangements-between-ato-and-dhs/>.

- Bankwest Curtin Economics Centre (BCEC) and the Workplace Gender Equity Agency (WGEA). *Gender Equity Insights 2018: Inside Australia's Gender Pay Gap*. Sydney: Workplace Gender Equity Agency. 2018. https://www.wgea.gov.au/sites/default/files/97249_Gender-Equity-Insights-2018.pdf/.
- Brady, Michelle, and Kay Cook. "The impact of welfare to work on parents and their children." *Evidence Base* 3, (2015):1-23.
- Bueskens, Petra. *Modern Motherhood and Women's Dual Identities: Rewriting the Sexual Contract*. UK: Routledge, 2018.
- Bush, Lisa. *Gender and governance*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 2003.
- Cabinet Sub-Committee on Maintenance, *Child support: a discussion paper on child maintenance*. *Parliamentary paper No. 292*. Canberra: Australian Government, 1986.
- Child Support Consultative Group, *Child Support Formula for Australia*. Canberra: Australian Government Publication Service, 1998.
- Child Support Evaluation Advisory Group, *Child Support in Australia: Final report of the evaluation*. *Volume one – main report*. Canberra, Australian Government Publication Service: 1992.
- Craig, Lyn, Killian Mullan, and Megan Blaxland. "Parenthood, policy, and work-family time in Australia 1992-2006." *Work, Employment and Society* 24, no. 1 (2010): 27-45.
- Commonwealth of Australia, 'Budget measures', *Budget Paper No. 2 2011–2012*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2011.
- Cook, Kay. "Child support compliance and tax return non-filing: a feminist analysis." *Australian Review of Public Affairs* 11, no.2 (2013): 696-710.
- Cook, Kay. "Gender, social security and poverty." In *Social security and poverty in Australia: social policy after Henderson*, edited by Peter Saunders. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, in press.

Cook, Kay. "The governance of single mothers and the conversion of child support into a technical and personal issue," Paper presented at the *European Social Policy Analysis Network* conference, 28-30 August 2018.

Cook, Kay, Hayley Mckenzie, Kristin Natalier and Lisa Young. "Institutional processes and the production of gender inequalities: The case of Australian child support research and administration." *Critical Social Policy* 35, no. 4 (2015): 512-534.

Cook, Kay, and Kristin Natalier. "The gendered framing of Australia's child support reforms." *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 27, no. 1 (2013): 28-50.

Cook, Kay, and Kristin Natalier. "Selective hearing: The gendered construction and reception of inquiry evidence." *Critical Social Policy* 34, no. 4 (2014):515-537.

Cook, Kay, and Kristin Natalier. "Gender and evidence in family law reform: A case study of quantification and anecdote in framing and legitimising the 'problems' with child support in Australia." *Feminist Legal Studies* 24, no. 2 (2016): 147-167.

Cook, Kay, and Christine Skinner. "Gender equality in child support policy: Fathers' rhetoric of 'fairness' in a parliamentary inquiry." *Social Politics*, (2018): 1-41.

<https://academic.oup.com/sp/advance-article/doi/10.1093/sp/jxy014/4993841/>.

Craig, Lyn. "Does father care mean fathers share? A comparison of how mothers and fathers in intact families spend time with children." *Gender and Society* 20, no.2 (2006): 259-281.

Department of Family and Community Services, *Annual Report 2001-02 Volume 2*. Canberra: Australia Government, 2002.

Department of Human Services. "Child support and your Family Tax Benefit Part A." Last modified May 23, 2018. <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/enablers/child-support-and-your-family-tax-benefit-part/29646>.

Department of Human Services. "Recovering child support payments." Last modified August 7, 2018, <https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/enablers/recovering-child-support-payments/29946>.

Department of Social Services, *Annual Report 2016-17, Part 2 Annual Performance Statement*.

Canberra: Australian Government, 2017.

Department of Social Services. *Child Support Guide*. Australian Government. June 2018.

<http://guides.dss.gov.au/child-support-guide>

Dinh, Huong, Lyndall Strazdins, and Jennifer Welsh. "Hour-glass ceilings: work-hour thresholds, gendered health inequities." *Social Science & Medicine* 176, (2017): 42-51.

Edwards, Meredith. "Child Support: Assessment, Collection and Enforcement Issues and Possible Directions for Reform." *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* 6, (1986): 93-140.

Edwards, Meredith. "Child Support." In *Successful Public Policy: Lessons from Australia and New Zealand*, edited by Joannah Luetjens, Michael Mintrom, and Paul 'd Hart. Canberra: ANU Press, in press.

Edwards, Meredith, Cosmo Howard, and Robin Miller. *Social Policy, Public Policy: From Problem to Practice*. Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2001.

Eriksson, Maria, and Marianne Hester. "Violent Men as Good Enough Fathers? A Look at England and Sweden." *Violence Against Women* 7, (2001): 779-792.

Fehlberg, Belinda, and Mavis MacLean. "Child support policy in Australia and the United Kingdom: changing priorities but a similar tough deal for children?" *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family* 23, no.1 (2009): 1-24.

Gilliom, John. *Overseers of the Poor: Surveillance, Resistance, and the Limits of Privacy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Gray, Matthew, Lixia Qu, David Stanton, and Ruth Weston. "Fifty years of changing families: Implications for income support." In *Social security and poverty in Australia: social policy after Henderson*, edited by Peter Saunders. Carlton: Melbourne University Press, in press.

Hancock, Linda. "Reforming the child support agenda? Who benefits?" *Just Policy* 12, (1998): 20-31.

Henderson, Ronald F, Alison Harcourt, and R. J. A. Harper. *People in Poverty: A Melbourne Survey*. Melbourne: Cheshire, 1970.

Henderson, Ronald F. *Australian Government Commission of Inquiry into Poverty: First Main Report*. Research report prepared for the Australian Government. Canberra, c1975.

Hondralis, Irina. "Does Maternity Leave Pay Off? Evidence from a Recent Reform in Australia." *Social Politics* 24, no. 1 (2017): 29–54.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Community Affairs, *Every picture tells a story: report on the inquiry into child custody arrangements in the event of family separation*. Canberra: Australian Government, 2003.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Social Policy and Legal Affairs, *From conflict to cooperation: Inquiry into the child support program*. Canberra: Australian Government, 2015.

International Network of Child Support Scholars, *Glossary*. October 2018.
<https://incss.org/glossary.html>

Jamrozik, Adam, and Luisa Nocella. *The Sociology of Social Problems; Theoretical Perspectives and Methodological Innovations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Joint Select Committee on Certain Family Law Issues, *Child Support Scheme An examination of the operation and effectiveness of the scheme*. Canberra: Australian Government, 1994.

Li, Tania Murray. *The will to improve: Governmentality, development, and the practice of politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

McClelland, Alison. "No child..." *Child Poverty in Australia*. Brunswick, VIC: Brotherhood of St Laurence, 2000.

Ministerial Taskforce on Child Support, *In the best interests of children – Reforming the Child Support Scheme*. Canberra: Australian Government, 2005.

Natalier, Kristin, and Belinda Hewitt. "It's not just about the money": Non-resident fathers' perspectives on paying child support." *Sociology* 44, no.3 (2010): 489-505.

Qu, Lixia, Ruth Weston, Lawrie Moloney, Rae Kaspiew, and Jessie Dunstan. *Post-separation parenting, property and relationship dynamics after five years*. Research report prepared for the Attorney General's Department, Canberra: Australian Government, 2014.

Shephard, Allan. "The Australian Child Support Agency." *Family Court Review* 43, no. 3 (2005): 387-401.

Skinner, Christine, Bradshaw, Jonathan and Jenny Davidson. *Child Support Policy: An International Perspective*. Research report prepared for the Department for Work and Pensions, Leeds, UK: Corporate Document Services, 2007.

Skinner, Christine, Meyer, Daniel, Cook, Kay and Michael Fletcher. "Child maintenance and social security interactions: the poverty reduction effects in model lone parent families across four countries," *Journal of Social Policy* 46 no. 3 (2017): 495-516.

Son, Vu, Bryan Rogers and Bruce Smyth. "The impact of child support changes on the financial living standards of separated families in Australia." *Australian Journal of Family Law* 28, no.2 (2014): 193-232.

Smyth, Bruce, and Paul Henman. "The distribution and financial impacts of the new Australian Child Support Scheme: A 'before and day-after reform' comparison of assessed liability." *Journal of Family Studies* 16, no 1. (2010): 5-32.

Summerfield, Tracey, Lisa Young, Jade Harman and Paul Flatau. "Child Support and Welfare to Work reforms." *Family Matters* 84, (2010): 68-78.

Wilkins, Roger, and Mark Wooden. "Two Decades of Change: The Australian Labour Market, 1993-2013." *The Australian Economics Review* 47, no. 4 (2014): 417-431.