

Youth and Habitus at Three Australian Schools: Perceptions of Ambitions, Risks and the Future in Reflexive Modernity

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Declarations

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Abstract

This research applies Bourdieu's theorising of habitus and cultural capital to understand how class mediates young people's reflexivity and perceptions of risk. It engages with the theories of reflexive modernity, primarily with the work of Beck and Giddens, who both describe recent processes of individualization, detraditionalization and the increasing importance of the concept of risk. The study seeks to critically engage with Bourdieu's project, reworking some of his key theoretical ideas such as the possibility of 'reflexivity' itself being a new form of embodied cultural capital. It also engages with works that see discourses of risk as central to neo-liberal governmentality.

The research entails 380 surveys and nine focus groups at three distinct secondary schools in a large regional Australian city – a public high school in an outer suburb low socio-economic area of the city which offers a specialist sports program; an inner suburb academically-selective public high school where pupils gain an offer of enrolment only through rigorous academic testing; and an expensive private college in the middle of the central business district.

Year Eleven and Twelve students (16-18 years) at the three schools were asked about their ambitions; the obstacles they think may stand in the way of achieving their ambitions; and about their perceptions and experiences of inequality and risk. The risks discussed include the problems involved in the day-to-day life of young people as well as their engagement with larger risk discourses about technology and the environment.

The data highlights how inequality is experienced or denied by some, and analysed from a distance by others. Reflexivity is present regardless of class position, but is expressed in a variety of ways. There are clear and subtle distinctions in engagement with micro and macro level risks. Overall, the data highlights how class continues to shape practice, perceptions and emotions.

Reflexive Preface

Without writing a biography or a complete ‘sketch for a self-analysis’ (Bourdieu 2008a), to give the reader some background behind the motivations of this thesis I will describe how this area of study became of interest to me and lead eventually to my doctoral research. My interest in habitus and life chances springs from observations of my own male friends from high school in the coal mining town of Cessnock in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales, Australia, a town with widespread unemployment, drug, alcohol and crime problems. After attending a school that had many parallels with what Willis (1977) describes in his classic study, most of my mates followed their fathers into very similar fields and careers, with ‘professional’ fathers producing ‘professional’ sons, and sons of fathers in blue-collar jobs also following suit. This class distinction seemed to be maintained even though most of the occupations were *within* the local coal mining industry. There was Willo, now a mechanical engineer, whose father is an electrical engineer. Fin’s dad is a mine manager, and Fin is now the head accountant of a mine and well on his way to becoming a manager himself. Buck’s dad is a retired coal miner and Buck is now an electrician in a coal mine. Thomo and his dad are electricians in mines who are both involved in the union movement.

There are many more of these examples. Yet there are also a few exceptions. For instance, Wazza’s dad is a garbage collector on the local council, while Wazza is now a mechanical engineer - an example of upward mobility. And then there is me. Firstly I followed the blue-collar path, as my dad was a bricklayer in a coal mine, and when I left school I became an electrician in a power station. Why I chose this as a career I

am still unsure, but at the time I had no interest in university study and was keen to have some money. Also, I knew that I had a very good chance of getting an apprenticeship due to my subject grades in the Higher School Certificate (not that I did very well) and excellent references from school. A number of my friends were also heading in this direction. The fact that it was day-work was important because my relationship with my then girlfriend and my many sporting commitments would not be interfered with.

I think I made a lifestyle choice more than a career choice, yet in hindsight it seems a rather strange decision because I had no real interest in trades or manual work in general. I suppose because I had no definite idea of what I wanted to do, other than play sport, it seemed the way to go ('Mate, you can't go wrong if you've got a trade' was something I heard on numerous occasions). It just seemed like the 'normal' choice. Yet I quickly realised that I did not want to be an electrician for the rest of my life. As there was virtually no work to do in the so-called on-the-job training, I started to read a lot whilst at work, which contributed to where I am now.

Therefore, I originally followed the father-son trajectory of most of my friends, yet now, as a current university graduate in social science, I am an exception to it. Once I began studying social theory, my own observations and experiences made Bourdieu's notion of habitus alluring, as it describes the reproduction of social class while being complex enough to allow for exceptions. In retrospect, the trajectory from electrician to sociology doctoral candidate was a winding 'non-linear' road. Between January 1997, when I left the power station, and the end of 2002 when I finished my Honours degree, I worked as a casual electrician, a cellar hand, a grape processor, a barman, a

brickies' labourer, a maintenance worker at a hotel, an Aqua-Golf attendant, and a professional cricketer. Throughout undergraduate study I made a living out of painting houses for cash.

For the past couple of years, as a postgraduate research student who pursues work as part-time academic, I have continued to experience uncertain and casual employment. Despite academia having a relatively high occupational status, my wages have been below the poverty line. These experiences of casual work and economic hardship developed my interest in the increasing uncertainty of work, and the notion of uncertainty in general. I have experienced various instances of alienation, dehumanization and the irrationality of rationality. The large array of workplaces where I have been employed also allowed me to witness and talk with many young people who were going through the same thing. In short, I have personally experienced many of the social changes that are happening to young people such as: increased financial and housing dependence on the family; low wages and casual work; hard to find and expensive rentals; continuing participation in education; and often baffling changes to welfare requirements. For instance, while doing Honours at 27 years of age, I was no longer categorised as a 'youth', and could not receive Austudy support, which would have been a higher payment than the welfare payments I did receive. This was because when I had started studying some years earlier I was only allowed to get Youth Allowance, as I was under 25. The rule was that once you begin on a certain type of payment you cannot change until your study is complete.

In less experiential and more observational terms, during the 1990s it was reported that youth suicide in Australia was rising rapidly to a point where it is one of the

highest rates in the world. At the time I found this incredibly difficult to comprehend, as Australia is a relatively comfortable place to live. Yet, I also somewhat understood it due to some of my own experiences with depression. In 1996, the infamous case of the Paxton family made me angry and cynical at the way young people were being dealt with in the media. That year the commercial television show *A Current Affair* covered the story of three young adults who refused to take jobs on a Queensland tourist resort in a set-up situation. The story showed the Paxtons, with their black clothes, long hair and piercings, getting out of bed at 11 am. It didn't mention that the jobs were offered only if all three took them, that they had to cut their hair, or that it was within the Paxton's rights to refuse these conditions. In the days following, Prime Minister Howard called them 'bludgers' and veteran talkback (cash for comments) radio host John Laws called them 'putrid'. Soon after, the Department of Social Security cut off their benefits and introduced a diary surveillance system for the unemployed. They also announced the 'dob in a dole bludger' campaign. The Paxtons were deluged with hate mail (Davis 1999: 13).

These experiences and observations, and the observation of similar experiences for those around me, made me think analytically about what was happening to 'young people' as a social category in Australia. These, and many more experiences and observations led to my current interest in the sociology of youth, class and culture, and motivated me to develop a better understanding of this field of study. Later, I came to appreciate that all those experiences pertained to habitus, a realisation which led to the research embodied in this thesis. It is these experiences that have led to what I believe is an empathetic understanding and feel for class issues that are the motivation for this research, frame its methodology and focus its discussion.

PART 1

INTRODUCTION AND THE FIELD OF YOUTH STUDIES

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This doctoral thesis developed out of an earlier honours thesis on young people, lifestyle, leisure preferences and political attitudes in three very different schools. The use of Bourdieu's theoretical precepts guided the analysis in that earlier endeavour and suggested the development of new theoretical ideas arising from data interpretation. These ideas are hopefully realised in this more lengthy and sophisticated study. In setting the scene theoretically for this thesis, an overview of some relevant social theory paradigms is necessary. These paradigms, especially Bourdieu's framing of habitus, the individualisation thesis, the claims of reflexive modernisation, the risk society, and so on, form the analytical basis for my interpretation of empirical data collected from three cohorts of young people. These paradigms are used to support my interpretive claim that 'class' is far from dead for any consideration of young people heading towards adult life choices.

Since the late 1960s, much prominent and influential social theory has been united by one common theme: social relations have been individualised whilst economic relations have globalised. The lives of young people have been profoundly affected by these changes with 'increasingly prolonged, decoupled transitions between education and work, dating and mating, and childhood and adulthood' (Côté 2003: 2). With this in mind, the research presented here investigates young people's perceptions of their futures: the obstacles and problems they envision on the path to achieving their ambitions; and their engagement with local and global discourses of risk. It does so whilst maintaining a defence of class as a sociological concept. Despite the apparent

diminishing significance of class consciousness and the prevalence of the neo-liberal myth of a free range of life choices and opportunities, class remains an obvious and ongoing mediator of life chances for young Australians.

The marginalising critique of class analysis forms part of a raft of theoretical propositions that seek to do away with the previous grand narratives of western social theory. New theories to describe recent social change have been expressed in a variety of fashions. Baudrillard (1983a, 1983b), Derrida (1976), Lyotard (1984), Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 1987), and many others have argued that so much change has occurred that the 'old' ways of understanding the world are redundant. For these theorists, we have entered a new era – postmodernity. Others maintain that many of the central tenets of 'modernity' remain despite considerable and ongoing change. These ideas attempt to 'reconstruct' rather than 'deconstruct' (see Lee 2006; Alexander 1995a).

Manuel Castells proposes that information, not class, is now the driving force behind global capitalism, producing a binary system of inclusion or exclusion: you are either a networker or 'switched off'. Those excluded, marginalised or displaced tend to return to the 'power of identity' in a search for answers and scapegoats. Zygmunt Bauman sees modernity as 'liquid', a state somewhere between 'solid' and 'air' – a metaphor for the demand of flexibility in all aspects of life and the growing role of consumerism. This creation of a permanent sense of impermanence increases social suffering as the ground shifts beneath the feet of a burgeoning number of people, but leaves them with nowhere to go. Anthony Giddens suggests we have reached 'late modernity', where the search for ontological security is central to the trajectory of our

detraditionalised and self-narrated lives. For Scott Lash and John Urry, capitalism is now a disorganised economy of signs and space producing an increasingly self-reflexive subject. Ulrich Beck claims that we are moving towards a 'risk society' where the globalised risks produced by the very 'progress' of modernity, and our individualised ability to insulate and protect ourselves from them, become a new foundation for social relations. Central to these new theories of recent social change is that 'class' has fundamentally changed and 'class consciousness' has dwindled or disappeared. 'Individualisation' has occurred - demanding the increase of 'reflexivity' in contemporary identity. These complementary ideas will be heuristically referred to as theories of 'reflexive modernity' in this thesis.

Without completely rejecting the useful insights of the postmodernists, it is the work of the reflexive modernists, particularly Beck and Giddens that will be focussed on in the interpretive analysis of data. However, it is not in the interests of any project driven by a sense of social justice for the continuing importance of socio-economic position to become a deficient or under-theorised aspect of 'reflexive modernity'. In the analysis of survey and focus group data in later chapters, the laudable work of Pierre Bourdieu provides material for the synthesising of a theory of emergent class-mediated reflexivity in contemporary urban western youth.

Bourdieu's concepts – cultural capital, social capital, habitus, field, distinction, symbolic violence - have become commonplace in many academic fields, particularly sociology and cultural studies, and have particular vitality in the study of education, popular culture, consumerism and identity. At the heart of Bourdieu's project are both a theory of social reproduction and an effort to break the dichotomy of agency and

structure. He sought to show how socio-economic status has considerable effects on life chances whilst maintaining a mechanism for social change to occur. Bourdieu's work upgrades the notion of class; the important concept of habitus synthesises structural, symbolic and status perspectives of class. Through the notion of cultural capital he highlights the role culture plays in an individual's quest for success in the fields that they choose, or are sometimes compelled, to practice.

A key aspect of the interpretive paradigm advanced in this thesis is the idea that reflexivity develops in proportion to perceived or actual risk in late modernity. Beck argues that 'risks essentially express a future component' (1992: 33). Accordingly, the data in this study specifically examines young people's attitudes to their future, life chances and risks.

Following the Reflexive Preface and this Introduction, the thesis begins with an overview of the theory used. In Chapter Two, the field of youth studies itself is discussed and this research is then situated within that field. Chapter Three outlines the work of Pierre Bourdieu which is used as the theoretical and empirical foundation of this thesis. Chapter Four describes the theories of 'reflexive modernity', largely focussing on the work of Beck and Giddens. Chapter Four concludes with a discussion of recent theorisations that attempt to bring the notions of habitus and reflexivity together, and also brings Foucault's notion of governmentality in to help understand how the concept of risk can be used tactically by various institutions to formulate specific ends. Chapters Five and Six outline the methodological issues of the quantitative and qualitative research contained in this thesis and set the scene for the data chapters by describing the three schools where the research was conducted.

Chapter Seven begins the empirical section, discussing the student's attitudes towards the notion of class itself. Chapter Eight considers the student's ambitions and their perceptions of what they feel may be obstacles that get in their way. Chapter Nine focuses on general attitudes and perceptions of risk that tend to be expressed in the risks faced in everyday life, while Chapter Ten examines more global discourses of risk about technology and the environment. Chapter Eleven concludes the thesis by summarising and theorising the research findings, and discussing some of their political, social and cultural implications.

CHAPTER TWO

The Field of Youth Studies

Introduction

In Australia, a 'Youth Allowance' is available to people between the ages of 16 and 24 (Centrelink 2006), indicating that this defines 'youth'. Yet the United Nations defines youth as aged 15 to 28 inclusive, meaning there are approximately 1 billion 'youth' in the world, or 18 per cent of the world's population (Youth at the United Nations 2006). In legal discourse, young people become 'adult' at the age of 18. As these varying figures indicate, the notion of 'youth' is itself contestable. Bourdieu claims that it is 'just a word', that the division between young and old is a power division which imposes limits and produces 'an *order* to which each person must keep, keeping himself [sic] in his place' (Bourdieu 1993 [1980]: 94 emphasis in original). For Bourdieu, the individuals who are labelled 'youth' are so different and live under so many various circumstances that it becomes an 'enormous abuse of language to use the same concept to subsume under the same term social universes that have practically nothing in common' (95). Youth is therefore a social and cultural construction immersed in techniques of control (see Kelly 2006). 'Youth' is often seen in this regard as a 'problem' to be regulated and controlled through intervention. Therefore, for the term 'youth' to have any meaning, rather than treating young people as an amorphous group, the different experiences of young people pertaining to their different positions in social space need to be investigated and emphasised. This study aims to accomplish that kind of positioning.

The sociology of youth is seen here as containing two main strands: the study of youth transitions, and the study of youth culture and identity. A third strand may also be discerned - the study of 'youth-at-risk' or young people's risk taking. The latter focus on marginalised youth or the 'dangerous' behaviour of young people and tend to come from a social work/welfare background within both the 'transitions' and 'youth culture' strands. The two former strands mentioned above have, until very recently at least, remained separate. Recent work suggests that the two strands need to engage with each other for them to remain relevant to the day-to-day lives of young people (Hollands 2002; Miles 2002; Skelton 2002). The following discussion outlines some key issues and debates within these two areas of the sociology of youth. The discussion will locate this doctoral research within the field of youth studies and finish by outlining what this project will add to current understandings of Australian youth.

Youth Transitions

In the post-war era, the transition from child to adult was seen as a fairly quick, straightforward and linear process. Coles (1997: 98) refers to three areas of traditional youth transition: a 'school-to-work transition' as one moves from education to employment; a 'domestic transition' from single life to cohabitation, marriage and parenthood; and a 'housing transition' as one moves from living at 'home' with parents to establishing an independent household (see also Skelton 2002: 101; Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 9).

Recent social change however has problematised this notion. In some respects young people are seen to grow up faster, have their 'childhoods' or 'innocence' stolen, as

they have to deal with alcohol, drugs, sex, media and consumerism, alongside managing their education and deciding on potential careers (Lee 2006: 3; Wyn 2004: 17). On the other hand, they remain increasingly financially dependent on their parents for a variety of interconnected reasons. There is evidence that people are marrying a lot later in life (Pitman *et al* 2004; Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 48-51). There is a need for more education due to the upward credentializing of the labour market. Changes to government income support have come at a time when it is harder than ever to find permanent full time work (Schneider 2000; Côté 2003: 2). Most young people experience the casualisation of the labour market and the dominance of 'McJobs' (Klein 2000; Furlong and Kelly 2005). These changes have had considerable effects on the whole notion of 'transition', as movement through the three areas above has become increasingly elongated, non-linear (te Riele 2004) and 'maze-like' (Pais 2003).

A further criticism is that the transition studies tend to postulate the end result – becoming an 'adult' – as a normalised goal all young people must complete. Those who do not manage to cross off all the factors on the list that make up what it means to be an 'adult' are seen to have 'failed' in their transition (Skelton 2002). There are many problems with such a view. Firstly, as White and Wyn (2004: 113) point out, the 'realities of "living at home" as a 25 year-old must at some stage give way to radically different conceptions of what it is to be "adult"'. Increasing uncertainty and insecurity affects adults as well, maybe to the point that the transitional experience traditionally postulated as the 'youth' period of an individual's life is looking more and more like *how life is* permanently becoming for *everyone* (see Crawford 2006; Blatterer 2008; Wyn and Dwyer 1999). A second problem is that the 'failure' of those

who do not make a successful transition to adulthood is often individualised. 'Failure' in this sense is the apparent inability of the individual to successfully construct their own biography and to make the 'right' choices to navigate risk. They are 'blamed for their own failures... [and] structural and social inequalities, social prejudices and discrimination, are not part of the explanation' (Skelton 2002: 109; see also Evans and Furlong 1997; Wyn and Dwyer 1999).

In his work on 'risk factor analysis', France (2008) points out that these types of studies take on board dominant neo-liberal governmental assumptions and often propose further regulations and interventions into young people's lives, as their transition failure is seen as the result of 'poor life choices'. With these issues in mind, the study of 'youth as transition' needs to take into account and understand a myriad of social circumstances that may mitigate the successful negotiation of risks during this period (Andres *et al* 1999; Looker and Dwyer 1999; Jones 2004; MacDonald and Marsh 2001). These include economic factors (Rudd and Evans 1998; Lehmann 2004), cultural factors (Willis 1977; Cieslik and Simpson 2006) and geographic factors (Coles, England and Rugg 2000). Equally important are: unequal access to important educational, vocational and technological resources (Facer and Furlong 2001); the effects of parental educational levels and attitudes (Andres and Grayson 2003; Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005); gender (Bullen and Kenway 2004) and sexuality issues (Skelton 2002); and ethnic and racial inequalities and prejudices (De Vries and Wolbers 2004). Moreover, it can be argued that there needs to be a negotiation of a crossroads between 'youth' studies and 'family' studies (Gilles 2005) to understand more finely contemporary youth transitions.

Youth Cultures and Identity

Since the late 70s, the sociological and cultural study of young people's style, music and leisure has been strongly influenced by the subcultural analysis of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 1). The 'Birmingham school', including Hall, Hebdige, Willis, McRobbie, Johnson and Jefferson, reworked the idea that popular culture was nothing but dominant ideology (for instance Adorno 1991). The Centre identified certain groups taking part in 'positive mass consumption' (Frith 1998: 571), where cultural goods can 'be equated with the value of the groups consuming them – youth, the working class, women' (Frith 1996: 13). For instance, Hebdige draws on Raymond Williams' conception of culture as 'ordinary'; popular culture is the lived culture of ordinary men and women (Storey 1997: 71).

Using this less elitist and more anthropological approach than the Frankfurt School's conception of popular culture, Hebdige (1979) examined culture as a wide range of social activities, meanings, values, beliefs, institutions and commodities and considered how these elements were related in a whole way of life. Hebdige stresses that there is not simply one culture – an individual's social experience and cultural activity is shaped by gender, ethnicity, age and most importantly, class (Negus 1996: 15). This analysis draws on semiotics and on Gramsci's concept of hegemony. In these terms, the Birmingham school saw 'popular culture as a site of struggle between forces of 'resistance' of subordinate groups in society, and the forces of 'incorporation' of dominant groups in society' (Storey 1997: 13-14). The 'struggle' is ideological. As Hall says, popular culture is a 'contested site for political constructions of "the people" and their relations to "the power bloc"' (Storey 1997:

15). The 'resistance' is symbolic and happens through 'rituals' (Turner 1996: 72). It does not necessarily challenge the system as a whole, but creates a measure of autonomy to live within it (Cashmore and Rojek 1999: 482).

There has been a mountain of critiques, developments and reworkings of subculture theory. For example, McRobbie and Garber (1976) originally pointed out that these subcultures were male, gave women only a subordinate role, and ignored the domestic sphere as a place of cultural practice. More recently, the concept of youth subculture has been used in increasingly random ways to the point where Bennett states that the concept 'has arguably become little more than a convenient 'catch-all' term for any aspect of social life in which young people, style and music intersect' (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 1). Other criticisms include the way subcultural studies focused only on resistance. The CCCS working of subculture left out any notions that subcultural performance was often for fun. Working class culture was overly romanticized and it wasn't necessarily only working class people taking part in a subculture. We might think of the role of middle class art students in the genesis of punk for example. It has been pointed out that real tangible resistance needs to be more than symbolic; and analysis of subcultures often failed to acknowledge the role of the media in their creation and maintenance (see Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 6-11). These criticisms, combined with recent social change, have led to the conception of what is known as 'post-subcultural theory' (see Muggleton 1997, 2002).

In other developments, Will Straw (1991) has postulated the notion of 'scene' to describe how music scenes develop their own temporal and spatial logics and are

mediated through communications technology. Straw notes that those participating in scenes are not necessarily doing it to 'resist', but are also not necessarily slaves to the culture industries. In her research on UK dance clubs and raves, Thornton (1995) sees club culture as 'taste cultures' organised around various media, music and styles. She reworks Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital into 'subcultural capital', highlighting how 'distinctions' are made on the hierarchies of 'cool' and 'authenticity' between the 'mainstream' and the 'alternative'. Redhead (1997) argues that subcultures have been superseded by club-cultures which are 'loose, globally based youth formations grounded in the media/market niches of contemporary dance music' (Hollands 2002: 155). Club cultures are characterized by a cultural mixing of styles. Hollands also points out the state's increasing obsession with regulating, even criminalizing, youth cultures.

The fragmentation and individualization of style, often influenced by postmodern theories, is central to much post-subcultural theory. According to Polhemus:

We now inhabit a Supermarket of Style where, like tins of soup lined-up on endless shelves, we can choose between more than fifty different style tribes. Jumbling geography as well as history, British punk circa 1976 sits on the shelf next to 1950s American Beatnik or late Jamaican Ragga (1997: 150).

Muggleton argues that young people in the post-subcultural realm do not see subcultures as having any authenticity. Cultural consumption is 'no longer articulated around the modernist structuring relations of class, gender, ethnicity or even the age span of youth' (Muggleton 1997: 199). Miles (2000) uses the term 'lifestyle spaces' to try to bridge the gap between the 'structural' and the 'cultural'. Miles shows how in the realm of increasing risk and globalisation, individual 'transitions' are increasingly difficult and highlights how leisure activities play an important role in transition.

‘Lifestyle’ changes over time. For instance, young people may shift or develop their musical and stylistic preferences which adds a temporal element of cultural affiliation largely absent in both subcultural and post-subcultural theory (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 13).

Lifestyle theory emphasises individual ‘agency and choice over structural forces and social divisions’ (Hollands 2002: 157). Bennett (2000), influenced by the work of Maffesoli (1995), conceptualised the term ‘neo-tribe’ as an attempt to describe the ‘increasingly fluid and unstable nature of social relations’ (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 12). Bennett relates the concept to dance clubs where:

Through its provision of space for expressions of ‘togetherness’ based on articulations of fun, relaxation and pleasure, can be seen as one of many forms of temporal engagement through which such neo-tribal associations are formed (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 12).

Young people do not commit to the uniforms and politics of specific subcultures, but ‘move easily in and out of particular styles, forms of music and temporary communities’ (Hollands 2002: 157). Neo-tribes organised around music and dance clubs can offer ‘select involvement in “private” events in which participants share particular sensibilities’ (White and Wyn 2004: 192). These shared sensibilities may range from resistance to the complete immersion in, or submission to, mainstream consumer practices. They are also said to cut across class lines, making it increasingly difficult to link music tastes and youth style to social class (Hollands 2002: 157).

We must also consider the implications of the internet on youth culture. The development of online virtual communication has had profound effects on youth

cultural practices and their mediation which transcend time and space, and may give rise to new subcultural practices, or cybercultures, 'whose collective practices centre not around common visual appearance or shared local experience, but take shape in the virtual spaces of the Internet' (Bennett and Kahn-Harris 2004: 18). As these criticisms and development show, there has been considerable spirited defence of, and debate about, the concept of youth subculture(s) (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006; Blackman 2005; Hesmondhalgh 2005; Bennett 2005).

As White and Wyn point out, recent developments in the study of youth cultures have tended to focus on notions of identity. This shift reflects a wider interest in the:

Subjective interpretations of individuals, and has resulted in less emphasis on the existence of definable groups, social structures, and organizations with which young people are affiliated (White and Wyn 2004: 189).

Evidence of this shift supports claims for the individualization thesis that is inherent in both postmodern and reflexive modernization theories. In his work on the 'night-time economy', Hollands (2002) acknowledges some aspects of individualization that become problematic for subcultural analysis. Most youth who seem to be doing their cultural practice are in the 'mainstream' and are not 'resisting'. They are nevertheless constructing and maintaining their identity through their consumption and leisure practices. Hollands maintains that the mainstream itself needs to be studied more closely as it too contains stylistic, status and class distinctions. He highlights examples where up-market exclusivity is used to deny entry to working class 'rabble', 'slappers' and 'townies' (Hollands 2002: 163-164). He criticises the common notion in post-subculture theory that class is now less important in youth culture and unearths an array of clear class distinctions evident in the choices of young people

about where to socialize, and who with, and in the judgments of distinction they make about others. In Hollands' conception of youth culture, there are minority elements of subcultures and 'hybrid' forms of identity, but they are overshadowed and outnumbered by the dominance of mainstream cultural activities that also contain divisions due to the labour market positions of the consumers and the financial imperatives of the venues themselves. This 'exploits existing cleavages in the population, and segregates young adults into particular spaces and places' (Hollands 2002: 154). Hollands' emphasis on class for the apparent lifestyle choices of young people is echoed in the focus of this thesis.

The analysis of, and debates surrounding youth culture that have developed over recent decades has provided a deeper understanding of the everyday practices of young people. For the most part, the study of youth transitions and the study of youth culture have remained two broadly separate fields. It is only recently that there have been efforts to bring these two fields together.

Synthesising Youth Transition and Youth Cultural Studies

Recent work in youth studies has acknowledged the need for more critical encounters between the 'transition' and 'culture' fields. Transition studies need to be more 'culturally rich' whilst youth culture studies need to be more aware of 'spatial divisions' (Skelton and Valentine 1998) and socially segmented consumption patterns among different youth groupings (Hollands 2002: 154). Youth researchers Hollands and Miles both point out that youth transition studies need to incorporate aspects of youth culture studies, as it is 'young people's cultural experiences [that] represent the

actual area within which they seek to cope with and at times defy the ups and downs of structural change' (Miles 2002: 65). Recent research has attempted this kind of critical engagement. For instance, Northcote (2006) highlights how there are 'informal rites of passage' enacted by young people in their leisure time pursuits that are equal in importance to transitions for understanding individual adult identity formations. He examines nightclubbing and shows how alcohol consumption, drug taking and sexual intercourse are all factors through which young people negotiate in their transition from child to adult. Vaughan (2005) discusses youth activities and navigations as having a 'just in time' quality alongside 'just in case' options, where young people's reflexive risk management simultaneously takes place in moments of consumption and in the transitional life choices they make.

In terms of combining the social concerns of transition studies and the consumption and identity concerns of youth culture studies, it can be argued that Bourdieu's theoretical framework productively links the two fields. It is his work that is used in this thesis research to break the social/cultural dichotomy. His notions of habitus, field, cultural capital and distinction remain most vital for theorising young people's attitudes towards their futures, the risk maintenance they will maintain on their transitional pathways and the cultural identities and consumer tastes they display. Several studies in the field of education have used Bourdieu's theories in vital ways, in particular the Australian work of Julie McLeod and Lyn Yates (2006), and the UK research of Stephen J. Ball, Carol Vincent and Dianne Reay (see Ball 2006; Ball, Davies, David and Reay 2002; Vincent and Ball 2007; and Reay 2000; 2004a; 2004b; 2004c).

Situating this Research in the Field of Youth Studies in Australia

There have been *many* valuable studies of Australian youth, from the early work of Connell (1971) on children's conceptions of politics; through investigations into educational inequalities (for example, Connell *et al* 1982; Collins, Kenway and McLeod 2000; McLeod and Yates 2006); to the critical youth studies of Johanna Wyn, Rob White, Peter Kelly and Ariadne Vromen. Much of this research has been published in the *Journal of Youth Studies*. Prior Australian youth research in the fields of sociology, education and politics has established many of the basic concepts that are expanded upon in this thesis. My research here engages with the young people's *perceptions* about their current social, cultural and political engagement, and their future life trajectories through the analytical lens of class. In this sense, the research presented here dovetails with McLeod and Yates' (2006) use of class where it not only maintains its usefulness for understanding disadvantage, but is vital for understanding how the relatively privileged also experience a homology of anxieties, and how individuals throughout social space perceive and maintain distinctions in regard to risks, advantage, disadvantage, power and their own future trajectory.

In the relevant theoretical field, the thesis attempts to synthesize a theoretical nexus between those who focus on individualised and reflexive notions of choice and transition, and those who continue to emphasise how class plays an important role in how these phenomena are perceived and dealt with. It does this in part by engaging with the ambitions, obstacles and risks of students at three very different schools - highlighting the complexities and distinctions that young people's positions in social

space, especially class – constitutes as everyday experience. These disparities range from obvious differences in experiences and in the content and themes of their opinions and perceptions about a wide range of issues; to more subtle differences in the way they employ language and express (or do not express) passions and emotions. These obvious and subtle distinctions illustrate habitus at work, demonstrating how the very notion of reflexivity itself is a mediated form of cultural capital. The distinctions thus identified exemplify how social class delineates the experience and perception of personal and global risks. The following chapters deal with the theoretical paradigms mentioned above in more detail.

PART 2

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

CHAPTER THREE

The Work of Pierre Bourdieu

Introduction

This is a thesis about youth and social inequality, which implies a social justice agenda. Bourdieu envisioned sociology as an '*eminently political science* that is crucially concerned with, and enmeshed in, strategies and mechanisms of symbolic domination' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 50 emphasis in original). Bourdieu 'considered any sociological analysis as an intervention in the real world' and 'that what is found out about the world has the potential to change it' (Grenfell 2004: 2). It wasn't until late in his life that he directly engaged in public comment, what some have referred to as his 'political turn' (Schinkel 2003), with some spirited polemical interventions on neo-liberal economics, the exploitation at the heart of 'globalization' and his thoughts on the European Union (for example Bourdieu 2008b). For most of his career he played the role of the social scientist and maintained a distance from engaging in public debates, relying on his research to contribute to the political field. Nevertheless, his social science and civic activism need to be seen as two sides of the one coin of an 'analysis and critique of social reality aimed at contributing to its transformation' (Poupeau and Discepolo 2004: 76).

As pointed out earlier, Bourdieu's work is used across a large number of research fields that deal with social inequality. Possibly due to the order of translation to English (see Savage and Bennett 2005), usually this sees each field focus upon the specific books or articles that Bourdieu contributed to that field. This occurs at the expense of a broader and more valuable understanding of his work as a whole. For

instance, cultural studies practitioners have tended to cite only *Distinction*, whereas the study of education has used *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture* (Bourdieu and Passeron 1990). This study makes use of Bourdieu's notions of habitus, cultural and social capital, symbolic violence, distinction and field with reference to Bourdieu's broader corpus.

Accordingly, the following discussion provides a wide ranging picture of Bourdieu's theories and case studies augmented by recent use, development and critique of his work. Outlining Bourdieu's work is challenging because each theoretical concept relies on its relationship with other concepts in his work. The following explains his key terms to show how his theory accounts for social reproduction whilst maintaining a mechanism for social change. This is particularly important for the overall interpretation of data advanced in this thesis.

Bourdieu and the Analysis of Class

Bourdieu acknowledges a bricolage-like approach to his influences: 'You get what you can where you can' (Bourdieu 1990 [1987]: 29). In a sense, his sociological theory has been described as an attempt to unite a 'Marxian programme for a sociology of reproduction with the Durkheimian programme for a genetic sociology of symbolic forms' with Weber's 'conceptual resources for a theory of the social functions of symbolic goods and symbolic practices' (Brubaker 1985: 747). This description goes some way to highlighting Bourdieu's use of the 'founding fathers', but his work incorporates ideas and influence from many more sociologists and philosophers, and more importantly, his own ideas were constantly developed and reworked in relation to the many empirical studies he performed.

Bourdieu extends the economic logic of Marx's concept of ruling class domination into the fields of culture. He treats 'all practices, including those purporting to be disinterested or gratuitous, and hence non-economic, as economic practices directed towards the maximizing of material or symbolic profit' (Bourdieu 1998 [1977]: 183).

For Bourdieu humans are symbolizers rather than producers [and his] approach can maintain only a weak genetic connection to the original Marxist class project' (Pakulski and Waters 1996: 44).

The combination of Marxian and Weberian notions of class is seen in *Distinction*, where Bourdieu studies classes in the form of status groups:

Focusing not on their external conditions of existence (which are, in the last instance, the fundamental source of their power and privilege) but on their shared dispositions and their "objectively harmonized" practices, which are perceived by others as positive or negative signs of natural social worth, and which thereby contribute to the legitimation of the social order (Brubaker 1985: 763-764).

Bourdieu develops Marx's 'classes' in relation to the mode of production to include sub-classes within the working and ruling classes. These sub-classes are based on occupations. Within the ruling class there are three occupational groups contending for the highest rank in social recognition: intellectuals and artists; professionals; and owners and managers of large-scale industry (Honneth 1986: 62). This creates the phenomenon of *dominated* dominant groups, that is, those high in cultural capital but relatively low in economic capital – a description that fits parents of the youth cohort at Sunnydale High in this empirical study. Bourdieu referred to these groups as 'cultural intermediaries' (Bourdieu 1984; see also Wright 2005; Bridge 2001) which others have postulated as the 'new middle class' (Betz 1992; Featherstone 1991), characterised by a range of specific occupations.

Notably, occupations are not classes in themselves; they do however indicate two things. Firstly, properties of individuals are directly shaped by their occupation or their position in the system which includes: the relation to the means of production (class in the Marxian sense); and their degree of market power (class in the Weberian sense). Secondly, occupation indicates other properties that, while not intrinsic characteristics of the occupation, shape access to fields by selecting or rejecting individuals: level of education; gender; geographical location; and so on (Brubaker 1985: 766). In short, by combining elements of class theory from both Marx and Weber, and developing the concepts further through his own work, Bourdieu adds a cultural and symbolic dimension to class struggle and domination ‘that is not confined to the narrow sphere of economy’ (Joppke 1986: 54) but reaches beyond to address issues of access and opportunity, advantages and obstacles. This is particularly relevant to the sociological study of youth.

Therefore, for Bourdieu, class is defined in a dual thesis. First, class describes shared dispositions as well as shared conditions of existence (or relations to production). Second, that status groups are classes concealed (Brubaker 1985: 767). In these terms, ‘class’ becomes a wide explanatory principle and is as much an experience or perspective as a social position. This experience or perspective is intrinsically related to *habitus*, outlined below. Bourdieu acknowledges that within occupations there are further divisions based upon sex, age, ethnicity or race. These do not necessarily cut across class divisions; they are divisions within classes that indicate different conditions of existence and different dispositions and opportunities. Class, therefore, is a group distinguished by its conditions of existence and its corresponding dispositions (Brubaker 1985: 767). The boundaries between classes defined in this

way are socially constructed and ‘flickering’ (Pakulski 2004: 228n3). Flickering in this sense means that the boundaries of class are not heavy and static. The influence of class in terms of the habitus it produces can mean different things in different fields. This allows the trajectories of occupations and individuals to be traced as they move through social space. These trajectories depend on: their possession of important capitals in different social fields; the balance between economic and cultural capital; and the possibilities of capital conversion (Pakulski 2004: 110-112).

Students attending the three schools in this research have different levels of possession of cultural capital in its many forms. The possession (or not) of these capitals, combined with location, the occupation of parents and the school environments themselves are used to delineate between three different types of habitus for the purposes of analysis. These dissimilar habitus mediate very different attitudes, opinions and experiences of the transitional youth period. Significantly, it is understood that habitus can expose the individual to, or protect the individual from, a variety of risks and opportunities, both real and perceived. Habitus also contributes to the possibility of a young person succeeding in the balancing act between risks and opportunities.

Agency/Structure and Subjectivism/Objectivism

Bourdieu attempts to break the agency/structure dichotomy, which is very important in terms of the reflexive modern paradigm where the notion of ‘choice’ becomes central. He does this by proposing the relative autonomy of individual fields from the economy, or in Marxian terms, the superstructure from the base. Bourdieu proposes that agency and structure make up a symbiotic relationship, inherently and

continuously influencing each other, rejecting the reductive notion of materialistic and technological determinism that denies agency. In his empirical work he combines an analysis of social structures with an examination of the way particular agents practice within, and because of, social structures. Bourdieu focuses on the symbolic dimension of social relations and demonstrates that there is a political economy of culture (Swartz 1997: 67). This can be readily understood employing the concept of field.

Field

As individuals, we do not take part in *all* of society. We pick and choose the *fields* and *social spaces* we practice and consume within. Bourdieu prefers the terms field and social space to the over-generalised notion of society (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 16). The relationship between structure and agency takes place in fields. The concepts of field and habitus are therefore relational in the sense that they function fully only in relation to each other. The theory of fields is incomplete without a social theory of agents, where habitus is central. Furthermore, the theory of habitus is incomplete without the notion of ‘structures that makes room for the organized improvisation of agents’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 19). Fields define ‘the structure of the social setting in which habitus operates’ (Swartz 1997: 117). A field may be of any size and any importance. The fields relevant to this thesis project where there are influential prior studies using Bourdieu are: education (for example Naidoo 2004; Maton 2005; Lingard, Rowolle and Taylor 2005; Zipp and Brennan 2003); media (for example Benson 2006; Champagne 2004; Hesmondhalgh 2006); and economics and politics (Chopra 2003; Widick 2003; Aldridge 1998). Specific occupations can also be considered as fields (Raedeke, Green, Hodge and Valdiva

2003). As Bourdieu says, ‘there are... as many fields of preferences as there are fields of stylistic possibilities’ (1984: 226).

A field is simultaneously a space of conflict and competition (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 19), and in the course of these struggles, the very shape and divisions of the field become a central stake. Fields are arenas of production, circulation, appropriation, service, knowledge and status, where the competitive positions held by actors rely on the struggle to accumulate and monopolise different forms of capital (see de Nooy 2003; Fligstein 2001). Fields maintain a relative autonomy from each other, while at the same time influencing each other. Bourdieu theorises this by constructing autonomous and heteronomous poles within fields. The autonomous pole is the part of a field that operates via its own logic with its own rewards in isolation from the rest of society. The heteronomous pole is the part of a field where influence from other fields is expressed (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002). The ability to compete or succeed in any particular field requires ownership of, or access to, a specific form of ‘capital’.

Forms of Capital

Forms of capital are central to most, if not all aspects of opportunity, opinion and choice. Capital is an important analytical concept in this thesis for examining the different experiences and expectations of the three distinct youth cohorts. Bourdieu defines capital as:

Accumulated labour (in its materialised form or its ‘incorporated’, embodied form) which, when appropriated on a private, i.e., exclusive basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labour (1986: 241-242).

The distribution of different forms of capital among classes determines ‘the chances of success for practices’ (242). When Bourdieu uses the word ‘capital’ it is not necessarily in the traditional economic form of money or property (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 10). Rather, all fields are analogous with the field of economics in the sense that they function in the same way. That is, one requires capital to participate, compete and succeed when one enters a particular field in search of its rewards. Originally, three forms of capital were identified:

Economic capital, which is immediately and directly convertible into money and may be institutionalised in the form of property rights; ... *cultural capital*, which is convertible, on certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of educational qualifications; and... *social capital*, made up of social obligations (connections), which is convertible, in certain conditions, into economic capital and may be institutionalised in the form of title nobility (Bourdieu 1986: 243).

Economic capital is simply capital as Marx defined it: money, shares and property. Social capital denotes privileged connections, networks and acquaintances that open doors to powerful or prosperous positions. Social capital operates towards both inclusion and exclusion. For example, prominent family networks and prestigious schooling maintain and lubricate social and economic advantage by including the privileged and excluding others. In this sense, there are connotations of nepotism or ‘jobs for the boys’.

In *The State Nobility*, Bourdieu (1996) highlights a myriad of examples where advantage is inherited. For example, attendance at specific educational institutions can be traced as giving a considerable head start into the upper echelons of the powerful fields of government, bureaucracy and business (see Hartman 2000). The concept of social capital has been reworked and co-opted (for example Putnam 2000; Latham

1998) to the point where Bourdieu's original conception is lost (see Law and Mooney 2006; Levitas 2004; O'Brien and O'Fathaigh 2005). This reworking engages primarily with inclusion and see networks as positive forces in society to the point where they seem to reinforce and legitimise the transmission of the very privileges that Bourdieu criticised (Adkins 2005). The use of social capital in this research project employs Bourdieu's original critical version. An example from the data is Rydell Grammar School, where there is a waiting list from birth for pupils to attend. Those on the waiting list can all afford the tuition, but preference is always given to those whose parents or siblings are former pupils.

Cultural Capital

Cultural capital is one of Bourdieu's most popular analytical concepts. It covers a wide variety of resources including verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information, and educational credentials (Swartz 1997: 75) and intangible inflections of style. For Bourdieu, cultural capital is an attempt to explain:

The unequal scholastic achievement of children originating from different social classes by relating academic success...to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fractions (Bourdieu 1986: 243).

It is therefore a most significant concept for this thesis, which considers three secondary schools that serve different class groups of young people. Like the other forms of capital, cultural capital is distributed unequally between different class groups. Distinctions of cultural capital can also apply to other social groupings including gender (for example Love and Hampston 2003), and race and ethnicity (for example Modood 2004). For this thesis, it is understood that cultural capital is 'differently formed in accordance with the different experiences and conditions of existence of the different social classes' (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 11).

Notably, Bennett *et al* (2005) – among many others - propose the need to sometimes qualify Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital. They maintain that many of the distinctions in cultural forms through taste that Bourdieu first highlighted remain, yet some have become 'diluted' since Bourdieu's original study. In terms of cultural activity, the middle classes tend to be somewhat 'omnivorous' by displaying knowledge about legitimate, middle-brow and popular forms, whilst those with less education in more working class milieu tend to remain 'univorous' by focussing mainly on popular forms (Petersen and Kern 1996). Other studies have shown the continuing importance of cultural capital to understand unequal outcomes in education. For instance, Reay (2004a) has highlighted how various educational policies that have increased the role of parents at schools have made the workings of cultural capital more visible. This is especially relevant for academically selective programmes like Sunnyside High in this research.

Cultural capital exists in three forms:

The *embodied* state, i.e., in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body; in the *objectified* state, in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.)... and in the *institutionalised* state, [such as] educational qualifications (Bourdieu 1986: 243).

Embodied cultural capital denotes an understanding of the correct use of language in specific situations (Bernstein 1973; Bourdieu 1991), or the knowledge of jargon, symbols and codes in specific fields, for example. It refers also to the aptitude for dressing appropriately in different social contexts and using body language. Cultural capital in its embodied form is the least 'learnable' due to the time of socialisation needed for its development. Its hereditary transmission gives it greatest weight in social class reproduction (Bourdieu 1986: 245-247).

Cultural capital is *objectified* in objects and media such as books, paintings and equipment. In a more contemporary form, access to important technologies in the home such as broadband internet are also examples. Whilst objectified cultural capital has a materiality that suggests easy transferability, it is in relation to embodied cultural capital where it maintains its exclusivity:

What is transmissible is legal ownership and not (or not necessarily) what constitutes the precondition for specific appropriation, namely, the possession of the means of “consuming” (Bourdieu 1986: 247).

An object is transferable. However, the likelihood of knowing what objects are ‘tasteful’ to consume and how to ‘understand’ them is not.

On the surface, *institutionalized* cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications is a way of neutralizing the advantages of embodied cultural capital, giving the bearer of a degree or certificate a measure of institutionalised advantage (see Moss 2005). Nevertheless, whilst some individuals from dominated, or less privileged class positions do manage to acquire prestigious qualifications from the most privileged universities, they might be subsequently excluded from prestigious jobs and social positions due to other factors. These might include lack of financial capital, lack of embodied and objectified cultural capital, or lack of social capital networks to be shortlisted for such positions in the first place. People inculcate, acquire access to, or ownership of particular forms of capital, including cultural capital, from their habitus. This is one of the most important aspects of Bourdieu’s theorising for this thesis.

Habitus

Habitus is the most difficult part of Bourdieu's analysis to explain - it is both one's outlook towards society and the place where the outlook is formed; it is a structuring mechanism that operates from within agents, though it is neither strictly individual nor in itself fully determinative of conduct (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 18). Essentially, habitus introduces the idea of agency into structuralist thought without resorting to the voluntarism found in Sartre's existentialism (Swartz 1997: 101).

One's habitus is formed by elements of family, friends, education, biology, geography, class, race and gender. Bourdieu in *Distinction* proposes that people of similar habitus have similar dispositions and are likely to make similar choices in certain situations, especially when it comes to cultural tastes. For instance, Bourdieu shows that 65 per cent of less educated working class people in France chose 'Blue Danube' as one of their three favourite songs, while only 11.5 per cent of highly educated upper class people included it in their favourite three songs (1984: 15). More recently, Bennett, Emmison and Frow's *Accounting for Tastes* Australian study shows a similar pattern of responses. For instance, 18.5 per cent of professional workers chose classical music as their first choice, compared to only 2.9 per cent of manual workers. There have been many critiques of the concept of habitus (for example Lau 2004; Lizardo 2004; Noble and Watkins 2003; Mutch 2003), with many concerned about apparent determinism.

For this study however, habitus is considered a highly productive heuristic to describe the set of principles that generate and organise practice. These principles are objectively adapted to their outcomes 'without presupposing conscious aiming at

ends' (Bourdieu 1990 [1987]: 53), 'enabling agents to cope with unforeseen and ever-changing situations' (Bourdieu 1998a: 72). As the result of the internalization of external structures, habitus reacts to the solicitations of the field in a roughly coherent and systematic manner (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 18). In reference to habitus, Bourdieu uses descriptive terms such as 'class unconsciousness', 'cultural unconsciousness', 'habit-forming force', 'set of basic, deeply interiorized master-patterns' and 'generative principle of regulated improvisations' (Swartz 1997: 101). Habitus provides the agent with a set of dispositions that form a range of actions of an individual in particular situations.

The habitus is both the generative principle of objectively classifiable judgements and the system of classification of these practices. It is in the relationship between the two capacities which define the habitus, the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste), that the represented social world, i.e. the space of life-styles, is constituted (Bourdieu 1984: 170).

For Maffesoli, habitus is:

A quality, in the true sense of the term, which realizes (or negotiates) a relationship with the world; it is a sense grafted onto 'power', the matrix for the social will-to-life which allows us to adapt (Maffesoli, 1996: 166).

The concepts of habitus and cultural capital are most vital in the area of the sociology of social reproduction, education and culture.

Class and culture are both vertically ranked in mutually reinforcing ways. The culture of the highest classes becomes the most distinguished culture, apparently because it is innately superior but really because it is the culture of those who rule. In its turn, culture is a class signal that helps to maintain class domination and to shape individual life chances, much as economic capital does (Erickson 1996: 217).

Within this process the analytical tool of cultural capital helps to highlight the mechanisms by which patterns of social inequality are reproduced through the education system despite the fact that 'modern centralised state education systems were designed specifically to provide equality of opportunity for all children'

(Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 10). There is an ‘affinity’ between the cultural and cognitive habits of the higher social classes and the criteria of norms, acceptance and success in the education system. This affinity is what explains the greater success of students from higher social classes, rather than innate biological ability by itself.

The habitus, and the cultural capital that flows from it, thus provide the cultural and cognitive *resources* for scholastic success (or, alternatively, set in place the conditions for scholastic failure) (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 11).

These factors have considerable influence on school pupils’ outlooks towards the future, especially in terms of higher education (Ball, Davies, David and Reay 2002) and career choices (see Karlsen 2001). This is pertinent to Chapter Eight which analyses ambitions and obstacles, where higher educational and career choices themselves represent the social practice of distinction.

Distinction and the Cultural Arbitrary

As individuals engage with each other in different fields, or choose different fields over others, they are making what Bourdieu famously referred to as distinctions, particularly in their choice of consumer objects and social practices. This is generally expressed as an affinity or appreciation of ‘high’, dignified or decent cultural artefacts (Ostrower 1998; Silva 2006): fine wine and dining (Oygard 2000; Warde, Martens and Olsen 1999), the great works of literature and classical music. Often, it is dependent on an expression of ‘disgust’ at the taste of the ‘vulgar’ working class (see Lawler 2005). Correspondingly, those with lower class habitus also make distinctions. Central to Bourdieu’s theorising of social reproduction is how habitus instils ‘a sense of one’s place’ (1984: 466) which can manifest, for example, as a reluctance in individuals to seek employment or cultural experiences outside what is ‘normalised’ for their particular habitus, excluding themselves from what they are often already

excluded from. For instance, the ‘lower classes’ do not eat at expensive restaurants not only because they probably cannot afford it, but because it’s ‘not for the likes of us’ (Bourdieu 1984: 471). Here, habitus subtly forces the limited choices of material and structural conditions onto the individual who succumbs to *amor fati*¹ and is therefore ‘content with what one is and has’ (Bourdieu 1984: 573-574).

Bourdieu maintains that hierarchical power relations in culture have no necessary basis and are ‘constructed to reflect the interest of dominant groups’ (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: x). Taste in this sense ‘emerges at once as avenues towards pleasure and as a class phenomenon, as a form of cultural capital and as an instrument of oppression’ (Gabriel and Lang 1995: 109). High culture is not necessarily ‘better’ than popular culture: polo is not necessarily better than football, or filet mignon is not necessarily better than a T-bone steak. Therefore, while all cultural artefacts are not necessarily relative (Bennett 2005), they are what Bourdieu refers to as the ‘cultural arbitrary’ - their ‘worth’ is in effect a social and cultural creation based on power relations.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) discuss the cultural arbitrary at length when outlining their theory of symbolic violence in education. They maintain that all pedagogic action is symbolic violence because it imposes cultural hierarchies on the arbitrary and constructs a ‘legitimate’ culture pertaining to the interests and affinities of the dominant, marginalising the culture of the dominated. Taste becomes a form of thought ‘terrorism’ (Bourdieu 1984: 511), where symbolic violence is enacted by the condemnation of aesthetic judgements.

¹ When Bourdieu is referring to *amor fati* here, he is discussing taste. ‘An agent has what he [sic] likes because he likes what he has, that is, the properties actually given to him in the distributions and legitimately assigned to him in the classifications (Bourdieu 1984: 175).

Cultural capital in this context is the affinity the dominant classes have with their own officially legitimised culture. In terms of educational aptitudes relative to the cultural arbitrary, the embodied cultural capital of privileged parents acts as a head start for their children by:

Providing from the outset the example of culture incarnated in familiar models, enable[ing] the newcomer to start acquiring the basic elements of the legitimate culture, from the beginning, that is, in the most unconscious and impalpable way (Bourdieu 1984: 70-71).

When those low in cultural capital begin schooling, not only do they have to learn the legitimate culture, they need to begin ‘the labour of deculturation, correction and retraining that is needed to undo the effects of inappropriate learning’ (Bourdieu 1984: 71; see also Gunn 2005; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979) that their less privileged habitus has so far provided. As Willis and others have shown, the dominated then often reject education, refusing what they are refused by rebelling against the educational authority which they do not see as really benefiting them. This creates an anti-school culture and in effect creates a self-fulfilling prophecy of scholastic failure (see Willis 1977; Dolby, Dimitriadis with Willis 2004).

UK research has uncovered how the ‘cognitive choices’ that students make regarding higher education are also expressions of distinction based on judgements of status (Ball, Davies, David and Reay 2002). In the research presented in this thesis, there are quite marked differences in the obstacles the students perceive that may get in the way of achieving ambitions. There are also marked differences in the way various risks and problems are comprehended and engaged with. These differences are conceived of in this project as forms of distinction. In explaining these kinds of processes,

Bourdieu uses the term *doxa* – commonsense ideas about what is normal for a given class-based habitus.

Doxa, Misrecognition and Illusio

Each field has ‘a set of core values and discourses which a field articulates as its fundamental principles and which tend to be viewed as inherently true and necessary’ (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: xi). This is what Bourdieu refers to as *doxa*, ‘what literally goes without saying’ (Crossley 2005: 67). This commonsense set of understandings is the result of historical struggles between the dominant and dominated. The historical evolution of doxic knowledge and attitudes is usually forgotten, hiding the political contestation of when its normality was established, making it appear natural (Bourdieu 1998a: 56-57). As Bourdieu notes, ‘*Doxa* is a particular point of view, the point of view of the dominant, which presents and imposes itself as a universal point of view’ (57). These forgotten historical struggles are what establish the cultural arbitrary in cultural hierarchies, or, why it is assumed that a high culture genre (for example) has more integrity and importance than a popular culture genre. The relationship between *doxa*, habitus and fields involves a form of forgetting that individuals are both produced by and caught up in (see Fowler 2004). This is ‘misrecognition’:

When we feel comfortable within our roles within our social world, they seem to us like second nature, and we forget we have actually been produced as particular kinds of people (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: xiv).

Bourdieu (1996, 2001) identifies numerous instances of misrecognition, particularly the valuing of certain forms of competence over others. For example, white collar work skills are misrecognised as higher status or more valuable than blue collar work skills.

Bourdieu frequently used the metaphor of ‘games’ when explaining the social world. In each field, with its own inherent doxa, logic and rules, habitus provides the agent’s ‘feel for the game’. *Illusio* is the belief that entering, practicing or competing in a specific field is worthwhile. This belief comes from an ‘ontological complicity between the habitus and the field’ (Bourdieu 1990 [1987]: 194). *Illusio* describes being caught up in and by the game - believing the game is ‘worth the candle’ and that playing the game is worth the effort:

We can indeed, with caution, compare a field to a game...Thus we have *stakes* which are for the most part the product of competition between players. We have an *investment in the game, illusio*...: players are taken in by the game, they oppose one another, sometimes with ferocity, only to the extent that they concur with the belief (*doxa*) in the game and its stakes; they grant these a recognition that escapes questioning’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 98 emphasis in original)

Players in a given field such as sport or education share an ‘objective complicity’ in the stakes and antagonisms of the field. Every social field creates its own *illusio* for the players entering it (see Garrigou 2006). For example, the misrecognition of neo-liberal economics as a form of ‘progress’ that increases human happiness (Bauman 2008; Hamilton 2003) is central to the maintenance of *illusio* in the powerful fields of economics and politics.

Illusio is very important for understanding the world view of the dominated classes in Bourdieu’s work. However, it is important to note that it is not the traditional Marxist concept of ‘false consciousness’ where the dominated are passive, culturally duped into accepting class inequality. The actions and choices that Bourdieu uses as instances of *illusio* are the result of rational decisions. They serve as examples of how habitus mediates our options. It is important to note that Bourdieu’s conception of

mediated choice acknowledges the myriad possibilities we all face. His theorising on this matter avoids passive determinism by highlighting the range of agency an individual has regardless of their position in social space. For example, the stakes and rewards of entering a field of criminal activity may be understood through the notion of *illusio*, where the obvious risks and consequences are perceived to outweigh the possible rewards in an economy of ‘making do’ (McRobbie 2002: 135).

Illusio in the sense of investment in the game doesn’t become illusion, in the originary sense of the art of deceiving myself... until the game is apprehended from the outside, from the point of view of the impartial spectator, who invests nothing in the game or its stakes’ (Bourdieu 1990 [1987]: 195).

Whilst Bourdieu admits that completely ‘scientific’ or objective social science is virtually impossible, the uncovering of misrecognition and the *illusio* it creates is at the heart of what he conceives of a ‘reflexive sociology’.

Symbolic Power and Violence

For Bourdieu, class relations are power relations. Like the link between cultural capital and economic capital, symbolic power is as important for explaining the process of social reproduction as physical or economic power. Central to his project is uncovering the symbolic forms of power inherent in class relations, where political and economic discourses maintain symbolic violence (see Crossley 2005; Topper 2001). Bourdieu’s whole project may be read as a hunt for the uncovering of symbolic domination (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 119). In this sense, Bourdieuan sociology is one that is constituted by the uncovering of hidden and subtle forces that are not immediately perceived, but are not limited to focussing on discourse (Crossley 2005: 319; see also Kim 2004).

Weber’s understanding of the state was that it held a monopoly on legitimate violence. In Bourdieu’s understanding of the state, while the governed have no trouble

in recognising actual state violence, in the population both the dominant and the dominated misrecognise the subtle forms of domination that manifest from political relations, knowledge systems and economic forces as 'normal'. In this sense, the state maintains a monopoly on symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 221). Misrecognition is central to this power (Bourdieu 1996: 30-53). Symbolic power is dispersed on a number of levels. In a similar manner to Foucault's description of power relations within discourse, Bourdieu highlights how experts 'are sanctioned to make judgements and impose definitions/categories so that their words, at least within the domains that they are sanctioned, carry more power than those of others' (Crossley 2005: 317).

Symbolic violence 'is the violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 167). Agents recognise (or misrecognise) institutionalised expert knowledge. Symbolic power in operation becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy in that those who are affected by it consent to it. Symbolic violence is 'a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims, exerted for the most part through purely symbolic channels of communication and cognition (more precisely misrecognition)' (Bourdieu 2001: 1-2). In terms of language for instance, the use of specialised jargon in a field may exclude people who are unfamiliar with it. A lack of cultural capital may see an individual feel excluded or belittled if they visit an art gallery and do not understand notions of 'surrealism' or 'postmodernism'. This exclusion is a form of symbolic violence.

In *Language and Symbolic Power* Bourdieu (1991) argues that language is not just a form of communication but a medium of power, especially in the field of politics

where words are in fact actions. Put simply, 'what matters in talk, in discourse, is not some power inherent in power itself, but the kind of authority or legitimacy with which it is backed' (Bourdieu and Eagleton 1992: 112). For instance, derogatory terms used in Australia like 'single mums', 'junkies', 'boat people', 'cue jumpers' and 'dole bludgers' are used to secure specific political interventions that shore up the interests of voting constituencies. The myriad of moral panics around young people are also used in this way. Symbolic power is exercised by those with the ability to produce these representations, while those labelled often feel the effects of symbolic violence in the form of marginalisation, stigma and lack of status. Symbolic violence may also be experienced as a lack of access to resources, being treated as inferior, or being limited in terms of realistic aspirations (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: xvi), what Adams refers to as the possibility of a 'post-reflexive choice' (2006). Bourdieu and his colleagues (1999) describe many examples of how people experience 'social suffering' living in positions that lack recognition (see also Couldry 2005; McRobbie 2002; 2004).

For example, in terms of the lives of young Australians, policies over the last fifteen years have tightened access to various forms of welfare support. At the same time governments at all levels are encouraging young people to continue their education. Young people are now staying in education longer. However there may not be jobs for them at the end of their studies. Moreover, the combined effects of low youth wages, high youth unemployment and increased financial dependency on the family, has had unintended social consequences, such as increased youth poverty and homelessness (Schneider 2000). This demonstrates how symbolic violence is experienced when powerful structural and economic factors deny the individual

agency and freedom of youth. This is compounded by ‘individualisation’, discussed at length in the next chapter.

Social Reproduction and Social Change

Bourdieu went to great lengths to show how social class positions were reproduced from one generation to the next. His work contains both an explanation of social reproduction and of systems of social change. For Bourdieu, the powerful fields of politics, economics, business and education are much more likely to reproduce ‘existing social inequalities rather than challenging and transforming the status quo’ (Webb, Schirato and Danaher 2002: xv) because the individuals that take up decision-making positions in these fields are obviously likely to benefit from a continuation of their dominance. But this is not just a deliberate act on the part of the dominant: the forgotten struggles that produce doxa and place the cultural arbitrary in hierarchies, see culture itself impel inequality through largely misrecognised symbolic means.

The specifically symbolic logic of distinction additionally secures material and symbolic profits for the possessors of a large cultural capital: any given cultural competence (e.g., being able to read in a world of illiterates) derives a scarcity value from its distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction for its owner. In other words, the share in profits which scarce cultural capital secures in class-divided societies is based, in the last analysis, on the fact that all agents do not have the economic and cultural means for prolonging their children’s education beyond the minimum necessary for the reproduction of the labor-power least valorized at a given moment (Bourdieu 1986: 245).

In short, the dominated suffer the double bind of lacking both the economic means to compete *and* the cultural proficiencies to be upwardly mobile. This becomes an economy of scale: some individuals do manage to break the binds and improve their socio-economic situation and status but *most* do not. Nevertheless, social change does happen and this is explained in Bourdieu’s construction of social fields. The field is a

dynamic structure. Accordingly the change of position of any agent or knowledge set within the field changes the structure of the field as a whole. For some of the young working class people studied in this thesis project, they represent the first member of their extended family to pursue post-compulsory education. So their presence in a senior secondary classroom minutely changes the field. It signifies both individual upward social mobility, and is at the same time an expression of structural changes to the Australian labour market which have seen many more young people completing 12 years of schooling.

Recent Social Change

Consumer Culture

The move from production to consumption sees agents form their own identity through consumer products, as well as traditionally ‘defining’ themselves by their occupation (see Bauman 1998a; 2007a). This has implications for the very nature of Bourdieu’s classificatory system, because he closely links class with occupation. This is still a legitimate way of classifying agents economically. However, culturally this is not necessarily the case because, for example, young people from different occupations in the field of work engage with a matrix of similar consumer products and popular culture to create their identities. The postmodern blending of high and mass culture sees people from different habitus or, in the case of Bourdieu’s maps², people at different ends of the axis, engage with similar products. This was certainly

² The ‘maps’ of ‘social space’ (Bourdieu 1985) that Bourdieu provides as illustrations of his theory must be thought of as ‘snapshots’ of a particular moment in time (see Bourdieu 1984: 186, 262 and 266 for examples of these maps and Gayo-Cal, Savage and Warde (2006) for some recent sketches). They are not permanent structural diagrams. For instance, Bourdieu’s map in *Distinction* of what each social class eats (1984: 186) would certainly have changed since the study was done. The inclusion of these maps is often a distraction from the complex nature of Bourdieu’s project, as they seem to illustrate the ‘structural functionalism’ of which Bourdieu is sometimes accused.

the case for the data from young people of different class backgrounds in this project. Such cultural blending in the fields of leisure and fashion bring into question the viability of cultural taste 'distinction' as everyone seems to be consuming largely the same items. Yet, the increasing importance of consumerism itself would seem to reinforce the cultural logic of Bourdieu's analysis of reproduction, class struggle and domination, where the distinctions become more subtle.

New Middle Class

The apparent rise of a 'new middle class' is sometimes seen as a postmodern phenomenon (for example Betz 1992). Lash and Urry (1987) refer to the 'service class', made up of employers, managers and professionals. Bourdieu himself has referred to the 'new cultural intermediaries' (1984). These agents are engaged in providing symbolic goods and services - including marketers, advertisers, public relations, radio and TV workers, journalists, therapists, dieticians (Featherstone 1991: 44) and personal trainers. Featherstone notes:

Bourdieu (1984: 371) remarks that their quest for distinction via the cultivation of lifestyle, a stylized, expressive life, 'makes available to almost everyone the distinctive poses, the distinctive games and other signs of inner riches previously reserved for intellectuals' (Featherstone 1991: 44).

These people are effectively responsible for the partial collapse of the distinction between high and low culture as they legitimise new fields, such as sport, fashion, popular music, film and popular culture in general, as valid fields of intellectual analysis (Featherstone 1991: 44-45). This 'new middle class' is analogous with many of the parents of students at Sunnydale High in this thesis.

Yet for my analysis here, cultural capital still has analytical force. Firstly, one may point to examples of ‘distinction’ forming *within* areas of mass culture, not necessarily *between* high and low culture. Secondly, even if actual ‘distinction’ through style, taste and fashion is becoming less visible, it may in fact increase the possibility of inequality and exploitation because ‘dominance’ becomes increasingly hidden. The merging of high and low culture does not necessarily weaken the concept of cultural capital as a useful analytical tool, because different things become important in terms of what constitutes cultural capital. Furthermore, the concept of cultural capital still provides the analytical skills needed to critically interpret culture, whether highbrow or popular, because of the distinctions that young people operate within the popular culture realm. Finally, the operation of cultural capital in relation to capacities and tastes is being extended rather than diminished in the information and communication technology revolution.

The Information Age

Castells, in his ‘information age’ trilogy (1996; 1997; 1998) argues that information and technology are increasingly important in terms of social stratification. In Bourdieu’s terms, they are becoming increasingly important as cultural capital, in the fields of education, work and leisure. Castells maintains that people now are where they are in the system by virtue of their expertise, not because they are property owners. There is no doubt that education and information are taking a central role in the rise the ‘new middle class’, even though access to the most prestigious forms of cultural capital are still biased towards the propertied classes. The access to elite universities is pertinent. For example, Halcli (2000: 75) shows that access to Oxford and Cambridge, the two most prestigious UK universities, has become, if anything,

more closed in recent decades in regard to the social origins of its candidates. Castells proposes a new kind of meritocratic principle, insisting that capitalism is now led by those with informational capital – a ‘faceless collective capitalist’ (Castells 1996: 474). However, this overlooks the continued importance of traditional economic and cultural mediators to scholastic success and access to information. Castells tends to overstate the influence of informational activities while underestimating the capacity of established forms of ‘class’ to continue (Halcli 2000: 79). Claims that people as subjects in the new information economy are becoming more individualised should not lead to the denial of productive class analysis. As Castells points out (1997), the modern information economy weakens the power of isolated individuals to understand, let alone assert their class interests, while the very same forces bolster the power of a small sector of society to exert influence. This hardening of stratification has seen more and more wealth and income flow to the upper class, leading to more extreme inequality in distribution (Perelman 1998: 32-33).

In terms of the lives of young Australians, their position at a surface level may be seen as one of relative advantage. Like all young people in developed countries they have grown up in the era of the information age. Unlike their parents, they are not aware of life without the new and dominant technologies that constitute the new cultural capital in informational capitalism. This would seem to give younger people a distinct advantage over previous generations. However, yet again, these advantages are not for everyone, largely due to factors of access and influence (Livingstone 2008; Facer and Furlong 2001). Young people with a wealthy or even middle class habitus continue to have more ability and tools to engage with the ephemerality of informational capitalism to their own advantage - that is, they possess the necessary

cultural capital to master the ‘network’ capacities. Conversely, those with a lower socio-economic habitus often still find an extensive and disproportionate array of barriers, hurdles and risks to their social advancement and economic sustenance. In that sense, despite the information technology revolution, not much social change has occurred in class barriers to social advancement.

As quality education becomes increasingly privatised and expensive, one’s economic capital becomes even more important in terms of access to relevant cultural capital. For instance, if a family can afford to pay over four thousand Australian dollars a term to enter the elite school in this study, Rydell Grammar, the child is virtually guaranteed access to the latest in education, information and knowledge resources. Yet, if a family cannot afford the privilege of private education, access to such resources will be limited, not least because class sizes are very large in public education and small in private education. It is still the case that one does not only need to inculcate cultural capital to develop a habitus that will be disposed towards school success, one needs economic capital to have access to further relevant cultural capital through education to succeed in the future. In terms of Bourdieu’s ‘distinction’, young people at any school now are all likely to be wearing similar clothes when at leisure and listening to similar music. Yet, even while postmodern styles seem to increasingly cut across various dispositions of habitus in those fields, the access by young people from different class positions to all three forms of cultural capital in the fields of education and work does not. It is here that Bourdieu’s conceptual framework of habitus, field and cultural capital still offers a relevant and operational form of class analysis.

Critique of Bourdieu

In itself, the breadth of critique of Bourdieu's work is testament to his importance and influence. Although a minority of critical works on Bourdieu are purely critical, a great many use Bourdieu's theorising as a starting place from which to rework and redevelop his key concepts. This in itself may be an indication of Bourdieu's 'relative rightness' (Laermans 1992). Two common points of criticism address, firstly, specific epistemological problems of determinism in his various theoretical concepts, and secondly, his lack of treatment of gender, race and ethnicity³. He has even been accused of being a 'new global intellectual for capital' (Tumino 2002). The most common criticism, despite Bourdieu's constant defence against it, is that of determinism.

One of the most systematic and extensive criticisms in this regard is from Alexander (1995b), who concludes that Bourdieu's project suffers so much from determinism that it is a 'failed synthesis' (see Potter 2000 for a defence against Alexander). Bourdieu's work has been defended against accusations of determinism by himself and others many times (for example Sweetman 2003: 533-7). It is said that those who accuse him of determinism 'fail to recognize...the force of [his] insistence that habitus is not to be conceived of as a principle of determination but as a *generative* structure' (McNay 1999: 10 my emphasis). Bourdieu's theories are open to interpretation and therefore can be read as deterministic or not (see Woodman 2007). Some of the deterministic readings of Bourdieu stem from the concepts of *illusio* and *misrecognition*, which if not used carefully can render the working class passive victims of structure in a similar manner to more traditional Marxian concepts of 'false

³ Some of his later work attempts to rectify this. See *Masculine Domination* (2001) and his preface to his associate Sayad's *The Suffering of the Immigrant* (2004).

consciousness' and 'ideological state apparatus'. Bourdieu's concepts are meant to show how some people make choices to enter fields, or make choices within them, which may well be to their own detriment. They do not diminish the agency expressed in the many ways 'the dominated' in Bourdieu's examples resist symbolic violence. Resilience, struggle, competing and optimism serve as active expressions of the refusal by the dominated to 'accept their fate'.

Beck argues that Bourdieu's concept of different forms of capital needs to be rethought in a transnational context, for instance, to explain how a migrant's ability to convert economic or cultural capital to social capital may be blocked by institutionalized racism in their new country (Beck 2002: 33). In an interview (Beck and Willms 2004), Beck maintains that Bourdieu's attempts to 'expand the idea of class' is trapped in the concept of the nation-state. For Beck the possibilities of converting capitals for immigrant upward mobility 'run up against national blockades and ethnic discrimination' (Beck and Willms 2004: 105). This alludes to Beck's central criticism of the notion of class in general: that it is confined in 'methodological nationalism' (Beck 2007a, 2007b). Yet, these 'blockades' to advancement – whether economic, cultural, social, political or symbolic – are the very point of Bourdieu's project. In summary, like Beck's censure of class as a whole, his criticisms of Bourdieu tend to be inconsistent, simplistic and lack empirical examples (see Atkinson 2007a, 2007b). They either misread or ignore the nuances of the concept of habitus itself. Furthermore, cultural capital works well for sociological analysis in an international context. For example privileged Western countries' education and qualifications rank the highest in terms of career legitimacy and credibility, to the point where the use of English as a language is an increasingly

important skill and many students in the ‘developing world’ travel large distances and spend lots of money on securing education in the ‘developed world’. This may complexify inequality and exclusion, but Bourdieu’s concepts are still well equipped to analyse these disparities.

In developing Bourdieu’s work, others have theorised their own forms of capital through critique. For example, Pakulski (2004: 109-122) implicitly argues for the concept of ‘political capital’ – an idea not expressed in Bourdieu’s work. This lack is claimed to have diminished Bourdieu’s ability to analyse notions of citizenship and the role of political and class elites. Kosut (2006) develops ‘professorial capital’ to highlight an ‘academic glass ceiling’ of class exclusion based on her own experience as a working class doctoral student in the United States. Weenink (2008) argues for ‘cosmopolitan capital’ as a way for understanding the how some (more cosmopolitan) parents prepare their children for engaging with a globalised world. Reay (2004b, 2000) maintains that ‘emotional capital’ is a useful extension of Bourdieu’s theorising to understand the juxtaposition of class and gender processes embedded in parental involvement in education. In a similar vein, Huppatz (2009) proposes forms of gendered capital. Verter (2003) has developed the concept of ‘spiritual capital’ to study religions as a competitive symbolic economy. All of these examples can be seen as dimensions or developments of cultural capital.

Concluding Remarks

Bourdieu’s complex theoretical framework approximates a ‘reflexive sociology’ in seeking to unpack and deconstruct the structure/agency dichotomy. His extensive and useful theoretical work has provided a vital means for analysing important

contemporary developments - described as reflexive modernity - which has been put to use in a number of critical social science endeavours. Their paradigms are also relevant to the analysis of data in this thesis and will be considered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

Theoretical Overview: Reflexive Modernization

We, the bewildered witnesses to the demise of the great stories of salvation, are hunted by our new destiny of *choice*. To cope with the possible both seductive and threatening to us, we are compelled to assume all the risks that go with decision making (of which catastrophe, nuclear or environmental, is the extreme image and metaphor)... Choosing is the inescapable fate of our time (Melucci 1996: 44).

Introduction

This chapter outlines the reflexive modernization paradigm by engaging primarily with the work of Beck and Giddens, who have provided youth researchers significant theoretical devices for understanding youth transitions. It then uses the work of Bourdieu and Foucault to critically engage with these ideas and to sketch out how the understanding of contemporary subjectivity needs to consider the interactions of habitus, reflexivity and forms of governmentality.

Theories of reflexive modernity primarily address the task of describing and explaining post-industrial western society. Industrial society has been replaced by a new modernity in which the old predictabilities and certainties of industrial development are threatened, and a new set of risks and opportunities are brought into existence (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 3) that young people must deal with as reflexive individuals. Where early modernity involved rationality and belief in the potential salvation offered by harnessing scientific knowledge, in late modernity (or post-modernity) the world is perceived as a dangerous place where we are constantly

confronted with risks to manage and prevent, even though we live more comfortable lives than any generation before us.

Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens are the primary theorists of reflexive modernity. For Giddens, 'one of the distinctive features of modernity... is an increasing interconnection between the two extremes of... globalising influences on the one hand and personal dispositions on the other' (1991: 1). The Western world is witnessing historical transformation, but, against the pessimism of postmodernists, the problems of modernity are not solved by its rejection, but by its radicalization (Lash and Urry 1994: 32). Reflexive modernity constitutes heightened awareness, questioning and suspicion of 'bads' or risks. Public debate on risk rages while private lives see our awareness of risk heightened at the everyday level (Lupton and Tulloch 2002a: 318). These risks range from the threat of terrorism, ecological disasters, and nuclear accidents or war to risks that individuals must negotiate in their day to day existence such as unemployment, loneliness, high cholesterol or depression (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 3). So risk, in this sense, is as much about perception as reality. As Giddens notes:

Preoccupation with risk in modern social life has nothing directly to do with the actual prevalence of life threatening dangers...people in the developed societies are in a much more secure position than most were in previous ages (1991: 115).

From Class Society to Risk Society

According to Beck, people are being freed from traditional social roles and networks which destroy previous securities, obliging the navigation of new form of risks in all aspects of their day-to-day lives. Further, there is an understanding that it is the

processes of modernization itself that are producing these risks (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 3). This is not to say that social constraints disappear. As Beck notes:

Like wealth, risk adheres to class patterns, only inversely: wealth accumulates at the top, risks at the bottom. To that extent, risks seem to strengthen, not abolish, the class society. Poverty attracts an unfortunate abundance of risks. By contrast, the wealthy (in income, power or education) can purchase safety and freedom from risk (1992: 35).

Here, Beck acknowledges unequal vulnerability to the risks, instabilities and uncertainties of contemporary society, but at the same time large-scale risks do not discriminate between classes – *‘poverty is hierarchic, smog is democratic’*.

Risks display an *equalizing* effect within their scope and among those affected by them. It is precisely therein that their novel political power resides. In this sense risk societies are *not* exactly class societies; their risk positions cannot be understood as class positions, or their conflicts as class conflicts (Beck 1992: 36 emphasis in original).

In this sense, whilst day-to-day vulnerability to risks of poverty or unemployment remain analogous to socio-economic stratification, protection from large scale risks such as fallout from a nuclear power station accident, global warming or the unforeseen manifestations of genetically modified foods cannot necessarily be bought – they threaten our very existence or, at least, life as we currently know it. Here, the so called ‘boomerang effect’ (Beck 1992) sees even those who profit from producing these global risks unable to escape their dangerous threats and consequences. Taken together, the intensification of these large and small scale risks engenders changes in our very consciousness towards individualization. Protecting ourselves becomes a driving force of individual practice, encouraging people to exercise surveillance over themselves in terms of exposure to, and protection from, perceived risks.

Beck suggests that in the era of reflexive modernity, class ties have weakened in a subjective sense, so that it is not always possible to predict lifestyles, beliefs and opinions using occupation or family background information (see also Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 3-4). He argues that 'people with the same income level, or to put it the old-fashioned way, within the same 'class', can or even must choose between different lifestyles, subcultures, social ties and identities' (Beck 1992: 131).

Within old-fashioned class societies the main concern was 'the visible stratification of material needs. Here, hunger and surplus or power and weakness confront each other' (Beck 1992: 44). In a sense, the uncertainties of a traditional class-based society are located in a 'culture of *visibility*' that is, 'emaciated hunger contrasts with plump satiety; palaces with hovels, splendor with rags' (Beck 1992: 44). Individuals are all too aware of their subject positions because their class position is visible through their possession and display of obvious material and symbolic assets. One's hierarchical position in the risk society is not however as easily perceived since material deprivation affects a smaller percentage of the population. It is here that 'immediate need competes with the unknown element of risk' (Beck 1992: 44). Risks themselves are not necessarily visible, and nor is the management of them, effective or otherwise. Yet even so, as Beck himself notes, risks and wealth are distributed in inverse proportions. This suggests that class inequality remains pertinent to considering young people's opportunities and choices.

Zombie Categories, Detraditionalization and Individualization

As visible, material 'need' in Western society diminishes, Beck maintains that traditional forms of 'class' are now a 'zombie category' (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim

2002; Beck and Willms 2004: 20-24). Class is described as a sociological concept that remains in use but is increasingly irrelevant (see Lovell 2004 for a defence of these concepts). Central to Beck's criticism of class is his creation of other sociological 'zombie' categories such as the nuclear family and the nation-state. Sociological study of inequality through the lens of the nation-state is increasingly irrelevant as 'an increasing number of social processes are indifferent to national boundaries' (Beck 2000: 80) and are lumbering under what he calls 'methodological nationalism' (Beck 2007b). Other theorists advance the idea that we face increasing uncertainty in a world complex and difficult to understand, as we move towards a 'liquid' modernity (Bauman 2000) or 'post-traditional society' (Giddens 1994) in which fixed sources of meaning such as religion, gender, class, marriage, lifetime employment and the nuclear family diminish.

It is therefore claimed we have seen the 'death of class' (Pakulski and Waters 1996) in late modernity. Certainly people no longer identify with class positions in the traditional form of 'class consciousness'. In the climate of uncertainty that rapid change engenders, our contemporary roles in life are not fixed, but constantly reinvented and constructed: 'we have no choice but to choose' (Giddens 1991: 81; Tulloch and Lupton 2003: 61) in an apparently class-free consumer market. Setbacks and crises in the life trajectory come to be understood as individual inadequacies, rather than as outcomes of social and economic processes that sustain inequality (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 4), for example unemployment. As a consequence of global changes, increases in social inequality (see Pakulski 2004; Lash 2002: 4-5, 28-30; Castells 1998: 70-165) may be associated with an intensification of individualization. More and more people placed in unpleasant, uncertain or difficult

situations interpret them as their own failure and do not necessarily associate them with a disadvantaged socioeconomic position. In short, risk - and our attempts to insulate ourselves from it - becomes a central factor by which we understand, or in some cases do not understand, the world. Individual subjectivity in this process is an important axis of risk perception and is considered more significant than one's class position.

In such conditions, reflexive individual negotiation of risk replaces traditional 'class consciousness'. In terms of this 'detraditionalization', Beck points out that class differences and family networks do not really vanish as the process of individualisation proceeds. 'Rather, they recede into the background relative to the newly emerging "center" of the biographical life plan' (Beck 1992: 131). Beck explains what happens to class consciousness in the following metaphor:

The concave mirror of class consciousness shatters without disintegrating, and that each fragment produces its own total perspective, although the mirror's surface with its myriad of tiny cracks and fissures is unable to produce a unified image (1992: 134-135).

This produces a situation where perception of life becomes both private and ahistorical. New generations don't know or understand the contexts of the lives of previous generations as '*history shrinks to the (eternal) present*, and everything revolves around the axis of one's personal ego and personal life' (Beck 1992: 135 emphasis in original). Media saturation, especially the influence of television, is central to fostering this development.

In terms of the lives of young people, relative 'poverty' is often now the experience for middle class Australian youth whilst undertaking university study. They may not be financially independent or supported by their parents, but if their parents' taxable

income is above the levels that allow government provision of the Centrelink welfare payment for youth, they will receive no income support at all for tertiary study. So the affluence of one's parents has become a personal risk for the individual young person, and he or she has to find individual ways of managing this risk.

Nevertheless, the denial of class stratification in Beck's work, like that of so many recent social and political theorists is puzzling. It is true in most Western societies at least, that material deprivation affects a decreasing percentage of the population (Hamilton and Denniss 2005). But at the same time that economic inequality is increasing (which Beck acknowledges), while measures of happiness and satisfaction are falling or remain stagnant at best (Pusey 2003). Insecurity and uncertainty affect those Australians lower on the social scale much more intensely (Pusey 2003). Class, both in the Marxian sense of relations to the means of production, and in the Weberian sense of status and market relations, still has obvious significant impact on individuals' chances of happiness, upward mobility, life chances or economic prosperity. The contrasting data from young people analysed in this thesis seems to bear out that premise.

Risk and Reflexivity

Beck's concept of risk is bound up with the concept of reflexive modernization. The term does not just point to the increased reflexivity of individuals; it is a distinct second phase of modernity – 'the modernization of modernity' (Beck, Bonss and Lau 2003: 1). Beck's conception of 'reflexive' is not solely about an individual reflecting on him or herself, but rather 'self-confrontation', and the political and economic use that may be made of this. The concept of risk is politically linked to reflexivity

because anxieties about the risks, both global and individual, that modernity is producing promote questions about the legitimacy and reliability of current life practices.

Reflexive modernity therefore has implications on both a macro and micro level. Globally, modernity itself – especially its key ingredients science and technology - has become reflexive as it is forced to face the unforeseen and often disastrous manifestations of itself. For example, the latest technology and science is forced into moderating the negative effects of the earlier application of science and technology. Furthermore, science often seems to change its mind about the ‘goods’ and ‘bads’ (think of the constant reports about red wine or chocolate and their benefits or detriments for health). Widespread perception of the possibility of risk is equally important to the reality of risk for the individual, and may even be more important. For instance, the huge ‘Y2K’ scare at the turn of the millennium saw many people in a panic mode preparing for risks that simply did not happen. The political potentiality of this as a technique of governmentality is obvious, particularly when one considers the success of the politics of fear within the so-called ‘War on Terror’ (Giddens 2005).

At an individual level in the period of reflexive modernity, people do become increasingly disembedded from their traditional ties of family, locality, social class and religion. One result is that individuals increasingly fashion their own identities and biographies. They are then linked together by the Weberian notion of market relations. Self-actualisation becomes perceived as ‘a balance between opportunity and risk’ (Giddens 1991: 78). Significantly for this research project, “‘reflexive’ does not

signal an increase in mastery and consciousness, but only a heightened awareness that mastery is impossible' (Latour 2003: 36). This has important implications for the young person seeking to construct a successful life trajectory, and highlights the intensity and stress of 'choice'.

Reflexivity and Biography

Beck and Giddens differ in their conception of reflexivity. Beck is more concerned with the analysis of the influence of institutions while Giddens focuses more on the construction of individualised self-biographies. Beck's version of reflexivity leads to a vision of emancipatory social change, whereas Giddens' conception of reflexivity tends to reproduce social structures (Lash and Urry 1994: 37-38).

Beck's version of reflexivity stems from the individual's relationships with institutions and expert knowledge discourses. At the heart of the individualization process lays an inherent contradiction: 'individualization takes place under the general conditions of a socializing process that makes individual autonomizations increasingly impossible'. The traditional 'roles' and support networks of social class and the nuclear family dissolve, to be replaced by the constraints, controls and standardizations of the labour market and consumerism. For example, people become 'dependant on fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets, contrary to the image of individual control which establishes itself in consciousness'. In short, traditional collective supports and networks are replaced by '*institutional biographical patterns*: entry into and exit from the educational system, entry into and exit from work' (Beck 1992: 131 emphasis in original). This is a form of *detraditionalization*.

Beck maintains that these changes leave people in an 'institution dependent control structure' (1992: 131), more open to external standardization and control than ever before. Detraditionalization 'frees' us from our class 'roles' but traps us as standardised consumers. How we live now becomes '*the biographical solution of systemic contradictions*' (Beck 1992: 137 emphasis in original), where the 'institutional conditions that determine individuals are no longer events and conditions that just happen to them, but also consequences of the decisions they themselves have made' (Beck 1992: 136). Where setbacks had been traditionally seen as a 'blow of fate' sent by nature, structure or God, these events are now considered to be 'personal failures' reinforced by new forms of institutionalized 'guilt ascription'.

For Giddens, reflexivity is a self-referring, even self-constitutive process that operates in a continuous and ongoing way – a kind of feedback loop. Giddens takes the wider institutional risks that Beck describes and shows how they affect the individual. As Lash and Urry put it - where 'reflexivity transfers from monitoring the social to monitoring the self' (1994: 41). Giddens uses the term reflexivity to describe contemporary social identity struggles where one's life is not subsumed in traditional roles but is 'a set of passages circumscribed by risks and opportunities' (Lash and Urry 1994: 39). In late modernity therefore, 'the self is reflexively understood by the person in terms of his or her biography' (Giddens 1991: 53) – a narrative or story about progress throughout life. 'We are, not what we are, but what we make ourselves' (75).

For example, the ‘life plans’, investigated in this project in terms of ambitions and obstacles, become the ‘substantial content of the reflexively organised trajectory of the self’ (Giddens 1991: 85). This involves processes of ‘self-interrogation’, adapting, making comparisons, getting ideas on how to improve one’s body, knowledge, mindset, and lifestyle, evaluating how one measures up in the social stakes and so on. Aspects of Giddens’ notion of reflexivity invoke a Goffman-esque ‘performance of the self’ (Goffman 1959) and ‘impression management’ where individuals need to adjust their performance to suit an ever-increasing set of social stages. ‘The self forms a trajectory of development from the past to the anticipated future. The individual approaches his [sic] past by sifting through it in light of what is anticipated for an (organised) future’ (Giddens 1991: 75).

The individualization that Beck and Giddens theorise has been critiqued for seeming to describe the professional middle class and marginalise the experience of the disadvantaged. Therefore, the past that Giddens refers to here needs to be understood in terms of Bourdieu’s notion of habitus as it may or may not provide the individual with the resources needed for a successful trajectory. This lies at the heart of the theoretical synthesis offered in this thesis.

Ontological Security

For Giddens, both the search for ‘ontological security’ and attempts to minimise anxiety characterize late modernity (1991: 36, 84). He defines ontological security as ‘a sense of continuity and order in events, including those not directly within the perceptual environment of the individual’ (1991: 243). We need to protect ourselves from fears of our own vulnerability and distance ourselves from a multitude of threats.

In the search for ontological security, individuals constantly try to insulate and protect themselves from an ever-increasing matrix of risks - unemployment and financial security, loneliness, personal relationships, health problems, crime, ecological disaster or terrorism (Denney 2005). In the absence of established systems of meaning, such as religion, to provide security, we face 'the looming threat of personal meaninglessness' (Giddens 1991: 201). Ontological insecurity drives the longing for security and stability in terms of the physical, the mental and the economic in an increasingly insecure and unstable world. Yet, while people are forced to put themselves at the centre of their plans and reflexively construct their social biographies (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 4), they are also faced with responsibility or blame for things that may go wrong in their lives, usually under the rubric of 'poor choices'. For example, youth unemployment is seen as a consequence of lack of skills or motivation on the part of the individual young person, that they are not 'job ready' or flexible enough to meet the demands of the labour market, instead of being seen as a direct outcome of labour market change and growth in unemployment. Structure is excluded from explanations of unemployment; blame is placed on the side of agency.

The individualization of risk may mean that situations that would once have led to a call for collective action are now envisioned as something which can only be solved on an individual level through personal action (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 4-5). Beck argues that as a consequence of these changes, increase in social inequality may be associated with an intensification of individualization as more people placed in unpleasant, uncertain or difficult situations interpret them as being due to their own failures. Zygmunt Bauman's (2004, 1998a, 1998b) work in particular shows the global consequences of these developments. Ontological security becomes the goal

for individuals in a sea of existential anxieties created by the disjuncture between rhetorical discourses of individualised neo-liberalism ('we are free to choose') and the constrained reality of their day-to-day lives. To avoid any kind of either/or explanation, habitus addresses the structure/agency debate in a productive way for studying youth from the perspective of reflexive modernity.

Using Bourdieu and Foucault in Reflexive Modernity

The next section uses the work of Bourdieu and Foucault to critically engage with the theories of reflexive modernity. Whilst Foucault and Bourdieu have considerable differences in their theoretical projects, the similarities are more interesting and like governmentality and Marxian scholars (Milchman and Rosenberg 2002), further critical encounters between the two are much needed.⁴ Both see knowledge as central to power relations and have been criticised for an overly 'totalized' or 'determined' subject in this regard. Their work is used here to elucidate how reflexivity is mediated by habitus and is also analogous with the demands of neoliberal subjectivity.

Risk and Governmentality

The notion of risk in reflexive modernity has been analysed by a number of prominent scholars using the notion of governmentality. Foucault attempts to describe the historical transformation of political power from monarchical rule ('off with his head'!) to more discrete coercive forms of political power and economics ('Scary interest rates hit home'). Foucault's notion of governmentality deals with how we think about governing - with the different mentalities of government (Dean 1999: 16).

⁴ See Ball (2006), Callewaert (2006), Fowler (1997: 92-93), De Certeau (1984: 45-60), Hibbert 2005, Sterne (2005), Cronin (1996), Schubert (1995), Couzens Hoy (1999), Burkitt (2002), Samuelson and Steffen (2004) and Alexander (1995a: 206n16) for discussions on the similarities and differences of Bourdieu and Foucault, or how their work can (or cannot) complement each other.

Institutional regimes, knowledges, practices and procedures are structured, internalised and normalised to exercise power over and through certain sectors of society (Wyn and White 1997: 133). As Dean explains, ‘to ensure the happiness and prosperity of the population, it is necessary to govern through a particular register, that of the economy’ (Dean 1999: 19). This sees the art of government become ‘economic’, both in terms of the medium it uses and in how the government uses direct power (Dean 1999: 19).

Governments focus on complex social interactions within a plethora of discourses, through a range of ‘multiform tactics’ (Foucault 1991: 95) that address people’s affective links with things such as wealth, risk and culture in their day-to-day lives (Foucault 1991: 93). Governments regard ‘these subjects, and the forces and capacities of living individuals, as members of a population, as resources to be fostered, to be used and to be optimized’ (Dean 1999: 20). In this sense, ‘the people’ become a thing to be used for specific political and economic purposes and ‘the people’ largely allow themselves to be used.

In short, the contemporary term governmentality refers to less spontaneous exercises of power over others, and particularly, to the use of techniques and technologies that regulate individual social practices (Hindess 1996: 106). Techniques of domination interact with techniques of the self (Burchell 1993: 268). Individuals both police themselves and are open to certain forms of manipulative tactics. Governmentality refers to the regulation of conduct. However,

In addition to acting directly on individual behaviour, *it thus aims to affect behaviour indirectly by acting on the manner in which individuals regulate their own behaviour*. In this respect, too, government involves an element of

calculation - and a knowledge of its intended object - that is not necessarily present in every exercise of power (Hindess 1996: 106 my emphasis).

Citizens in late modernity engage with the narrow dominant economic and political discourses that characterize the neo-liberal state. This creates neo-liberal governmentality whereby individuals follow neo-liberal logic in the regulation of their own behaviour and transfer this disposition to other, non-economic, areas of their lives. As Adkins (2002) has highlighted, the individualization process that Beck and Giddens describe produces a subject very close to a reflexive individualised neo-liberal subject. Further, in a variety of fashions, these governmentalities can become objectified in durable dispositions and bodies - what Bourdieu refers to as *habitus* - as individuals engage and inculcate information from a myriad of regulating discourses. This is an important point for the research presented here.

If we accept the Foucaultian definition of governmentality, there is no such thing as risk in reality. It is simply:

A way of representing events in a certain form so that they might be made governable in particular ways, with particular techniques and for particular goals. It is a component of diverse forms of calculative rationality for governing the conduct of individuals, collectives and populations (Dean 1999: 177).

So while Beck emphasises the importance of risks, real or perceived, risk itself 'may be understood as a governmental strategy of regulatory power by which populations and individuals are monitored and managed through the goals of neo-liberalism' (Lupton 1999: 87). Foucault, like Beck and Giddens, emphasizes the role of expert knowledges and discourse in the construction of late modern society and subjectivity. Foucault argues that expert knowledges are central to producing reflexive practices that formulate a certain kind of subject. Processes of normalization are central to these technologies. Risk is therefore governed:

Via a heterogeneous network of interactive actors, institutions, knowledges and practices. Information about diverse risks is collected and analysed by medical researchers, statisticians, sociologists, demographers, environmental scientists, legal practitioners, bankers and accountants, but to name a few. Through these never-ceasing efforts, risk is problematized, rendered calculable and governable. So too, through these efforts, particular social groups or populations are identified as 'at risk' or 'high risk', requiring particular forms of knowledges and interventions (Lupton 1999: 87).

From a Foucaultian perspective then, risk is a moral technology. 'To calculate a risk is to master time, to discipline the future' (Ewald 1991: 207). Neoliberal governmentality is formed by both coercive and more subtle techniques that bind the ambitions of the state to individuals' ambitions, needs and wants. These strategies and techniques emit from both the state, but also from other areas, particularly the mass media (Lupton 1999: 87-88). Therefore, 'risk is a form of rationality, a way of thinking about and representing events' (Dean 1999: 184). It can therefore be argued that the discourses of risk act as 'technologies of the self' (Foucault 1988; 1997) that imbue opportunities and limitations (Green *et al* 2000: 111).

A crucial aspect of the relationship between governmentality and risk is that the regulation and disciplining of risk is directed at autonomous, self-regulating individual citizens. Individuals police themselves; they exercise power upon themselves as 'normalized subjects' who are in pursuit of their own best interests, freedom, happiness and healthiness (Lupton 1999: 88). The concept of risk, developed through normalization, initially focuses on aggregates or populations, rather than individuals. However, 'expert' information gathered about risk is then used to advise individuals about how they can avoid risk, and therefore, how they should conduct their lives. It is here that we see the practice of governmentality in action. Beck himself seems to acknowledge this in the following:

Institutional determinations and interventions are (implicitly) also determinations of and interventions in human biographies... Individualization thus means precisely institutionalization, institutional shaping and, hence *the ability to structure* biographies and life situations *politically*. The actual shaping usually occurs unseen, as a 'latent side effect' of decisions explicitly related to intra-organizational matters (educational system, labor market, work, etc.) (Beck 1992: 132 emphasis in original).

An example is where unemployed young people are encouraged, or forced, to participate in 'work-for-the-dole' schemes under the auspices of gaining experience and training to aid in the avoidance of the 'risk' of long-term unemployment. In practice, it is dubious how successful these schemes are in eventually gaining meaningful employment for the participant. Rather, it enforces a form of discipline on the participant that is congruent with the needs of the economy, which in turn may encourage the formation of self-discipline. Bourdieu sees the risk of unemployment as the 'ultimate foundation of this [neo-liberal] entire economic order... The insecurity of job tenure and the menace of layoff it provides [along with the] reserve army of employees' at all levels of the employment hierarchy make up the 'structural violence' of unemployment (Bourdieu 1998b: 4). In other words, people may be influenced by the dominant discourse of neo-liberal governmentality due to the risks implied by prolonged unemployment, with the state fostering this influence. This 'structural violence' underpins the possibility for the neo-liberal system to survive, despite individuals being aware that they are less secure and possibly individually worse off.

In the field of youth sociology, the work of Peter Kelly on risk has highlighted various instances of how young people are regulated (1999), problematised (2000) and institutionally mistrusted (2003). While there has been considerable work on the nexus between governmentality and risk, there has been far less analysis of how one's

position in social space influences one's engagement with governmental discourses. It is here that habitus can provide key analytical insights for projects such as this thesis.

Habitus and Reflexivity

There have been several recent attempts to bring together the concepts of reflexivity and habitus. Of particular note is the work of Skeggs (1997; 2004), McNay (1999), Adkins (2002; 2003), Sweetman (2003), Adams (2006; 2007) and Lewis (2006). Skeggs noted that reflexivity may be a disposition of the middle classes (1997). While arguing that gender identity is not easy to transform reflexively, McNay (1999) criticized the under-theorised relationship between habitus and movement across fields which *can* lead to reflexivity and change. Sweetman (2003) observed that reflexivity itself may now be becoming habitual, forming what he calls a 'reflexive habitus' that encodes middle class privilege:

For some, reflexivity and flexibility may actually characterise the habitus, and that for those who display a flexible or *reflexive* habitus, processes of refashioning – whether emancipatory or otherwise – may be second nature rather than difficult to achieve (Sweetman 2003: 537 emphasis in original).

As Adams (2006) points out, reflexivity and flexibility do not mean the same thing. Flexibility is the ability to move from field to field easily, which Bourdieu noted was an inherent property of some habitus. Reflexivity on the other hand suggests an openness to scrutiny, especially self criticism and self discipline. Nevertheless, flexibility itself may be a factor of contemporary reflexivity in the capacity to be able to perform different roles in different fields.

Adkins' work shows how reflexivity dovetails with neo-liberal governmentality to become a resource that allows mobility and taking up 'privileged positions' in late modernity (2003: 33). As for the formation of identity, Adams asserts that:

To fully understand contemporary identity formation we need to also emphasise what comes 'after' the moment of reflexive awareness, in which choices are resourced or otherwise (Adams 2006: 523).

It is therefore the 'post-reflexive choice' of youth - the meaningful reality of having achieved one's choice - which should be the key focus for understanding 'contemporary identity and the social basis for their distinction' (Adams 2006: 523). In this sense, despite increased reflexivity and the intensified importance of 'choice' regardless of position in social space, successfully fulfilling the desired trajectory of the self still requires socio-economic resources and opportunities, which are facilitated by cultural capital.

Reflexivity may have permeated the contemporary habitus of the current generation of western youth as some youth researchers claim. However, it can be argued that this happens at differing levels of intensity depending on differential amounts of cultural capital stratified according to socioeconomic status. The ability to use reflexivity productively for fulfilling the trajectory of the self is still largely reliant on traditional educational and material factors of advantage and privilege. So for some privileged youth with a more materially and ontologically stable habitus, the process of reflexivity may well be routine, normal and easy. Employing reflexivity as a form of cultural capital, they self-regulate, adapt and compete in a satisfying life trajectory. For other youth from more strained circumstances, reflexive self-discipline, flexibility and adaptation may be much harder to achieve. The outcome of their less advantaged circumstances may manifest as less effective cultural capital through a more uncertain, less privileged and confident habitus. In rhetorical terms, contemporary youth have an abundance of choices; but in hard reality not everyone has the decisive option of wide post-reflexive choice.

In this synthesis there is no intention to lose sight of risk, and perceptions of risk as shaping forces in the constitution of contemporary youth trajectories. However, risk position should be considered as an added, yet perhaps somewhat hidden, dimension of an individual's socio-economic class position. As stated previously, the unequal distribution of resources needed to achieve successful reflexive negotiation of risk tend to be understood by modern citizens as *individual* inadequacies and weaknesses, rather than the consequences of structural and global economic forces. The pervasive neo-liberal discourse encourages young people to perceive actual structural and material inequalities as a *personal* lack of relevant skills or education, inadequate personality traits and other individual deficiencies. Understanding the contours of class positions and these so-called individual deficiencies highlights a fundamental sociological purpose – linking private troubles to public issues (Willis 2004).

Reflexivity and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu states that 'rational and conscious computation' may emerge 'in situations of crisis which disrupt the immediate adjustment of habitus to field' (1990 [1987]: 108 see also Crossley 2003). Reflexivity becomes most pronounced 'where there is a lack of 'fit' between the habitus (the feel for the game) and field (the game itself)' (Adkins 2003: 21). It is here one can identify the possibility for the emergence of reflexivity as a form of cultural capital mediated through class-based habitus. The highly fragmented process of youth 'transitions' (Skelton 2002) constitutes a disruption that demands the adjustment of habitus to field as young people make the increasingly complex and extended voyage from 'child' to 'adult', from education to work, or from living with parents to finding their own space. The process is now so

non-linear (Lash 2003) and fractured that some youth researchers propose a new classification of 'emerging adult' (Bynner 2005). Some even suggest that the contemporary youth experience itself is an example of what adult life is moving towards (Crawford 2006; Wyn 2004; White and Wyn 2004). It is within this disrupted period of habitus adjustment that the young people in this study envision their future narratives and trajectories.

The empirical data presented in this thesis highlight many of the choice and risk phenomena described within the reflexive modernity paradigm. However, socio-economic status (SES) still obviously shapes life chances, even though the traditional notion of 'class-consciousness' may have diminished. There *is* no choice but to choose, but the lack of real choices, or at least the unequal possibility of achieving one's choices, has been understated. As Bauman (1998b: 86) points out, 'all of us are doomed to the life of choices, but not all of us have the means to be choosers'. It is the lack of acknowledgement of the importance of socio-economic position, and the often uncritical attitude towards effects of inequality and life chances, that is deficient in much reflexive modernity theorising.

The core assumption of reflexive modernization is the apparent freeing of agency from structure in the construction of narratives or biographies of the self, which operates well if explaining the flexibility of contemporary production. Yet it does not explain the 'creation of large armies of unemployed... (and) whole battalions of 'reflexivity losers' in today's increasingly class polarized, though decreasingly class conscious, information societies' (Lash 1994: 120). Lash's term 'reflexive losers' acknowledges that some people engage reflexively and some do not, but it also

implies that those without reflexivity are lacking ‘something’ – which seems dangerously close to a cultural deficit model. In the data from young people presented here, reflexivity seems to be present throughout regardless of position in social space. The disadvantaged youth are not lacking reflexivity. Rather, they lack the traditional economic, material and cultural resources that the disadvantaged have always lacked and that means it is difficult for them to put reflexive choices into practice.

Like Goffman’s (1959) notion of performance, successful use of reflexivity is not only the ability to self monitor, but the ability to flexibly perform different roles in a variety of different contexts. One’s ‘acting’ relies on knowing one’s lines: the accumulation of methods and resources to refer to and rely on. Despite his assertions to the contrary, this seems to be what Beck is saying when he says:

Social determinants that impact one’s life must be conceived of as ‘environmental variables’ that can be moderated, subverted or nullified for one’s personal life space by ‘creative measures’ suited to one’s own sphere of action and corresponding to the ‘internal differentiations’ of possible contacts and activities (Beck 1992: 136).

Or in Bourdieuan terms, reflexivity is a key component of the ‘feel for the game’ in the fields individuals choose to participate.

In Beck’s work on the risk society, there are flashes of a sense of contemporary subjectivity that echoes the notion of habitus. For example, referring to the simultaneity of individualization and standardization, he states that ‘they have the contradictory double face of *institutionally dependent individual situations*. The apparent outside of institutions becomes the inside of the individual biography’ (Beck 1992: 130 emphasis in original). This sounds a lot like the internalisation of external structures that Bourdieu theorises as a factor of habitus. It also echoes the engagement

of subjectivity with discourses and tactics that Foucault theorises as governmentality. Beck also points to the importance of cultural capital when he states ‘the key to a livelihood lies in the labor market. Suitability for the labor market demands education. Anyone who is denied access to either of these faces social and material oblivion’ (Beck 1992: 133). If anything, Beck’s vision here is *more* deterministic than the alleged determinism in Bourdieu’s work.

Therefore, and despite Beck’s assertions that individualization and the individualism promoted by neo-liberalism are two separate entities, the individualization thesis needs to be understood as pointing to *perception* – the way people regard their situation. If people less often identify as a member of a particular ‘class’, this indicates the pervasive discourse of neo-liberalism rather than the lessened effects of socio-economic stratification. Neo-liberalism promotes an individualized, self-disciplined, entrepreneurial governmentality (see Foucault 1991; Lupton 1999: 84-103). This is what Bourdieu calls ‘knowledge without concepts’ where ‘the social order is progressively inscribed in people’s minds’ (1984: 470-475). As Adkins (2002: 123) points out, ‘the self-reflexive subject is closely aligned to neo-liberal modes of governance’. Although there are deep epistemological differences between the theoretical paradigms of Foucault, Beck and Bourdieu, it is interesting to note these resonances. At the very least they point to the concealment of inequality within discourses of neo-liberalism.

Habitus and Governmentality

According to De Certeau (1984), Bourdieu is interested in where practice comes from, while Foucault is interested in what practice produces. There are similarities between

their notions of discourse and field respectively in terms of how they contain ‘struggles’ for domination. A key distinction is that discourses are forms of knowledge while fields are arenas of practice (that produce their own discourses).

Foucault explains how people engage with knowledge to self-regulate themselves. Bourdieu explains how individual’s engagement with fields and their doxic knowledge they produce is mediated by habitus. Similarly the fields where people choose to practice and pursue success are also mediated by habitus and our interpretations of expert knowledge emitting from various discourses are influenced by cultural capital. Again, cultural capital becomes central to the very notion of choice: those with it tend to be on the positive end of the choice spectrum, those lacking are situated towards the negative end.

Foucault was notoriously slippery on the subject of class, preferring to talk instead about power networks and the instances where institutionalised power is capable of being met with resistance. He therefore goes beyond the sociological model of power in relation to social cohesion and governments, although he does allude to ‘strategic relations’ within certain discourses. His work on governmentality, in effect, is a detailed description of how he envisioned the ‘strategic relations’ of politics and the ‘multiform tactics’ pursued within that discourse to strive for certain ends. These relations include individuals’ ‘imbrications’ with each other, with wealth, and with risks (Foucault 2000: 208-209). It is here that ‘techniques of domination’ interact with ‘techniques of the self’ that have resonance with the reflexive self-discipline described by the reflexive modernization theorists. It is also here that Bourdieu’s notion of habitus is helpful for understanding the success or failure of specific

‘tactics’ used by government. A far more nuanced stance than the Frankfurt School’s notions of state apparatus of repression, it also can account for how governmental tactics can directly use ‘class’ issues to encourage certain types of self-discipline in very effective ways. As Knox (2006: 36) succinctly points out in regard to the prolonged Australian electoral success of John Howard:

[He] has harnessed the energy of class resentment. The rich vote for him because he promises to tax them less and keep down wages. The middle class vote for him because they give him credit for their rising house prices and job security. The deserving poor vote for him because he feeds their antagonism at the undeserving poor. And the whole delicate balance is held in place by a shared refusal to acknowledge the existence of class.

Class in this sense is a vital area of manipulation for politicians, especially when the perceived ability to pursue consumerist and material desires is threatened, or at least made to look under threat. It is here that class-based habitus becomes an obvious mediator of the success or failure of governmental tactics: via the subtle influences of expert discourses and how cultural capital affects their interpretation, or through not so subtle or direct political strategies and techniques.

Governmentality or Doxa?

The notions of governmentality and doxa play very similar roles in the theoretical paradigms of Foucault and Bourdieu: they explain the historical power struggles that produce the ‘taken for granted’. For Foucault, governmentality is a self-discipline that stems from engagement with knowledge discourses that show us what is ‘normal’ and what is ‘truth’. For Bourdieu, doxa or doxic knowledge is produced through historical struggles in fields which are then ‘forgotten’. Of the two terms, governmentality is the more analytically productive. This can be judged simply by weighing up the large amount of papers and research using the notion of governmentality compared to the very few that use doxa – despite the popularity of Bourdieu’s other notions.

Governmentality scholars have provided a canon of research and developments of Foucault's notion that provide real world examples to engage with and compare. Of specific relevance to this thesis are the studies on education (see the special issue of *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 2006; Edwards 2002; McCarthy and Dimitriadis 2000; Miller 2003; Morgan 2005; Nadesan 2002). For my project, governmentality offers a far better concept for referring to instances where discourses are used to speak with or through. Governmentality is a highly effective term for describing situations where the discourse seems largely taken for granted, and where there appears to be a lack of acknowledgement of other discourses implying that the power struggles that produced the knowledge in the first place have been forgotten.

Theorising a Crossroads between Habitus, Reflexivity and Governmentality

As pointed out earlier, Beck maintains that his notion of individualisation should not be confused with the individualism promoted by neo-liberal discourses. Yet, it is difficult to see substantial differences between the two. Whilst Beck was attempting to describe individualisation and the state and private institutional developments that engender it, a Foucaultian analysis of these same institutions and discourses indicates that they operate to produce an individualised and reflexive agent that is very close to the ideal neo-liberal subject. Here, expert knowledges 'dump their contradictions and conflicts at the feet of the individual and leave him or her with the well intentioned invitation to judge all of this critically on the basis of his or her own notions' (Beck 1992: 137). 'His or her own notions' are a product of the socialisation processes that produces habitus. The above judgements that Beck draws our attention to will be different for individuals who are not in the same position in social space.

Individualization or Neoliberal Subject?

Beck proposes that individuals are liberated from their traditional social roles, but:

Become dependent on labor market relations and because of that, dependent on education, welfare regulations and support, traffic planning, consumer supplies, and on possibilities and fashions in medical, psychological and pedagogical counselling and care. This all points to the institution-dependent control structure of individual situations. Individualization becomes the most advanced form of socialization dependent on the market, law, education and so on (Beck 1992: 130-131).

Beck seems to be describing how individual engagement with a variety of discourses reflexively construct (normal or choice) biographies, yet this leaves the agent open to a myriad of governmental tactics. Many of the features of individualization that Beck describes – flexibilization, decentralization, uncertainty, mass consumption and market dependency - seem to create the ideal neoliberal individualised entrepreneurial subject.

Beck highlights how governmental tactics manipulate biographies into subject positions whilst allowing them to maintain some kind of illusory self-identity by allowing distinction through mass produced status symbols (Beck 1992: 132). He notes how regulation and schedules in educational systems and occupational roles shape biographies to the point where they ‘are directly intermeshed with phases in the biographies of people’ (Beck 1992: 132). This sounds a lot like governmentality.

Hierarchical Organised Pluralism and Choice

For Beck and Lau (2005), recent developments have formed ‘hierarchical organised pluralism’. Discourses once defined what is ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’. Recent social change and political progress has seen an increase in tolerance and legitimacy for

some alternatives. This creates a hierarchical ladder of acceptability. For instance, the nuclear family still maintains top billing as the 'normal' family, but other forms, such as single parent, de facto and mixed families, are becoming increasingly acceptable in various institutions. This development is part of the detraditionalisation process that may be seen as creating more freedom and choice. At the same time it also increases uncertainty and puts added intensity to the choices we make as those traditional roles become less central to identity.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that the ladder of acceptability is not lying on its side – there is still a hierarchy in place. Some things are still more normal than others. Some people and institutions still have more power to decide what is normal. Some individuals can achieve normality relatively easily, especially when what deemed normal is homologous to their own habitus. Other individuals have to strive to achieve normality because it may not reflect their own position, and they have to strive to do this regardless of whether it is a realistic option from one's position in social space. For the young people taking part in this research, normality seems to be defined as striving to excel in the HSC in an effort to gain entry to university and a professional career whilst maintaining relationships, leisure and consumption activities. For those without the resources, the risk of abnormality – of not being able to achieve these goals – is a real threat to their ontological security.

Concluding Remarks

For young Australians, material circumstances still have a considerable effect on educational access and achievement, which pertain directly to future life chances. For instance, a large-scale Australian study found that 'girls and boys from lower-SES

backgrounds...live their lives in circumstances of great difficulty, which impacts on their schooling and their post-school lives' (Collins *et al* 2000: 135). Bynner notes in Britain that for youth in education and work 'the gap between have and have-nots was actually getting wider, with a substantial minority of young people at the bottom end of the social scale, falling substantially behind the rest' (Bynner 2005: 375). Despite the very real existence of inequality, current discourses maintain that inadequate self-surveillance or self-discipline, or lack of specific education or training are responsible for an individual's failure over more structural economic explanations. This is symbolic violence in action.

Even taking into account Beck's claim that we should not confuse class with inequality (2007a), the findings from such studies reinforce Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction through cultural capital where 'class and culture are both vertically ranked in mutually reinforcing ways' (Erickson 1996: 217). Yet at the same time changes at the global level are actually engendering new forms of 'distinction' (Bourdieu 1984); particularly through attitudes towards certain discourses, that still look a lot like class differences. It is theorised here that the skill of using reflexivity successfully might produce a form of cultural capital (or is at least mediated by cultural capital), which sustains these new kinds of distinction. Therefore, reflexivity is similar to language as form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). Where most people are literate, those from higher socio-economic backgrounds possess a greater ability to use language 'correctly' in various contexts. So like language, we all have reflexivity and use it, but some can use it 'better' than others.

Bourdieu's work over many years actually demonstrates that 'hierarchies of classes and strata are socially constructed and are therefore fickle and fluid' (Pakulski 2004: 121). In his later work he was adamant that a 'true sociogenesis' of the dispositions constituting an observable habitus should be concerned with how the particular social order of the time 'collects, channels, reinforces or counteracts psychological processes' like disappointments, conflicts, religious conversions and so on (Bourdieu *et al* 1999: 512). However, he maintained his central argument – that habitus 'governs all forms of incorporation, choosing and modifying everything' that an individual 'ingests and digests and assimilates, physiologically and psychologically' (Bourdieu 1984: 190). In short his analytical work acknowledges duality, where 'structures are not only the outcome but the reflexive medium of action' (Lash 1994: 154). Significantly then, reflexivity is not only a possibility as a generative disposition, but may be mediated through different habitus as a form of cultural capital. The next chapter outlines and discusses the methodological issues of the research.

CHAPTER FIVE

Methodological Considerations

Research Questions

There is a lot of writing *about* young people. Yet it is rare that young people are allowed to speak for themselves, to express their own opinions and feelings. A central intention of this research is not only airing some of these opinions and feelings of the young people interviewed, but to investigate what they mean in the context of what is happening in the wider world. The aim of this project is to investigate contemporary processes of reflexivity for young Australians and to see whether class differences play a role in how these factors of reflexive modernity manifest in individuals. From this aim, three interlinked objectives were derived:

1. To use Bourdieu's theorising of cultural capital and habitus to understanding how class mediates young people's reflexivity and perceptions of risk.
2. To interrogate the contemporary mediation of reflexivity. Is it in terms of individualization, as Beck and Giddens propose, or are there differences along class lines?
3. To see how these notions are expressed through attitudes, ambitions and perceived risks.

The following methodologies were chosen, used and developed to engage with these objectives. This chapter discusses the key methodological issues of the research. The central influence, both theoretically and methodologically, is the work of Pierre Bourdieu. The notion of doing a reflexive sociology is discussed first. The mixed methods approach is also inspired by Bourdieu. He has used mixed methods

successfully in a wide array of influential studies. Here, the suitability of combining quantitative survey data and qualitative focus group data is highlighted, as well as reviewing some of the problems and limitations of these approaches. Furthermore, using the schools and parents' occupations as delineators of habitus is also an obviously Bourdieuan legacy. This will also be considered and linked to other studies employing a similar approach.

The Place of Theory in Empirical Youth Sociology

The use of social theory is an important part of any empirical engagement with young people. But we should not become dogmatic with our use of theory and blind ourselves to its relative strengths and weaknesses. On reflection, I have a tendency to focus on the strengths of Bourdieu's work and downplay its weaknesses. In this project I have used Bourdieu's strengths to criticise the theories of reflexive modernity, while also highlighting some of the strengths of the reflexive modernity paradigm. These theoretical excursions are an important element of a progressive youth sociology.

Doing Reflexive Sociology

When Bourdieu invites us towards a 'reflexive sociology' one of the main things he wants the sociologist to think about is the way our theoretical models are influenced by our social locations, and to try to become aware of our own biases (Smith 2001: 135).

Sociologists cannot be unaware that the specific characteristics of their point of view is to be a point of view on a point of view. They can reproduce the point of view of their object and constitute it as such by resituating it within social space, but can only do so by taking up that very singular (and, in a sense, very privileged) viewpoint, being obliged to place themselves there in order to be

able to take (in thought) all the points of view possible (Bourdieu 1999: 625-626).

In other words, how ‘can we claim to engage in the scientific investigation of presuppositions, if we do not work to gain knowledge of our own presuppositions?’ (Bourdieu 1999: 608). There is a need for researchers to ask questions such as: how does *our* habitus affect our motivations? How can we ensure that our own position in social space as researchers does not impede the quality of the knowledge we seek to uncover or transmit unnecessary symbolic violence towards our research participants?

The quote above sums up Bourdieu’s attitude towards doing social research: one must try as hard as possible to understand where the research participant is coming from, to be empathetic and to maintain a ‘reflex reflexivity’ based on a sociological ‘feel’ or ‘eye’ that allows the researcher to monitor while the research is actually taking place ‘the effects of the social structure within which it is occurring... to take their point of view, that is, to understand that if they were in the same shoes they would doubtless be and think just like them’ (Bourdieu 1999: 608, 625-626).

This thesis began with a statement of my own biography relevant to the thesis topic. Yet, as basic epistemological debates attest, life experiences that lead to certain beliefs and motivations should not be confused with knowledge. It is the scientific rigour that the following methodologies provide that enable research to be social science, not personal or political opinion. It is here that one returns to Bourdieu again and his assertion that sociology *is* a political science that *should* attempt to intervene and change the real world in order to produce the useful knowledge crucial to emancipatory social change. As he also stressed, reflexive sociology needs to be fundamentally rigorous in its scientific methods (see Bourdieu 2008b).

The Research

This project employs a mixed method approach. Given the aim of investigating the influence of class on contemporary perceptions on ambitions, obstacles and risks, it was necessary to gauge any distinctive class-based patterns by first using a survey questionnaire to uncover broad trends. Focus groups were then conducted to enrich and expand on these trends. The research was done at three distinctive schools with varying levels of economic and cultural capital. There were 380 participants in the survey, which is a valid sample size for descriptive statistics. There were three focus groups – males, females and mixed – completed at each of the schools with three or four participants in each.

Prior research for this project began in 2002 by using a purposive sample (May 1997: 71; Denscombe 1998: 11-17) in three schools selected according to known characteristics. This was a small scale Honours research project which served as a pilot study for the more complex PhD research project presented in this thesis (see Threadgold and Nilan 2004). The data from the Honours project confirmed the different demographic and attitudinal characteristics that implied a different kind of habitus for pupils at each school. These same three schools were therefore used again in the PhD project. Demographic characteristics included: participant's parents' occupations; the number of books in households; and home computer ownership and access to the internet. Each school is distinctive for socio-economic characteristics and academic achievement. The schools are described in detail in the following chapter. This approach engaged with Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital. Bourdieu stated that his theoretical concepts are 'polymorphic, supple and

adaptive, rather than defined, calibrated and used rigidly' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 23). In this sense, Bourdieu's notions of capital are 'thinking tools' to enable analysis and understanding of the relative homologies in research participants' responses (see Silva and Edwards, 2004).

There are obviously many ways to analysis the data here apart from class, particularly gender, ethnicity and race. However, whilst there will be some analysis in these areas, and acknowledging that these issues render more complex issues of class, it is class-based habitus that will be focussed on here. This focus is for a number of reasons. Firstly, and speaking reflexively, it is issues of class inequality that I have a strong empathetic concern for, a 'feel', or a strong 'point of view on a point of view' that I do not think I possess for other contours of inequality such as gender and race/ethnicity. It is this concern that was the motivation for this project to begin with. This concern was built into the methodology of the project itself, from the research questions onwards. Analysing gender differences would in effect be reading qualities in the data that the methodology was not designed for or intended to investigate. Secondly, the pilot study data highlighted a relative lack in gender differences. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the exclusion of gender and a maintenance of a class related focus is a limitation of the study.

Schools and Habitus: Measuring Cultural Capital

The three cohorts in the study generally display sufficient common characteristics to justify describing them as different habitus. In this sense, the data presented provides a 'snapshot' of habitus in action. Surveys were carried out at the end of 2004 and

during 2005. Focus groups were conducted in late 2005 and early 2006.

When Reay (2004c) asks ‘is it all becoming habitus?’, she highlights a valid concern. Rather than making Bourdieu’s concepts work in the contexts of the data and research settings, investigators often ‘overlay’ research analysis with his concepts. That is, there is ‘a danger in habitus becoming whatever the data reveal’ (Reay 2004c: 438). With that point in mind, this project has used the notion of habitus as an empirical method and a way of thinking, where ‘habitus, then, is a means of viewing structure as occurring within small-scale interactions and activity within large-scale settings’ (Reay 2004c: 439).

The pilot study confirmed the three schools were attended by very different cohorts of young people. However, to verify this, the first section of questions in the survey established levels of cultural and economic capital of respondents. The questions were developed from a number of different sources. In terms of respondents’ parents’ occupations an open question was asked. Written responses were categorised using a classificatory system based on Bennett, Emmison and Frow’s (1999) model in their Bourdieuan study in Australia of taste and culture. This system combines a neo-Marxist framework of job classification - retaining the relationship of paid work to the means of production - with a Weberian foundational precept that pays close attention to shared work and market situations as determinants of social class. Comparable sources of income, degree of security and chances of advancement, and the degree of autonomy which attaches to the content of the work role, are all taken into account when classifying the job (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 18).

This framework retains the distinction between blue- and white-collar work, as well as the importance of supervisory status within each type of work. Furthermore, an educational distinction was made between professionals and para-professionals which is central to the Australian class system (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 18). The 'Unemployed/Pensioner/Housemaker' category denotes those parents currently not in employment. 'Self-employed' includes small business owners in the areas of trades, sales and service. 'Managers' are those who exercise full managerial functions in their job in areas of finance, production, personnel, distribution, sales, service and hospitality. The category 'Professionals' includes engineers, doctors, primary, secondary and tertiary teachers, lawyers, social workers and priests, accountants, journalists and lawyers. 'Para-professionals' include nurses, police officers, and medical and engineering support staff. 'Supervisors' are those who supervise blue-collar workers and white-collar workers. 'Manual workers' include tradespeople, plant and machine operators, labourers, cleaners and horse trainers. The category 'Sales and clerical' includes secretaries, clerks, receptionists, data processors, tellers, cashiers, and sales assistants (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 18-20). Occupational levels are held to provide different ownership and access to cultural capital in all its forms.

Other survey questions in the first section measured factors of objectified cultural capital. The number of books in the respondent's household is understood to be a predictor of literacy performance which is an indicator of the level of cultural capital (Freebody 1993). Another question asked about access to computers and the internet - an increasingly important cultural capital resource for educational success. Other questions investigated how many computers were in households and what type of

internet access (modem or broadband), if any, they possessed (see Facer and Furlong 2001; Anderson 2008). These measures are discussed in more detail in the following chapter 'Setting the Scene'.

Ethics, Consent and Confidentiality

The research project was approved by the University of Newcastle Human Research Ethics Committee on 30th of April, 2004 (Approval Number: H-810-0504). The project was also approved by the NSW Department of Education and Training on 6th of April, 2004 (SERAP No. 04.09). At the three participating schools, the principal gave permission for the research to be undertaken on school grounds and gave permission for students to take part and for their teachers to assist. Passive consent was all that was required for participation in the survey questionnaire. Parent's permission for their children to participate in the focus groups was obtained by official consent forms that needed to be signed by a parent before the student could take part. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, both the schools and the individuals in the focus groups were given pseudonyms. Names of suburbs have also been concealed.

Survey Methods

When selecting a survey cohort, the researcher needs to take into account the sampling technique. In these terms, there are two main options: probability and non-probability sampling (Denscombe 1998: 11-17). A probability sample seeks to express the characteristics of the general population by selecting participants randomly. The sample used for this survey was sought for its specific characteristics. Therefore, the sampling method used was non-probability, in this case a purposive

sample. This sees the selection of those to be surveyed made according to known characteristics (May 1997: 88). Each school was chosen for its general socio-economic characteristics and academic level as established from the pilot study, Department of Education information and specific school websites, and media reports.

TABLE 5.1: Number of Survey Respondents by School and Gender

Montesano High – Males	89
Montesano High – Females	64
Montesano High – Total	153
Sunnydale High – Males	67
Sunnydale High – Females	84
Sunnydale High – Total	151
Rydell Grammar – Males	30
Rydell Grammar – Females	46
Rydell Grammar – Total	76
Total Males	186
Total Females	194
TOTAL	380

Purposive Sampling and Surveys

The survey sample size was less than 500, and due to the small-scale nature of the project, the data cannot be generalised to illustrate or highlight general social trends. Rather, the results should be understood as providing evidence for or against a theory, as assisting in the development or reconfiguration of a theory, rather than providing ‘proof’ (May 1997: 84). Surveys can aim to show causal relationships, yet, for the most part, surveys can only show the strength of statistical variables, literally any attribute or characteristic that can vary (May 1997: 84). For example, the results suggest it is more *probable* that a male student from Montesano High will say there is ‘no such thing as class’ compared to other groups and cohorts. However, we cannot assume that all Montesano High males will say this more often than their Sunnydale High counterparts.

Designing the Survey

In designing the survey, methodological sources were consulted to ensure the rigour of the instrument, framing the points made by writers on social science methodology against the aims of the thesis as stated above. Researchers also need also to consider *how* the survey instrument is treated by the participant. As Wynne (1996: 43) points out, ‘lay people’ do have ‘reflexive capabilities’ inherent in their responses to social surveys.

This means that people are consciously thinking not only of the poll itself and the questions posed, but about their own social context in relation to the poll: who is the poll for? What will my answer be taken to mean if I agree or disagree? What will the poll be used for? Their responses are likely to reflect a much more sophisticated view... than the poll’s relatively naïve construction (Waterton and Wynne 1999: 132).

The types of survey questions being asked also needs to be considered. There were two main types: closed or pre-coded questions, and open or unstructured questions. The advantages and disadvantages of each must be taken into account. The advantages of closed or pre-coded questions include: they are easier and quicker to answer; they are easier to compare; answers are easier to code and statistically analyse; the coded responses can clarify the question; respondents are more likely to respond to sensitive topics using closed questions; there are fewer irrelevant and confusing answers to deal with; less articulate or literate respondents are not at as much of a disadvantage; and the future replication of the study is easier (Neuman 2003: 278). The disadvantages of closed or pre-coded questions include: they can engender an answer that the respondent would not have thought of; those with no opinion or knowledge may answer anyway or force people to make choices they would not have made or considered in the real world; they can frustrate respondents if what they want to say is not an option; they can be confusing if there are too many

options; the misinterpretation of an answer is more difficult to notice and distinctions between responses may be blurred; marking the wrong response or a version of 'donkey voting' is possible; and they can force simplistic answers on complex topics (Neuman 2003: 278). In view of the fact that closed questions allow a rapid appraisal of class differences across the cohorts, a number of closed questions were included in the survey to verify distinctive class differences between students at the three schools, and these were readily answered by the majority of respondents.

The advantages of open ended questions include: respondents can give detailed answers and can clarify, contextualise or qualify their responses; there is far less limit on the number of possible responses leading to unidentified or unexpected answers to crop up; and they allow the possibility of more complex answers to complex problems whilst allowing for more self-expression (Neuman 2003: 278). Disadvantages of open ended questions include: responses maybe irrelevant or hard to understand; literacy skills may skewer the way responses actually represent what the respondent is trying to say; coding, comparisons and statistical analysis is much more difficult; more time is needed to complete the survey and the length of the survey is markedly increased (Neuman 2003: 278). With these considerations in mind, the survey consisted of a mix of both open and closed questions. It was found that the open ended questions were not answered as reliably as the closed questions, and this was especially so at Montesano High. While quotes from answers written in response to open survey questions are not used extensively in the following data chapters, they were considered and analysed to frame the questions asked in the focus groups.

Respondent Reactions to Survey Items

Good research needs to evaluate the weaknesses as well as the strengths of its methodology (Denscombe 1998: 237). For instance, pre-coded or closed questions, such as Likert Scales and multiple choice answers, can be frustrating for respondents, and therefore, deter them from answering (Denscombe 1998: 106). In this regard, the pre-coded questions were answered more regularly than the questions that required the respondent to write responses of their own. Pre-coded questions can also bias the findings towards the researcher's, rather than the respondent's, way of seeing things (Denscombe 1998: 106). Every effort was made to ensure that the pre-coded questions allowed for an appropriate array of answers in easy to understand language, without bias towards a particular type of response. Nevertheless, as the questions were asked for specific reasons about specific matters, the questions did tend to direct the respondents to particular themes. Also, questionnaires offer no opportunity for the researcher to check or verify the truth and accuracy of the answers given by respondents (Denscombe 1998: 106). Here, the responses to both pre-coded and open ended questions have to be taken at face value, except for some cases where the answers were obviously jokes. In general, the survey method worked well and provided interesting and significant data for analysis. Overall, the questions asked provided the relevant and necessary data for the purpose of the research. A fairly “coherent” subject appears to emerge from the survey data’ (Silva 2006: 1184); this constitutes a strength for the innovative theoretical interpretation advanced in the thesis.

Focus Group Methods

Focus groups bring complexity and nuance to the broad picture provided by quantitative data, opening up rich and resonant details for analysis. The focus groups provided an opportunity to observe habitus in action. In group discussion the participants brought all the elements of their cultural capital to the fore: their use of language; their body language and dress; their opinions and tastes; the influence of their parents; their different school environments; the different attitudes and resources of their teachers; and their relative comfort or discomfort during the research itself. In the focus groups, questions about ambitions, problems, risks and other various issues that the participants discussed at length provided evidence of both subtle and obvious distinctions between the three school cohorts.

The focus group is an applied qualitative research method where groups of people are interviewed relatively informally in a familiar setting. In this case the groups were conducted inside unused class rooms at the schools during school hours. The interviewer needs to be as non-directive as possible, facilitating a conversation about the topic area being investigated (Neuman 2003: 396). Focus groups provide interaction that needs to be guided by the moderator (Morgan 1996). Groups need to be reasonably homogenous (Neuman 2003: 396), and in this case they were. The reason for separate male and female groups was to attempt to capture the specific interactive behaviour and performance of groups of teenagers of the same sex. For instance the girls had a tendency to try and out do each other in the 'drama' of their experiences. The boys were often harder to get responses from with masculinity issues sometimes seeing a reluctance to engage with certain issues. In the mixed group, there were some instances of flirting and teasing (more so in looks exchanged

and body language than in terms of what was said) and there seemed to be some implicit restrictions on what boys would say in front of girls and vice versa. Using both single sex and mixed groups attempts to account for these sorts of differences and to minimise their effect on the data. The length of the focus groups ranged from 25 minutes to 90 minutes. Basically, they took as long as was needed to get through the set of semi-structured focus group topics. The sessions were longer at Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High than at Montesano High which is an indication of the relative comfort students from the more privileged schools displayed in the research setting and their confidence in speaking their minds and giving their opinions (both indicators of cultural capital). It was requested that the participants not be close friends, but it was inevitable that they all knew each other quite well. The sessions were audio-recorded digitally then fully transcribed.

TABLE 5.2: Number of Focus Group Participants by School and Gender

Montesano High – Males	3
Montesano High – Females	3
Montesano High – Mixed	1 Male, 3 Females
Sunnydale High – Males	3
Sunnydale High – Females	4
Sunnydale High – Mixed	2 Males, 2 Females
Rydell Grammar – Males	3
Rydell Grammar – Females	3
Rydell Grammar – Mixed	2 Males, 2 Females
Total Males	14
Total Females	17
TOTAL	31

The attractiveness of focus groups stems from the fact that they ‘are social events... and... demand no technical skills of the group members’ (Bloor *et al.*, 2001, p. 13). There are advantages and limitations in focus group interviews. In terms of advantages, the familiar setting allows a relaxed atmosphere and free expression. This free expression tends to leave the participants feeling empowered (Neuman 2003:

396). Interaction within the group is also an advantage as participants may quiz each other about their responses and ‘explain their answers to each other’ (Neuman 2003: 396), opening up possible aspects of the topic that the researcher did not consider. This is what has come to be known as ‘the group effect’ or ‘synergy’ (Carey 1994). Morgan (1996: 139) points out that the real strength of focus groups lies in ‘providing insights into the sources of complex behaviours and motivations’. The ability to observe agreement and disagreement provided important data on both consensus and diversity between focus group participants from the three schools.

Furthermore, the focus groups were advantageous for getting direct feedback on some of the survey results. Focus group participants were shown some of the survey data in graph form and asked for comments. This prompted moments of reflexivity and analysis from the research respondents themselves. Their responses to and understandings of *their own survey data* further provided snapshots of habitus in action and of how reflexivity itself is mediated by habitus.

An important issue in focus group limitations is what is known as the ‘polarization effect’ (Neuman, 2003: 396; Morgan, 1996: 140) where the attitude of the participants may become more ‘extreme’ both within and after the group discussion. For this project the effect was seen to be small to negligible, but not much is actually known of how group members affected each other. Another problem is that discussions are often dominated by one person, or a minority, in the group. This did happen in two of the nine focus groups conducted: the female groups at Montesano High and Sunnydale High. In the Montesano High group it was the dominant personality of one participant, where the other two girls followed her lead and often just agreed with

what she said. In the Sunnydale High girls' group, three of the participants were friends while one girl was only acquainted with the others - creating a situation where the 3 girls would hold lengthy discussions amongst themselves while the other girl just sat there, listened and often agreed. In all the focus groups, there was a considerable effort by the researcher to promote as even amount of participation as possible, but this could not always be controlled.

There was some difference in the actual engagement, confidence and enthusiasm of focus groups between the three schools. As Silva and Wright (2005: 4) point out:

Research suggests that the *skill* of expressing opinions in a competent and focussed way is not universal in itself but reflects existing experiences of education and of group discussion which, in Bourdieu's terms, relate to cultural capital.

The middle class students at Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High were confident in expressing their opinions and seemed to inherently trust the research process and enjoy the experience. It was obvious that the Montesano High participants were initially suspicious of the research process, were not used to having their opinions sought after and were not as confident and forthcoming in their responses. But notably, their initial reluctance disappeared as the discussion progressed and the participants grew more comfortable in the environment, grew to trust the researcher and realised that their opinions were being appreciated. With this in mind, Wilkinson has argued that an understanding of the 'collective sense making' process is needed when analysing focus group data. There is a need for an understanding of what is agreed upon, how agreement is generated and how conclusive the agreements are (Wilkinson, 2004). These agreements are focussed on in subsequent analytical chapters.

Issues of Power in Focus Groups

The social situation of a focus group itself may result in the possibility of the research participants experiencing symbolic violence. It is the researcher who sets up the rules and who usually ‘unilaterally and without any preliminary negotiations, assigns the interview its objectives and uses’ where a ‘market for linguistic and symbolic goods [is] established every time an interview takes place’ (Bourdieu 1999: 609). Those lower in cultural capital may feel threatened, disempowered or generally uncomfortable in this situation. Furthermore, the asking of inappropriate questions that may bemuse, offend, threaten privacy or overly challenge may impose a symbolic violence that shatters ‘the fragile trust necessary for undistorted communication to occur’ (Fowler 1996: 12). For Bourdieu, ‘sympathetic comprehension’ is essential to avoid the symbolic violence where the research participant feels ‘the fear of patronizing class attitudes which, when the sociologist is perceived to be socially superior, is often added to the very general, if not universal, fear of being turned into an object’ (Bourdieu 1999: 612).

There are a number of ways that this can be minimised. Firstly, the researcher must remain intensely aware of their own effect on the situation, especially of how he/she presents themselves, uses language, and of how one gives or withholds encouragements. The researcher must be willing and able to ‘improvise on the spot, in the urgency of the interview, strategies of self-presentation and adaptive responses, encouragement and opportune questions, etc., so as to help respondents deliver up their truth or, rather, to be delivered of it’ (Bourdieu 1999: 621). Secondly, the researcher must make clear that all speech is legitimate within the situation (not just ‘legitimate speech’) and attempt to minimise the research participant’s self-censorship

that may be a result of the social structures inherent in the focus group. This requires 'active and methodological listening' (Bourdieu 1999: 609), where the researcher needs to be aware (and sometimes adopt) the interviewee's 'language, views, feelings and thoughts – with methodological construction, founded on the knowledge of the objective conditions common to an entire social category' (Bourdieu 1999: 609).

An example of this in the focus groups was swearing. Overall, there was very little swearing, even though respondents swear frequently in everyday conversation between themselves. When it did occur at Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar, the research participants did not flinch: they were comfortable in the research situation and between themselves, that is, they saw the situation in relatively unofficial and easy-going terms. These focus groups continued as if nothing abnormal had happened.

This easygoing attitude contrasted with the initial attitudes in focus groups at Montesano High. Here the male participants in particular were at first making an effort to be more formal as they seemed to interpret that this as what was required in the focus group situation. Then the following exchange happened. At the time Dan was a junior cricket representative in the same competition where I hold a senior representative position. We had played a few games against each other in club cricket:

Interviewer: Talking about pressure, what about pressure from parents and teachers to succeed at school, or in the sporting sense from coaches, do you feel any pressure like that?

Dan: I've got a mate whose Dad's a cockhead, you probably know him, [boy's name]...

Interviewer: Yeah, we always sledge him about his old man when we play him...

Dan: Yeah, well his old man is just a queer cunt [everyone laughs].

Taylor: Geez, there's some vocabulary coming out of you...it's terrible! [laughter]. That will do me!

Interviewer: You can say what ever you want, don't worry about it, I probably swear more than you... Go on, Dan.

Dan: It depends what kind of pressure, if it was pressure to succeed like...my parents were never really good at school or anything, so they can't really expect much of me, but that motivated me to do well. But if they were putting pressure on me and saying that I should be getting this, I would just probably get shitty with them and tell them to fuck off, 'cause they went shit in their High School Certificate or whatever, so I'd probably go better without pressure.

From the critical point of reassurance, when Dan began to speak again, the focus group discussion became much more open, honest and relaxed. The barriers came down (as much as is possible in this situation) and the free discussion reminded me of discussions I have had with males of this age at cricket and in other social situations. The boys realised that this was an unofficial, informal situation in a way that that explanations at the start of the group could never have engendered: they learned it was OK to express themselves freely through their own experience of it.

Bourdieu has trained non-professional interviewers from the same social position to minimise the distance in social position between researcher and researched since their dispositions are 'objectively attuned to those of the respondent' (Bourdieu 1999: 611). That was not possible for this project. Nevertheless, there were efforts made initially to minimise this distance, or as Angrosino and Perez (2003: 115) put it - to consciously adopt a situational identity. The success of this can be best summed up by a comment of one of the teachers at Sunnydale High: 'they like you because you're not an old man with a beard in a suit'.

The researcher was *relatively* young and in touch with the popular culture practices of the age group investigated. An effort was made to wear casual clothes. At the beginning of the groups, before the recorder was turned on, I would discuss sport, TV

or music with the group in an attempt to make some sort of connection or to try to convey that I at least maintain some form of cultural currency. My sporting career was obviously a useful form of subcultural capital at Montesano High, as was my 'indie rock' preference at Sunnysdale High and Rydell Grammar (even if this was to playfully tease others about their own taste). I would then outline my background and why I was doing the research: giving young people a voice, concerns about uncertainty and the future (and would alter these slightly for each school based on the concerns emanating out of the survey data).

These exchanges helped create a relaxed atmosphere, a form of mutual interest and respect and demonstrated that I empathised with them and was going to take what they had to say seriously. This created a better atmosphere for the participants to display their own habitus *reflexively*, rather than trying to provide what they thought I, as the 'formal researcher', might have wanted them to display. These techniques are 'criteria for validation' (Angrosino and Perez 2003: 128). They aim to ensure that the data is reliable as possible because the restraints on free social interaction have been minimised. This careful approach validates the qualitative data as reliably addressing the research questions (see Altheide and Johnson 1998).

Limitations of Focus Groups

One limitation of the focus group is that, compared to individual interviews, fewer topics can be discussed, fewer ideas are produced and there is sometimes less depth to the discussion (Neuman 2003: 396). The moderator limiting the scope of possibility of free discussion, or leading the discussion, is also a possible limitation of the focus group (Neuman 2003: 396). Accordingly, the interviewer here strove to create a

casual and relaxed environment while attempting to keep the discussions revolving around issues relevant to the specific research questions. This was done by using a list of approximately a dozen questions to semi-structure the discussions while allowing for relative freedom. The focus groups in this research provided a happy medium between *focussing* on the key issues being investigated and allowing the participants to pursue tangents and themes of their own making. In some respects, the interaction of focus group participants 'often decreases the amount of interaction between the facilitator and the individual members of the group. This gives more weight to the participants' observations' (Madriz 2003: 365-366) which may lessen the influence of the interviewer on the group - assisting with issues of validity and reliability.

Silva and Wright (2005: 14) point out that the relative informality of focus groups and the different levels of cultural capital of research participants are both a strength and a weakness. Those not possessing certain language skills and/or educational competencies may 'spend the focus group getting to grips with the research setting as much as getting to grips with the research questions' (Silvia and Wright 2005: 14). Nevertheless, for focus groups that are set up to investigate social inequalities and in which observation of distinctions deriving from cultural capital is intended, the diversity of participants' skills and competencies provides 'fertile material to investigate the very constitution of social hierarchies' (Silva and Wright 2005: 14). The focus groups conducted in this research experienced similar problems, but yielded similar positive outcomes.

Interpreting Focus Group Data

It is difficult to ascertain in the focus group *how* the discussion is being done, that is, whether what is being said represents the group as a whole or each individual separately (Carey 1995). Identifying this is difficult because:

Participants talk in different ways and in different capacities. They may represent a group of people, they may represent themselves as individuals, they may act as a member of the focus group, they may shift between these positions (Silva and Wright 2005: 4-5).

To overcome this the quotes presented in subsequent chapters were chosen after careful analysis of how representative they are of the general discourses and themes that emerged in each focus group, especially where there was general agreement on a specific topic. In this sense the focus group responses are treated as generalised homologies addressing specific research questions that display moments of reflexivity and highlight differences in experiences and attitudes.

Bourdieu argues that ordinary people's speech should be given the same weight and treated with the same significance that sees interpretive debates surround Shakespeare or the Bible. That is,

To give the marriage of a teacher and a post office worker the attention and interest that would have been given to the literary account of misalliance, and to give statements of the steelworker the thoughtful reception received by a certain tradition of reading for the highest forms of poetry or philosophy (Bourdieu 1999: 624).

This was one of the central intentions of this research: to give young people's opinions, concerns and experiences the attention they deserve.

Combining Methods

Both qualitative and quantitative methods share scientific principles, yet they differ in significant ways. Whilst ‘objective reality’ can never be truly captured in social research, traditionally, the combination of methods, or triangulation, attempts to secure an in-depth understanding of the research questions (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 8). Combining methods is best understood ‘as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness and depth to any inquiry’ (Denzin and Lincoln 2003: 8, see also Flick 1998).

The aim of combining methods is to merge features of both with the intent of limiting the weaknesses of each (Neuman 2003: 16), while maintaining their relative strengths. Where the quantitative method attempts to measure objective facts, qualitative methods construct social reality and cultural meanings. Quantitative methods focus on variables where reliability is key; qualitative methods focus on interactive processes where authenticity is the key. Where quantitative approaches attempt to be value free and independent of context, values are present and explicit in qualitative approaches and they are situational constrained. Quantitative methods involve many participants and require statistical analysis, whereas qualitative methods provide fewer participants but are analysed thematically. The researcher is relatively detached in quantitative processes, but very much involved in the qualitative processes (Neuman 2003: 16).

In this way quantitative methods are ‘data condensers’ in order to see the big picture, while qualitative methods are ‘data enhancers’ that enable the researcher to see more aspects of what is being investigated more clearly (Ragin 1994: 92 in Neuman, 2003:

16). The mixed use of methods here attempts to do exactly that: identify some broad social trends relevant to the research questions through the survey, then clarify and enhance the understanding of those trends through focus groups that allow close scrutiny of the opinions and feelings of those who provided the data in the first place.

Analysing the Survey Data

The survey data was entered into SPSS 13.0, each survey as a separate case. There were 200 variables. Responses to pre-coded questions, such as Likert Scales, were entered directly when numerics were involved. Open ended survey questions were also directly transcribed as strings into the programme and then coded. Numerics were derived from the grouping of most frequent to least frequent kinds of responses. Key variables that showed evidence of varying relevant to the three schools were subject to descriptive analysis such as frequencies, comparison of means and some cross-tabulations. Tables and graphs were then created from this descriptive analysis to present the demographic and attitudinal differences between the three schools.

Transcribing the Talk

The transcribing of any interview poses several risks: ‘the simplest punctuation, the placing of a comma, for example, can determine the whole sense of a phrase’ (Bourdieu 1999: 621). There are two sets of constraints in this regard, ‘the constraint of being faithful to everything that came up in the interview’ and ‘the constraints of readability’ (Bourdieu 1999: 622). There is an inverse relationship here; the constraint of being faithful is mitigated by the need for the reader to be able to comprehend, and vice versa. Punctuation and emphasis can change the ‘truth’ of one’s representation of what was said. Even the transcription process itself may see things lost in the process

from the spoken to the written: ‘the voice, pronunciation (notably in its socially significant variations), intonation, rhythm (each interview has its own tempo which is not that of reading, gesture, gesticulations and body language)’ (Bourdieu 1999: 622). The process may also see the speaker’s speech stripped of irony or sarcasm, or, not take into account a roll of the eyes that may change what the speaker actually means. For Bourdieu ‘transcription then, means writing, in the sense of rewriting... the transition from the oral to the written, with the changes in medium, imposes infidelities’ (Bourdieu 1999: 622).

There are three ‘infidelities’ that Bourdieu is referring to here. Firstly, there are the ‘hesitations, repetitions, sentences interrupted and prolonged by gestures, looks, sighs, or exclamations’ (Bourdieu 1999: 622) that are difficult to express in transcription. Secondly there are ‘laborious digressions’ that need to be removed and ambiguities that need to be understood then either used or discarded. Thirdly, there are ‘references to concrete situations, events linked to a particular history or a town, a factory, a family, etc.’ (Bourdieu 1999: 622) that require context, explanation and pseudonyms. To overcome these obstacles towards a coherent reading it is inevitable that some things have to be omitted and, more importantly, some contextual devices have to be added. ‘Rigor, in this case, lies in the permanent control of the point of view, which is continually confirmed in the details of the writing’ (Bourdieu 1999: 624-625).

Therefore, the focus group data presented here tries to tread the line between maintaining anonymity, providing contextualisation and describing local references, and reliably reporting the participants’ words and meanings. References to locations and the names of places have been replaced with descriptions. Language has been

changed minimally and only ‘cleaned up’ to provide coherence for the reader. For example, the ubiquitous use of the filler word ‘like’ has been regularly removed. Where possible there are directions in brackets within the focus group quotes that describe if someone is talking to a specific member of the group, for example: [to Dan]. Square brackets also indicate how someone is speaking, for example: [sarcastically] and to denote the numerous instances of laughter [everyone laughs]. Paraphrases and summaries of what the participants had to say are provided when an issue or theme came up multiple times, and are carefully worded to ensure accuracy of representation.

Analysing the Talk

Once the transcriptions were completed they needed to be analysed. The focus group data was carefully analysed as the deepest level of data that embodies reflexivity of the participants and expresses various manifestations of their different habitus.

Important things to consider when analysing talk are to: always look for sequences of related talk; observe how speakers take on and sometimes change roles or identities; and ‘look for particular outcomes in the talk and work backwards to trace the trajectory through which a particular outcome was produced’ (Silverman 2003: 357). Whilst transcribing the recordings various common themes and issues were marked by the researcher and copied and pasted into themed documents for close analysis *during* the transcription process. After transcription was complete the focus group interviews were again searched to ensure nothing was missed. Simultaneously, the answers to each focus group question were also placed together and examined for similar discourses and terminology. This process was repeated for instances that

directly related to the general research questions at the start of this chapter. These similarities and themes were then represented by a quote that best exemplified the point or by synthesising the content of similarities into summary passages. When a particularly important observation or commonality in the data was discovered, especially if it related to various theoretical claims, the other relevant sections of the transcripts were traced back through to search for how that point was reached. This is important in terms of validity to ensure that the concluding point was not unduly influenced by leading questioning.

There are also a number of things that the researcher needs to be aware of, or, to avoid. When explaining a comment we must try to avoid generalising about roles or status and must avoid trying to make sense of a ‘single line of transcript or utterance in isolation from the surrounding talk’ (Silverman 2003: 358). Researchers also must minimise extrapolating the speaker’s intentions from their statements, that is, while qualitative analysis can help to show ‘how people “see things” [it] ignores the importance of how people “do things”’ (Silverman 2003: 359). This is particularly the case in this research where many of the questions ask the participants to give their opinions on things that haven’t happened yet – for instance, their ambitions and their obstacles – that obviously need to be understood as their personally informed opinion of what *might* happen, not what *is going to* happen. Nevertheless, these opinions, and the discourse through which they are expressed, provide ample and revealing examples of how a participant’s position in social space has profound implications for their attitudes and experiences.

Concluding Remarks

This research project used a multi-method design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. There are two kinds of triangulation here. Firstly, there is triangulation of theory (Neuman 2003: 138) which considers multiple and/or contradictory theoretical perspectives in the planning and analysing stages. The main perspectives here are the work of Pierre Bourdieu; the theories of reflexive modernization, particularly Beck, Giddens and to a lesser extent Bauman; Foucault; and some concepts drawn from Castells and others. There are further theoretical influences from the specific field of youth studies and its debates around the notion of 'transition'.

Secondly, there is triangulation of methods (Neuman 2003: 139) where quantitative and qualitative methods are combined throughout the planning, gathering of data and analysing phases of the research process. Mixing methods can happen in several ways from sequential to simultaneous (Neuman 2003: 139). In this case the research was done sequentially. The quantitative data was used both in the planning process of the focus groups, as stimuli in the focus groups themselves and in the overall analysis. The qualitative data complements the survey data by providing a deeper understanding of the young people's views in rich detail and highlights in myriad ways how habitus influences these very attitudes. This multi-method approach yielded three levels of data that creates a rich sense of how the research participants view their social world.

In relation to earlier discussion of rigour and validity, it is important that the reader has sufficient understanding of the context and environment that the data was

collected in. The following chapter will set the scene of each school, highlighting how they can be considered as signifying different class-based habitus.

PART 3

EMPIRICAL DATA AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER SIX

Setting the Scene – The Three Schools

Introduction

Sociological concepts such as class, gender and ethnicity contain subjective and objective elements. For instance, when asking someone about gender they may objectively tell you that they are male or female in terms of sex based on their existence as physiological ‘objects’. But discussions of issues such as masculinity or femininity are more complex and depend on a whole matrix of discourses, symbols and experiences. It is therefore difficult to ‘measure’ gender in any sense. When it comes to class, there are similar difficulties in its ‘measurement’. We can ask what the person thinks of ‘class’ or what class they belong to. We can measure objective aspects such as income levels or location. We can highlight educational attainment and occupations that approximate income inequalities and status. Nonetheless, there are other subjective elements of class that not only relate to status, but to cultural and symbolic practices that may change over time.

It is this divide that the theoretical concept of habitus was created to fuse, but when it comes to validating the differences between three distinct formations of habitus we need to provide some measure of evidence. The descriptions in this chapter attest to the reliability of using the three different schools in this research as representations of class-based habitus, as ‘units of analysis’ (Pakulski 2004: 110). The descriptions below proceed by highlighting these class-related objective and subjective

homologies. Explanations of the schools are given. Distinguishing demographic characteristics of the students and their families are provided; and some distinctions of cultural taste and practice are indicated.

The Schools

This research project was conducted in an industrial city that saw over 2500 metal worker jobs disappear in the decade between 1996 and 2006. Nevertheless, the region still has a large manufacturing sector as the field has diversified into machinery and equipment making (O'Neill 2008). During this period of change both Montesano High and Sunnydale High reinvented themselves from 'normal' (government) public schools to selective schools, in the fields of sporting prowess and academic merit respectively. It seems no accident that Montesano High in a poor, working-class outer suburb has become a selective sports high school, while Sunnydale High in a trendy inner-city suburb has become an academically selective school. Sport has a particularly important place in Australian society (see Rowe 2003) and somewhat mythically maintains an upward mobility discourse through sporting achievement and a 'third way' version of social capital. Certainly the re-badging of Montesano High has improved its reputation by removing the local suburb from its name. The status of the school has been enhanced also by media reports on the various successes of its sportspeople and teams. Yet Montesano High is not regarded as a prestigious government selective high school, unlike Sunnydale High, which regularly reports the outstanding academic achievements of its pupils and is greatly sought-after by ambitious parents.

When visited, the atmosphere at Montesano High was quite chaotic compared to the other two schools. The school was described as a stressful place to work by the teachers who assisted in this research. Despite being as competent and capable as their counterparts in the two other schools, they seemed much busier when I was interacting with them and had to consistently deal with disciplinary problems, teaching very large and hectic classes with only modest resources. Students were seen in the playground at all times of the day and many seemed to just choose not to go to class, something confirmed in the focus groups. There was some difficulty in getting the students to concentrate on and complete the surveys in class, with some completely refusing. When meeting with the deputy principal, there was a constant stream of students outside his office who had been sent to him for disciplinary and welfare reasons. This certainly was not the case at the other two schools.

In contrast, the teachers at Sunnydale High seemed comparatively relaxed and had relatively few disciplinary issues to deal with. The ‘rebels’ in their classes usually just made some smart comments and then got on with the surveys. During the briefing for the project there was a serious competitive academic environment where students would constantly ask questions about the research process or wanted to discuss their own various research projects.

The atmosphere was very similar at Rydell Grammar. Teachers were relaxed and the students completed the survey without *any* resistance. At both Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar, the teachers maintained that one of the most stressful parts of their jobs was dealing with the demands of students’ parents. Of course, these are observations from the relatively small amount of time I spent at the schools and in

interaction with teachers. It is therefore as much about how the schools and students ‘present’ themselves since there are obviously some behavioural and motivational problems at the selective and grammar schools. They just remain less obvious and/or are deliberately concealed.

These three contrasting schools are all within 20 kilometres of each other move from the centre of the city to the suburban periphery and constitute youth cohorts with considerable variations in economic, social and cultural capital. In the general understanding of cultural capital, schools themselves are a form of it: ‘school effects’ are cultural capital.

Montesano High

Montesano High is a state secondary school in a very low socio-economic area. About twelve years ago it developed a Targeted Sports Programme (TSP) to raise the reputation of the school. 45 per cent of students are TSP and 55 per cent are non-TSP local students. Montesano High has developed a crèche and support centre to enable teenage mothers to complete their schooling. Each year about 15 per cent of the school’s students are from an indigenous background. The school runs special programmes to assist students who are disadvantaged in various ways. These include specific programmes for indigenous pupils, as well as a Boys’ Education Programme which is run with assistance from the local university. In 2008, only 2 out of the 68 (4.4%) Year 12 students made it onto the state’s final examination (HSC) Credit list.⁵ The feeder area for the school is characterised by government-subsidised housing, high crime rates, very high unemployment and low school retention rates. On the

⁵ A Credit is achieved when a student gets a score of 90% or more in a subject.

evidence, most students at Montesano High could be described as low in both economic and cultural capital.

Sunnydale High

Sunnydale High is a public, academically selective school with some students travelling considerable distances to attend. Unlike Montesano High that still services its local area, Sunnydale only enrolls students who have passed a rigorous academic assessment from any part of the region. Initial enrolment each year is decided by taking in the top 18 per cent of applicants, which means 180 get in out of an average 1000 applicants per year. Sunnydale High has a very competitive learning environment where fast-tracked University entry is possible. According to the school's website:

In the 2006 HSC examination... the school was placed in the 'Top 20' of best performing schools (government and non-government) according to the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

In 2008, 137 out of 172 (79.7%) Year 12 students made it onto the state's Credit list. Sunnydale High students are high in cultural capital, although many come from families that are only mid-range in terms of economic capital according to survey results.

Rydell Grammar

Elite and private, Rydell Grammar School is prestigious and expensive. Year 12 tuition fees in 2004/2005 were AUD\$4000 a term (there are four terms per year) with high uniform and equipment costs. The school is well beyond the means of most families in the city. In 2006, only 338 students attended the secondary level of the school. Class sizes are kept low. Names can be placed on a waiting list at birth and

preference is given to the children of previous students, indicating social capital at work. In 2008, 41 out of 76 (53.9%) Year 12 students made it on to the state's Credit list. As for the past decade, the school was named in the state's top 50 schools in Higher School Certificate (HSC) examination achievement. It is the highest achieving non-academically selective school in the region. Rydell Grammar is also one of the oldest schools, established by the Church of England next to the Cathedral in the heart of the Central Business District. It offers a highly-regarded specialist music programme. Rydell Grammar students are high in both economic and cultural capital.

Demographic Details of the Three School Cohorts

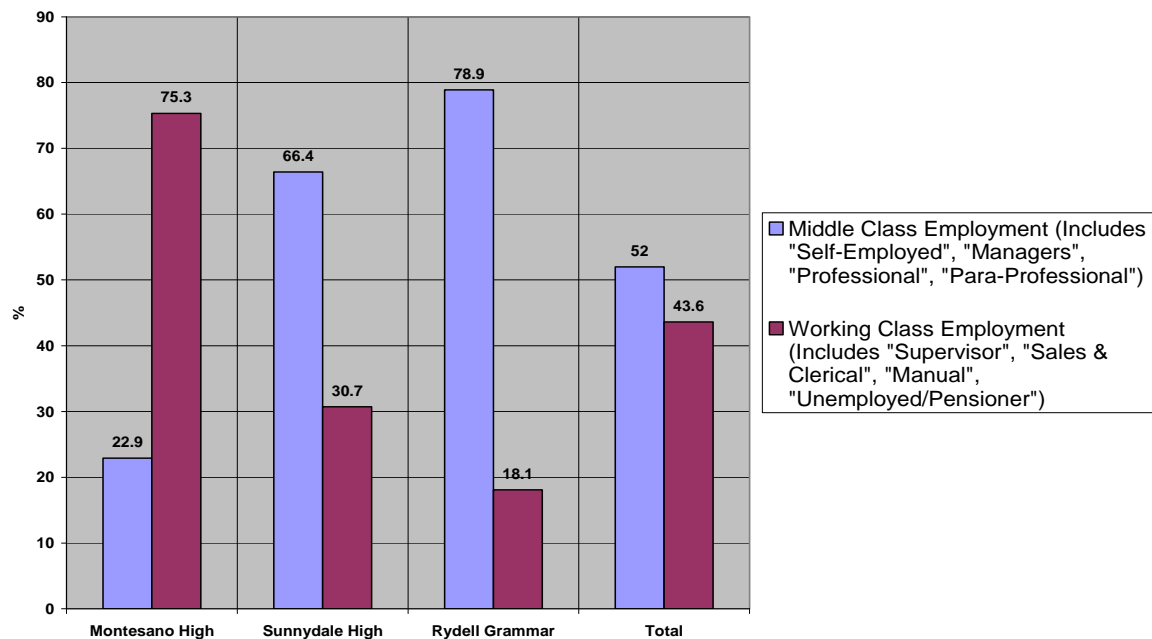
The pilot study established that students at the three schools showed sufficient differences for the three schools to be loosely treated as corresponding to different class-based habitus. The following survey data analysis engages with both objective and subjective dimensions of class established through responses to key questions. These measurements correspond to earlier research that has used the notion of cultural capital (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999; Strandbu and Skogen 2000).

Parents' Occupations

Occupation has traditionally been a central marker of class, especially following the work of Wright (1980; 1996) and Goldthorpe (see Goldthorpe and Marshall 1992; Goldthorpe and McKnight 2006). Bourdieu also saw occupations as being an important denominator of social space that indicates both subjective and objective elements of class (1984, 1985b, 1987). Following the work of Bennett, Emmison and Frow (1999) and Pusey (2003) in Australia, and the work of Wright, Goldthorpe and Bourdieu, a list of nine occupational groups was devised. The higher four categories

of ‘Self-Employed’, ‘Managers’, ‘Professional’ and ‘Para-Professional’ are grouped as middle class, while the bottom four⁶ – ‘Supervisors’, ‘Sales & Clerical’, ‘Manual’ and ‘Unemployed’ were grouped as working class (see Figure 6.1 and Table 6.1).

FIGURE 6.1: Parents’ Occupations by Class



The clear majority of parents of Montesano High respondents (75.3%) were either in manual labour, sales or clerical employment, or were unemployed. Parents of students constitute a traditionally working class cohort with relatively low levels of education and wealth. According to the survey, the unemployment rate of parents at Montesano High was approximately five times the national average at the time of 4.8 per cent (ABS 6202.0 2006). Whilst the unemployment rates at Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High were also above the national average, most were mothers who were nominated as doing ‘domestic duties’ while the father had a relatively high paying professional job. The occupations of both the parents at both Sunnydale High (66.4%)

⁶ Note: the ‘Retired’ category was not included.

and Rydell Grammar (78.9%) were primarily professional which indicates a much higher level of educational qualification and higher paid employment.

Yet there were distinctions between the professional occupations of parents at these two schools. Rydell Grammar survey responses showed more doctors, lawyers, finance and business people on a higher level of wages – well above what Pusey refers to as the incomes of ‘middle Australia’ (Pusey 2003). Sunnydale High parents were more often teachers, academics and care workers, or in human resource or technical positions which are lower on the pay scale (what Pusey refers to as professional, managerial and technical jobs). Most of the Montesano High parents were in what Pusey refers to as manual and lower service jobs (2003: 55). These differences were reflected in the political sensibilities of the students (see Threadgold and Nilan 2004 for a report on this from the pilot project).

TABLE 6.1: Respondent’s Parents’ Occupations

PARENT'S OCCUPATIONS	Self-Employed	Managers	Professional	Para-professional	Supervisor	Sales & Clerical	Manual	Unemployed/ Pensioner	Retired
Montesano High	4.9%	4.9%	3.7%	9.4%	1.9%	10.1%	37.5%	25.8%	1.9%
Sunnydale High	7.9%	8.9%	39.6%	10%	3.9%	8.2%	9.3%	9.3%	2.9%
Rydell Grammar	7.2%	10.9%	53.6%	7.2%	0	2.9%	2.9%	12.3%	2.9%
Total	6.6%	7.7%	28.5%	9.2%	2.3%	7.9%	19%	16.4%	2.5%

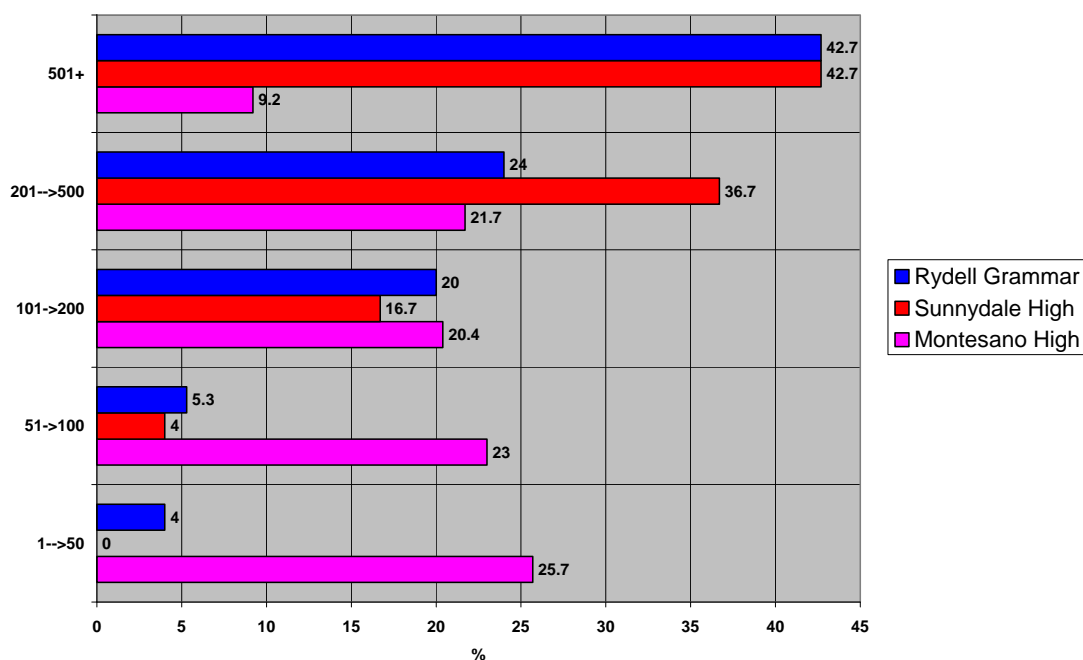
The occupational differences of the research participants’ parents, and their associated levels of cultural capital, indicate that there might be some differences in respondents’ families regarding financial and other kinds of support, such as assistance with

homework (see Andres and Grayson 2003; Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979); and general cultural practices, opinions and dispositions in respondents' families.

Household Resources: Books, Computers and Internet

While some of those high in economic and cultural capital may be 'reluctant readers' (Love and Hamston 2003), numerous studies have highlighted the importance of the availability of reading material at home as an important factor in literacy and educational aptitude (for example Reay 1998). Therefore, number of books in the household was used as an indicator of cultural capital (Figure 6.2).

FIGURE 6.2 How Many Books in Your House?



Over 96 per cent of Sunnydale High students estimated that there were over 100 books in their household, followed by Rydell Grammar (86.7%) and Montesano High (51.3%). 42.7 per cent of students at Rydell and Sunnydale schools said that they had

over 500, compared to only 9.2 per cent at Montesano. It is notable that 25.7 per cent of Montesano High respondents said that they had less than 50 books at home.

As information technology becomes increasingly central to social organisation and the production of wealth (Stehr 2001, Lash 2002, Tomlinson 2007), access to computers and keeping up with their rapid new developments has become an important form of cultural capital. Inequality in information technology access therefore is now embedded in the perpetuation of existing class inequalities (Attewell 2001; Facer and Furlong 2001, Lee 2008). Western nations in general have a high level of computer ownership, and this was the case for this study. Virtual saturation has been reached at Sunnydale and Rydell schools, while nearly 90 per cent of households owned a computer at Montesano High (Table 6.2).

TABLE 6.2: Is There a Computer in Your House, if so, How Many?

IS THERE A COMPUTER IN YOUR HOUSE?				HOW MANY COMPUTERS IN YOUR HOUSE? ⁷					
	YES	NO			1	2	3	4	5 or more
Montesano High	89.5%	10.5%		Montesano High	66.4%	20.4%	8%	2.2%	2.9%
Sunnydale High	99.3%	0.7%		Sunnydale High	26.5%	37.1%	18.5%	11.3%	6.6%
Rydell Grammar	100%	0%		Rydell Grammar	24%	29.3%	22.7%	13.3%	10.7%
Total	95.5%	4.5%		Total	41%	29.2%	15.4%	8.3%	6.1%

Yet, simple ownership of a computer is not in itself necessarily a true indicator of computer technology access. While there is no data here regarding the quality or vitality of operating systems, software and so on, there is a noticeable difference in the number of computers possessed per household. This obviously reflects access and use, as one computer shared by parents and a number of siblings can create all sorts of sharing and studying issues. As Attewell (2001: 257) notes even ‘among children’s

⁷ Responses here are from participants who answered ‘yes’ to “Is there a computer in your House?”.

families that [do] own computers, the benefits for having a home computer were substantially greater for children from more affluent and educated homes than from poorer or less educated ones'. Many Rydell Grammar respondent households seemed to possess almost a computer per person, since 46.7 per cent of households possessed three or more.

Internet access is also an important factor in contemporary education, and the use of the internet itself is influenced by indicators of social class (see Willis and Trantner 2006; Nguyen and Western 2007). Just 82.4 per cent of Montesano High households that possessed a computer also had internet access. This means that only 73.75 per cent of students surveyed at the school had internet access at home (Table 6.3). In the 'information age' this is an obvious indicator of inequality of access to information and to some forms of communication.

TABLE 6.3: Do You Have Internet Access, If so, What Type?

DOES THE COMPUTER HAVE INTERNET ACCESS? ⁸			WHAT TYPE OF INTERNET ACCESS DO YOU HAVE? ⁹			
	YES	NO		MODEM	BROADBAND	OTHER
Montesano High	82.4%	17.6%	Montesano High	58.9%	39.3%	1.8%
Sunnydale High	99.3%	0.7%	Sunnydale High	71.1%	27.5%	1.3%
Rydell Grammar	98.7%	1.3%	Rydell Grammar	33.8%	66.2%	0%
Total	92.8%	7.2%	Total	58.8%	40%	1.2%

Type of internet access is also important, with broadband access allowing speedier internet use, but not necessarily meaning more internet usage overall (Anderson 2008). At the time of the survey, broadband internet was quite new to the area, yet

⁸ Figures here are from participants who answered 'yes' to "Is there a computer in your House?"

⁹ Figures here are from participants who answered 'yes' to "Is there a computer in your House?" and 'yes' to 'Do you have Internet access at home?'.

66.2 per cent of Rydell Grammar student households already had it. Montesano High reported a higher broadband rate than students at Sunnydale High, despite the fact of the extra costs involved (Table 6.3). This is explainable by the fact that a lot of the Sunnydale High students come from areas that, at the time, did not have access to broadband internet.

Cultural Practices

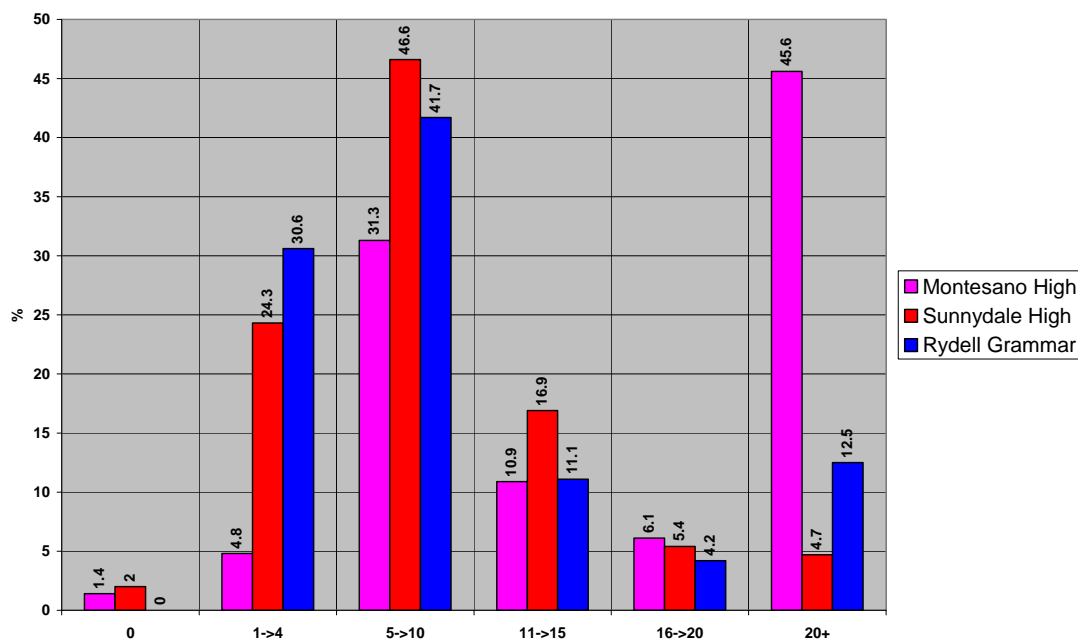
The survey also investigated some of the students' cultural practices and tastes as a means of gauging class-based 'distinctions'. It firstly needs to be pointed out that expressions of taste elicited 'in the quasi-confessional context of a questionnaire... is different from actually making them' (Bennett 2006: 209). Bennett finds that lower legitimacy or status genres, for instance, tend to maintain lower instances of 'like', despite the fact that they are often the highest rating. Nevertheless, these performances in the data can also be thought of as distinctions in themselves (Skeggs, Thumin and Wood 2008), signalling some denial of the consumption of an 'embarrassing' low status genre or text.

Bourdieu highlighted the distinctions of an extensive range of cultural practices, usually maintaining a high and low culture divide. His analysis of what he referred to as 'cultural intermediaries' in the middle classes acknowledged how this divide was breaking down (Bourdieu 1984). There were relatively few high/low cultural distinctions found between the three schools. But there were taste distinctions, even within the relatively homogenous mass culture consumed. This was most marked in television tastes.

Television and Movie Consumption

The classical highbrow/lowbrow distinction does not make much sense when applied to television (Kuipers 2006). Differences in television consumption tend to be greatest in terms of age and gender. Nevertheless, there are ‘distinctions on the box’ (Bennett 2006, see also Bennett *et al* 2005; Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 67-81) and there were a number of differences found between the three cohorts. Montesano High students watched by far the most TV with over 45 per cent claiming they watch more than 20 hours a week (some of them blew the scale away by writing ‘30+ hours’ next to the Likert Scale). Sunnydale High students claimed to watch the least TV with over 30 per cent claiming they watch less than 4 hours a week (see Figure 6.3). Bennett found that 85 per cent of his research participants watched 2 hours of TV a day (Bennett 2006), so it may be that they do watch more than this. In some of the introductory and informal conversations I had before the focus groups at Sunnydale High, they did seem to know a lot about what had been recently shown on TV. Therefore, this apparent under-claiming of hours watch may signal distinction in the form of positioning themselves ‘above’ watching a lot of TV.

FIGURE 6.3: How Many Hours of TV Do You Watch a Week?



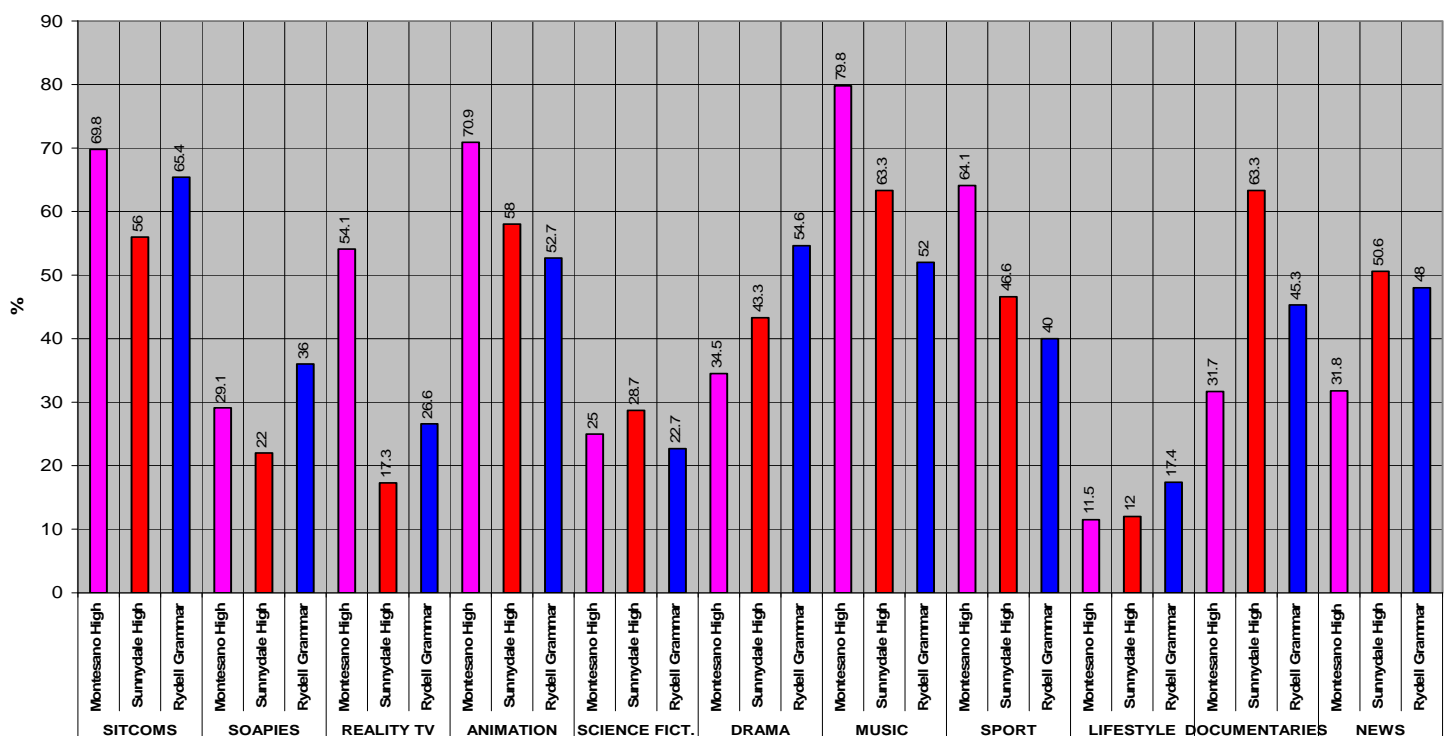
There was a considerable distinction between channel preferences with Sunnydale High students over 10 times and Rydell Grammar student just under 10 times more likely to nominate a non-commercial channel as their most watched free-to-air channel than students at Montesano High, who preferred commercial broadcasters. Nevertheless, all students reported an overwhelming preference for viewing commercial television.

Despite the costs involved, Montesano High students (40.9%) had the highest percentage of Pay TV ownership, followed by Rydell Grammar students (34.7%) then Sunnydale students (17.9%). This appears to confirm that TV is more important for working class leisure. The preference for Pay TV is in itself a form of distinction, in that the families of the poorer youth cohort seem more willing to spend money on television viewing options. Since Montesano High is a specialist sports school, it may

be presumed that watching unlimited sport broadcasts is important for many students and their families.

When it comes to taste in TV genres, Montesano High liked most genres more (Figure 6.4). Out of the 11 categories on the Likert Scale they were leading in ‘Love Them’ or ‘Like Them’ responses in five. While there are no clear distinctions here, Montesano High students seemed least critical of most genres, except for ‘News’, ‘Documentaries’ and ‘Lifestyle’. They had more than double the rate of positive responses for ‘Reality TV’ than the other two schools.

FIGURE 6.4: TV Genre Tastes



A question also asked about films. Overall, the cinema was attended once a week or month. There is strong evidence that most Australians see film as an aspect of television culture, with age and gender being important markers of taste distinction (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999: 84-86). When it comes to the consumption of

movies, Montesano High students reported consuming a lot more movies at home. 51 per cent reported watching a movie more than a few times a week, compared to just 22.5 per cent at Sunnydale High and 13 per cent at Rydell Grammar. Montesano High students attended the cinema slightly more regularly (although cinema attendance had rather small data differences between the schools).

Film genre tastes followed similar patterns to TV genres. There was more high culture versus low culture taste distinction here. For example, while overall the more ‘serious’ genres such as Art/Cult, Classic, Foreign and Documentaries were liked less, this dislike was most apparent by far at Montesano High.

Overall the distinctions between what the young people consumed as visual media were minor. This supports previous research on television consumption that shows how TV seems to flatten ‘out the relationships between classes and culture so that class distinctions are now no longer so easily identifiable in terms of sharply differentiated tastes’ (Lahire 2004: 624–636 quoted in Bennett 2006). In this study however, while distinctions in taste (between *what* they consume) are minor, distinctions between *how much* they consume is major. Montesano High students report spending far more time watching TV and movies than their counterparts at the more privileged schools.

Music Taste, CD Ownership and Downloads

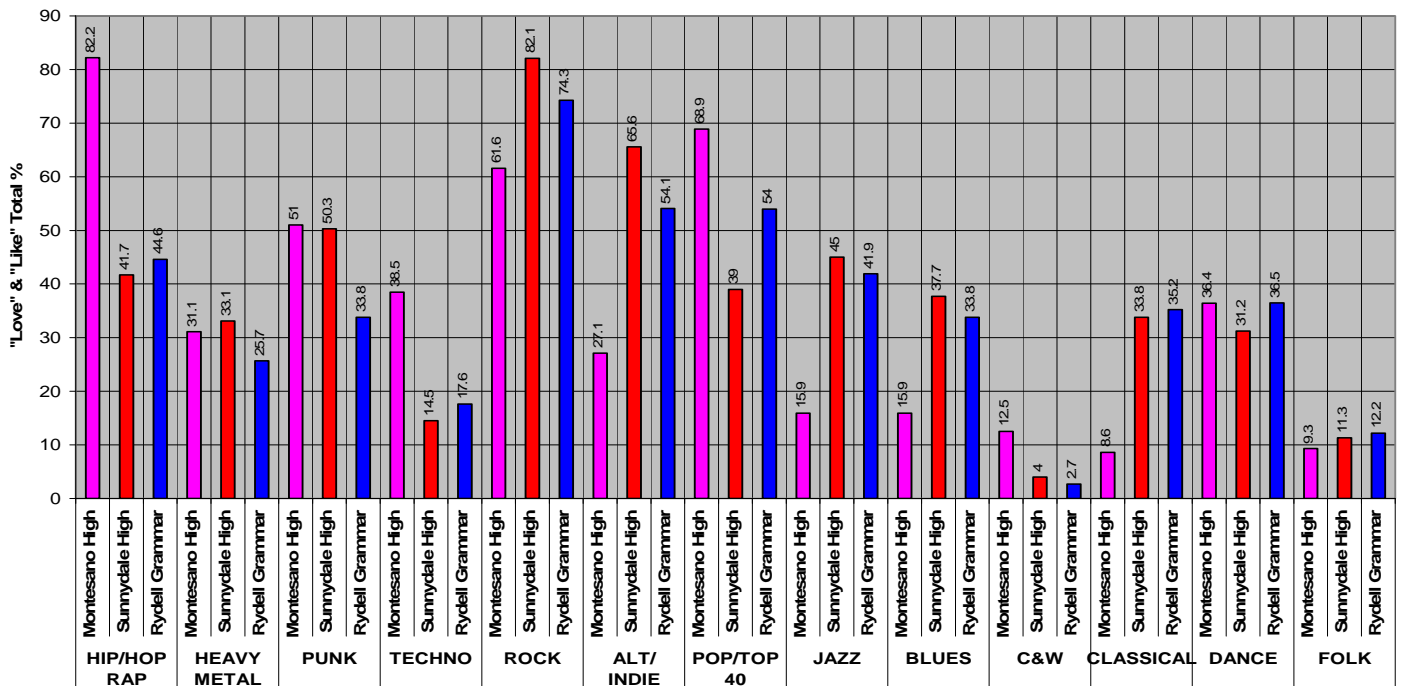
Musical taste, what one likes (see Tanner, Asbridge and Wortley 2008) and dislikes (Bryson 1996), is seen as a central element of distinction within cultural practice (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999; Savage 2006). The sociological study of popular

music has many theoretical strains, from the critical theory of Adorno and the Frankfurt School (Adorno 1999), to the work on subculture at the Birmingham school (Hebdige 1979), to Bourdieu's work on distinction and the field of cultural production (1984, 1993) and their developments (see Thornton 1995, Bennett *et al* 2005). There have also been studies of musical taste that highlight the 'omnivorous' (Peterson and Kern 1996) and 'neo-tribal' (Bennett 1999; 2005) consumption of music that cuts through traditional class lines. The following discussion outlines survey responses on music tastes.

Reports on ownership of original CDs showed little difference, Although more at Rydell Grammar owned more than 100, three quarters of respondents owned fewer than 20 CDs. Ownership of whole CDs burnt from friends was also relatively consistent, although males were more likely to have burnt more than 50. Over 50 per cent of total respondents had less than 20 burnt CDs. Montesano High students responded least often to the question on music downloads which may relate to the fact that only 74 per cent of their households had internet access. It is somewhat surprising that over a quarter of total respondents claim never to have downloaded a song, which does go against the music industry stereotype of young people 'stealing' by downloading music.

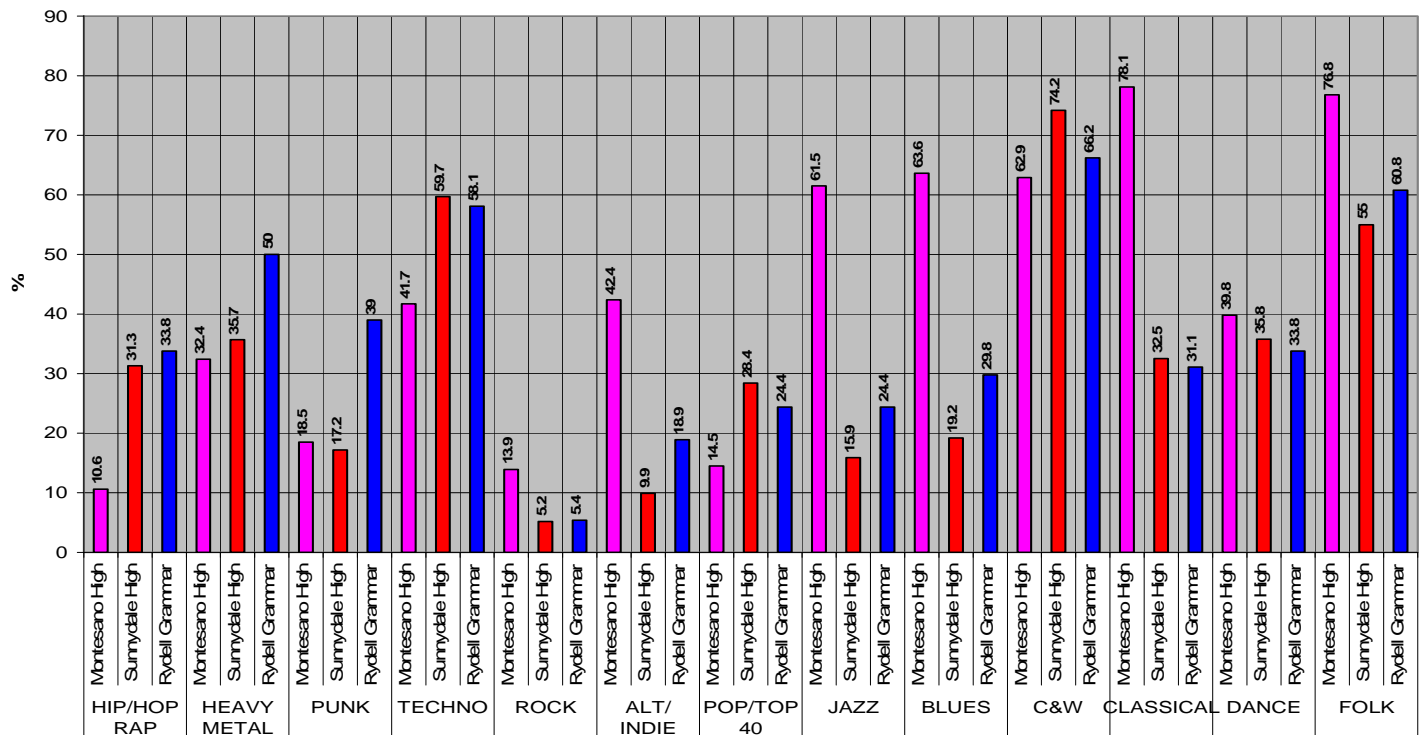
Distinctions between music tastes were present but minor (Figure 6.5). For instance, while relatively unpopular overall, 'Classical', 'Jazz' and 'Blues' music were much more liked at Rydell and Sunnydale schools than at Montesano High, where they were avidly disliked. 'Hip-Hop' was twice as popular at Montesano High than at the other two schools.

FIGURE 6.5: Music Genre Tastes: Love/Like



Taste distinctions were much more evident when it came to negative reactions to music genres, with Montesano High students stronger in their dislikes (Figure 6.6). Whereas Rydell and Sunnydale youth tended to select ‘indifferent’ for less popular genres, Montesano youth tended to select hate. This was especially the case for more canonical music genres such as classical, jazz, folk and blues, and also for alternate/indie.

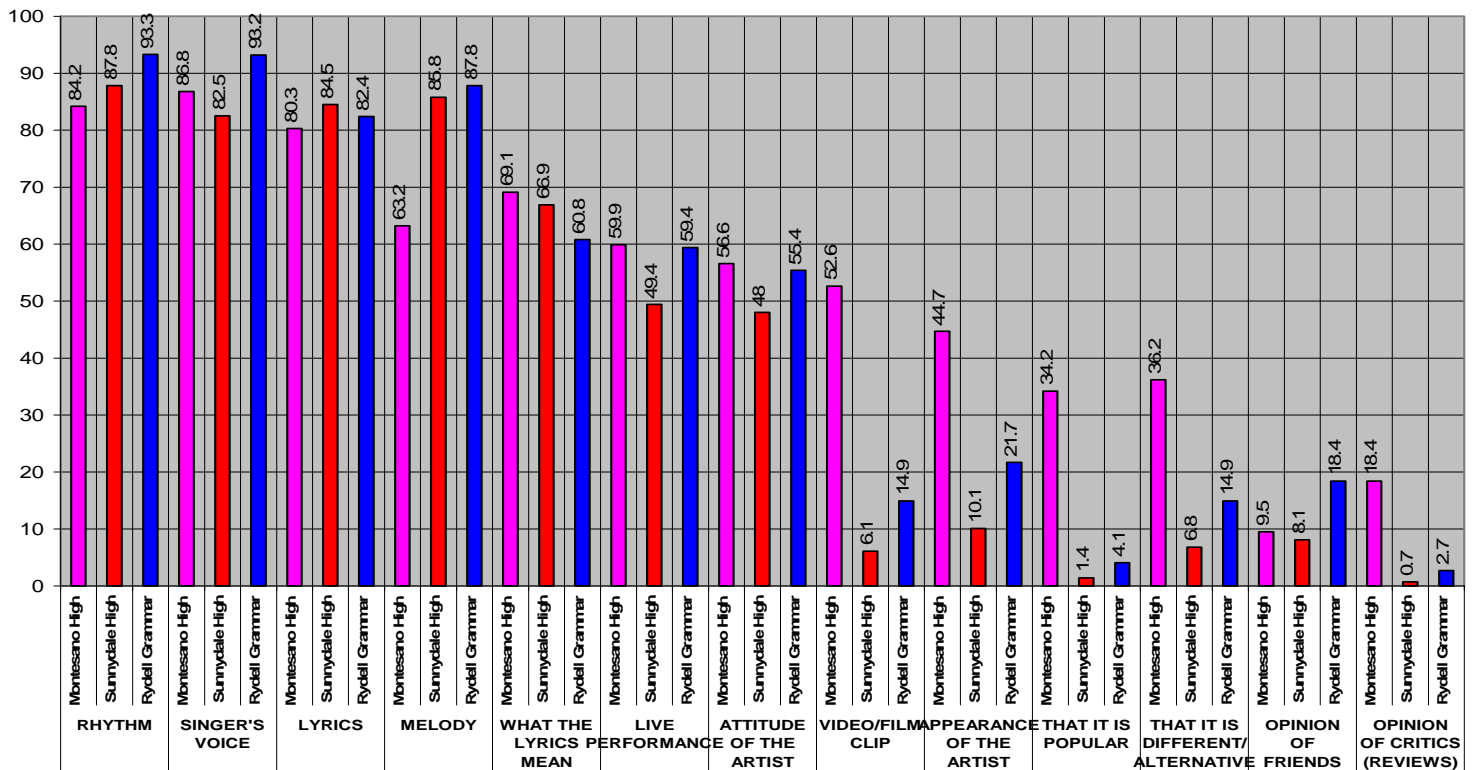
FIGURE 6.6: Music Genres Taste: Don't Like/Hate



Rock, Top40/Pop, Hip Hop/Rap, Punk and Alt/Indie had the most positive responses overall. This indicates that they are largely consuming low or popular culture music over high culture music. Nevertheless, some distinctions remained in terms of a highbrow/lowbrow divide which was expressed more in the negative sentiments towards the ‘higher’ genres.

The students were also asked why they liked the music that they like. They were asked to rate the ‘importance’ of various factors on a Likert Scale (Figure 6.7). When it came to aesthetic features of the music itself – rhythm, singer’s voice, lyrics, melody, meaning of lyrics, and live performance – there was very little difference between the schools.

FIGURE 6.7: Factors of Music Taste

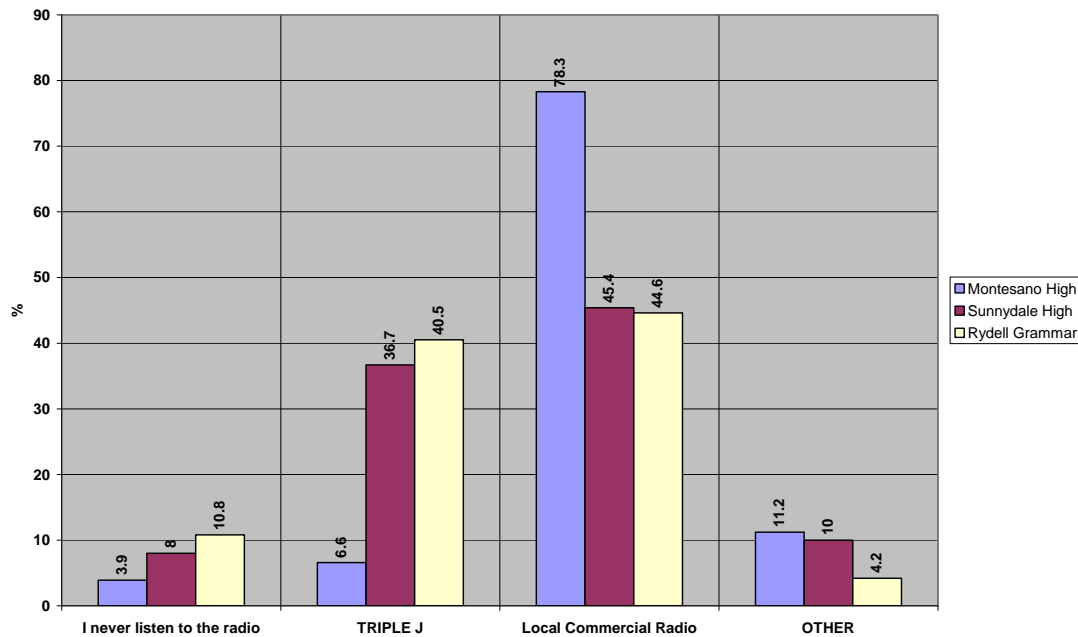


However, when it came to other more commercial and peer related factors there were considerable distinctions. In all of these categories except ‘opinion of friends’, Montesano High respondents had much higher rates of importance. ‘Video/Film clip’ has obvious parallels with the higher consumption of television by Montesano youth. The data implies that Montesano students are more influenced in their music tastes by commercial and peer factors than the other two schools, and this may be the case. Yet, it may also be that they are just more willing to admit to these influences, which is itself a form of distinction.

There was a marked distinction when it came to what radio stations the students listen to (Figure 6.8) which may tell us more about musical taste distinctions. The responses of Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High students were almost identical, with slightly

more in each case listening less to commercial radio stations and more to national publicly-funded and relatively alternative station Triple J. In contrast, Montesano High students listened much more to commercial radio stations and much less to Triple J.

FIGURE 6.8: What Radio Station do You Listen to the Most?



There is a non-commercial/commercial taste divide reflected here, which parallels the highbrow/lowbrow cultural distinction within contemporary popular culture itself. With some exceptions, the young people surveyed consume broadly similar media products, but the three distinct cohorts consume in different ways and to a different extent. This finding implies that while high/lowbrow cultural distinctions are not as delineated as in Bourdieu's original study, they do exist in subtle ways that point to the operation of cultural capital within a class-based habitus. These results are quite similar to the research done by (Bennett, Emmison and Frow 1999).

Concluding Remarks

The presentation of survey data in this chapter demonstrates that the three schools are quite distinct when it comes to socio-economic markers of class, and to manifestations of cultural capital in operation. They are therefore suitable for detailed investigation of whether reflexivity in the contemporary habitus of Australian youth is distributed along class lines, as we would expect from Bourdieu's theoretical framework of interpretation.

The cultural consumption investigated here is relatively 'traditional': TV, movies and music. In the relatively short period of time since the surveys were completed consumption in youth culture has changed considerably, with the internet becoming increasingly important and Blogs, iTunes, Bit Torrent, YouTube, MySpace and Facebook becoming central sites of youth cultural exchange and consumption. Nevertheless, the data above does provide a snapshot of taste distinctions: where class-based habitus meets culture.

The data above attests to the validity and reliability of using these three schools as representations of class-based habitus. There are a number of important considerations here. Firstly, an 'ecological fallacy' must not be allowed to arise, where something 'appears to be a casual explanation when it is not' (Neuman 2003: 534, 158-159). So we must not make conclusions about individual behaviour from group level data and vice versa. Furthermore, methods can themselves play a part in how class is expressed. By applying theorised versions of class to responses it is easy to misunderstand what research participants actually mean by 'class' when they are discussing it (Payne and Grew 2005). Research participants can sometimes anticipate

what the researcher wants and attempt to give it to them. Much effort was made in the following data chapters to avoid interpretive mistakes. With these things in mind, the performance of the self within the research process is itself an activity that reproduces distinctions (Skeggs, Thumin and Wood 2008). In this way, not only does the different *content* of the research participants' responses to the research questions display habitus at work, the very *form* of their participation does so as well.

These cultural elements combined with the more objective markers of class – parent's occupation, number of books in the home, computer access and internet access - add up to a class 'profile' for each cohort that is further reflected in the characteristics of the school. The following chapter discusses matters of class and inequality and finds that class itself delineates very different attitudes.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Attitudes towards Class and Inequality

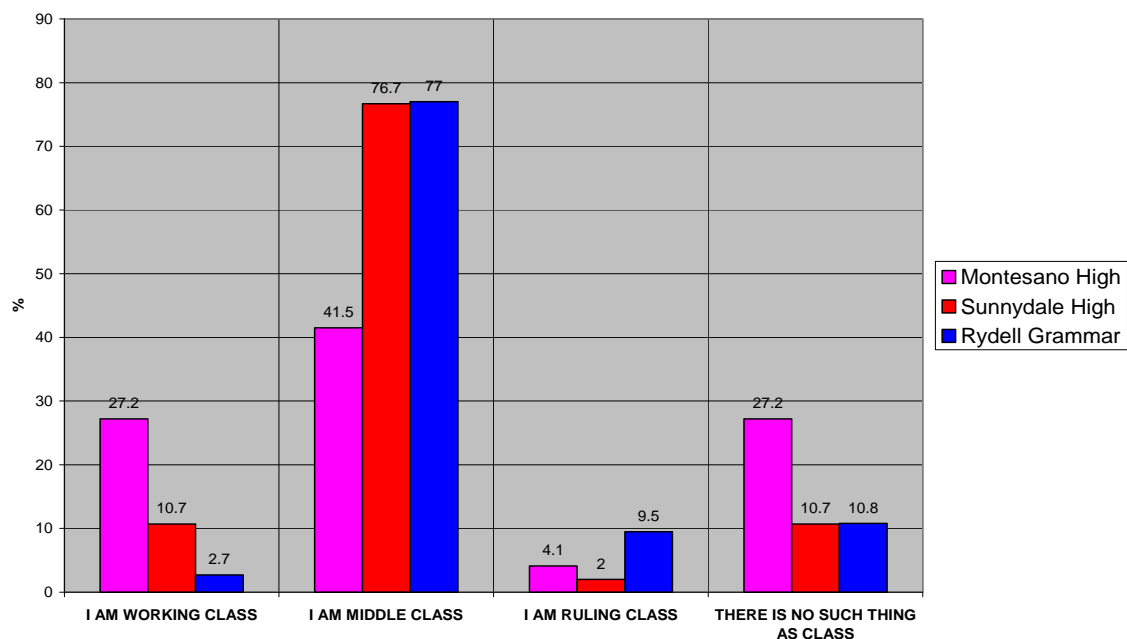
Introduction

It is important in this thesis is to interrogate the contemporary mediation of reflexivity, whether this happens in terms of individualization, as Beck and Giddens propose, or whether there are differences along class lines. An obvious survey question was to ask whether the respondents identified themselves as belong to a particular class, and whether they thought there was class inequality in Australia. This was also discussed in focus groups, where the participants were shown the graphs displaying the survey data on this question and asked to reflect on it.

Quantitative Responses

The question asked respondents to circle what 'class' they saw themselves in, or whether there was no such thing as class (Figure 7.1). Curiously, almost half the mainly working class Montesano High students located themselves in the middle class and were almost three times more likely to state that 'there is no such thing as class' than students from the other two schools. Given their parents' stated occupations, as a cohort their sense of being middle class was overstated, while their sense of being working class was understated. Only a quarter of Montesano parents had middle class occupations according to the classification system used, but 41.5 per cent of survey respondents claimed to be middle class. About 75 per cent of parents had working class jobs, were unemployed or on a pension, yet, only 27.2 per cent claimed to be working class.

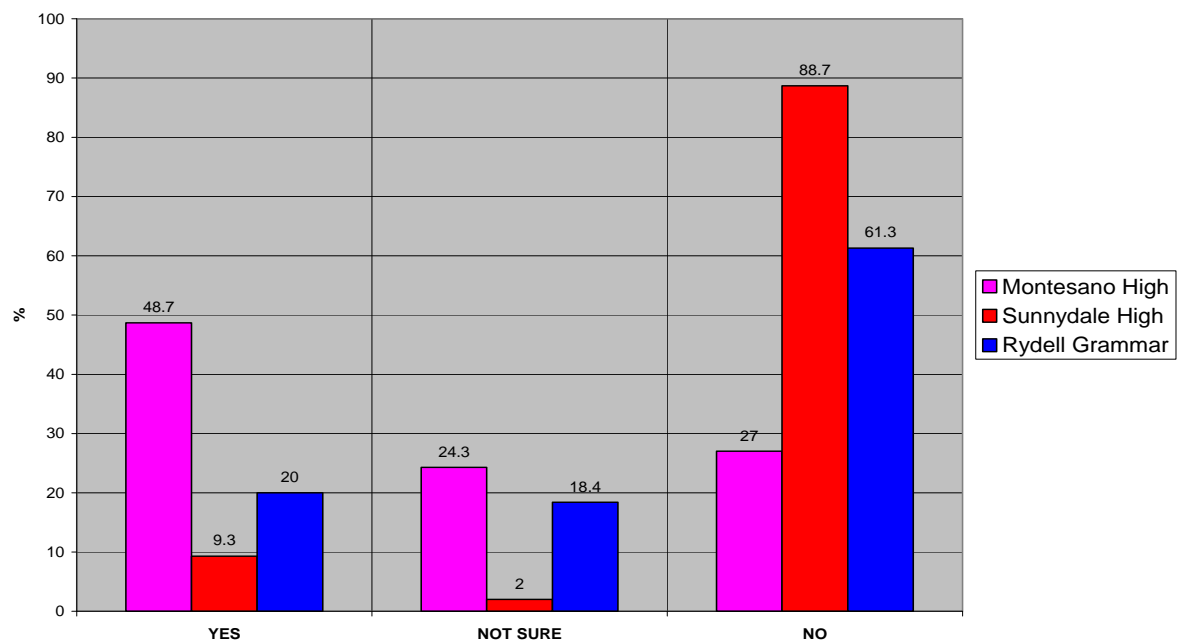
FIGURE 7.1: Response to the Question on Class



Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High respondents gave fairly accurate depictions of their 'class' location when compared to the occupations of their parents and were much less likely to claim that 'there is no such thing as class'. These issues are discussed in more detail in the focus group data below.

The students were then surveyed about whether, in general, *everyone* has an equal chance to achieve his or her ambitions (Figure 7.2). In a similar way to the skewed responses on class location, students from the most disadvantaged school – Montesano High - were five times more likely than students at Sunnydale High, and two and a half times more likely than students at Rydell Grammar to claim that everyone in society has an equal chance to accomplish their own ambitions.

FIGURE 7.2: Responses to the Question About Chances of People Achieving Their Ambitions

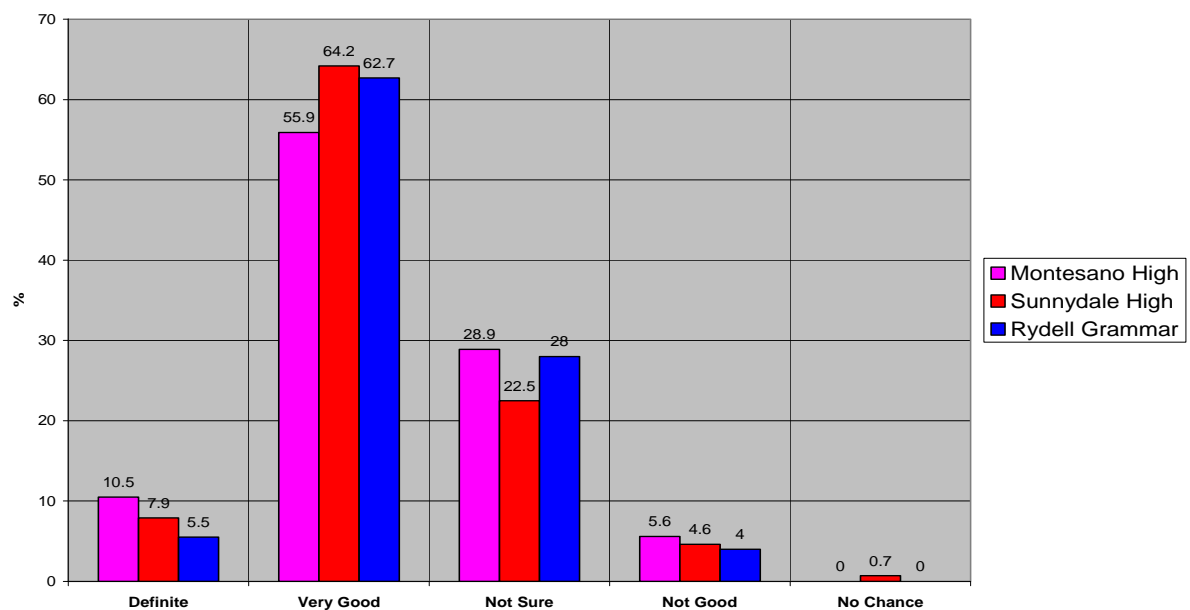


How can we understand this apparent denial of class inequality by the cohort best placed to see and understand it? We need to look at some of the key claims of reflexive modernity. Risks have become individualized and people increasingly regard setbacks and crises as resulting from individual inadequacies, rather than as outcomes of social and economic processes beyond their personal control (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 4). On the surface, it seems that Montesano High students have accepted the *illusio* of the neo-liberal discourse of classlessness and therefore misrecognise the socio-economic disadvantages of themselves and others. But, as the qualitative data below attests, this isn't a passive acceptance of inequality or false consciousness. It should rather be understood as a dismissal of the status labels and stereotypes associated with disadvantage that demonstrates resistance in the form of an active resilience and an expression of strength (Bottrell 2007; Raby 2005). Resilience in this sense is the opposition to stigma where the resistance is not part of class consciousness, but of 'identity work' (Bottrell 2007: 599; Hey 1997). It was notable that Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar students were generally more

sceptical about equal life chances than those at Montesano High. Sunnydale High students were almost unanimous in saying that opportunity is not equal, and Rydell Grammar students only a little less so.

A subsequent survey question relevant to class and inequality then asked what they thought were their own chances of accomplishing their life ambitions (Figure 7.3). There was little difference in responses across the three schools. Most thought their chances were very good. Interestingly, this relatively positive attitude towards their own individual futures is at odds with the rather negative attitudes towards the future of the planet which is discussed in detail in Chapter Ten on ‘risks’ and progress.

FIGURE 7.3: Responses to the Question about Accomplishing Your Ambitions



In short, there were obvious differences in perceptions of class equality when respondents were asked *generally* about chances of fulfilling ambitions, yet when asked the same question about themselves as *individuals*, the responses were remarkably similar across the three schools. Therefore contemporary habitus of youth

seems to instil relatively similar attitudes towards one's own life chances regardless of position in social space but yet also mediates very different analytical attitudes towards inequality.

At Montesano High, with more students in the 'very good' category of response, this apparent optimism directly reflects some of the participants' sporting ambitions and their determined, if possibly unrealistic, desire to succeed in that field. For example, of the many male students who have taken part in the school's rugby league programme over the past decade, only a few have made it into the Australian National Rugby League (NRL). According to personal communication with a Physical Education teacher at Montesano, the TSP students are continually encouraged to make sure that they have something to 'fall back on' if they don't achieve their sporting ambitions. They are told to dedicate equal time to sport and study, but many ignore this. These students see the stories of focus, hard work and determination on the road to sporting success in various media discourses, and know that single-minded dedication is essential to reach elite competition levels. Yet such dedication to training virtually ensures that they are left with no qualifications if they do not 'make it', as all their effort and time has been solely directed towards sport.

If we turn to the prevalence of responses from the Montesano High cohort that assert 'middle class' location, or claim that there is 'no such thing as class', this could be interpreted as evidence that neo-liberalism is producing a classless society where even the most disadvantaged feel that they have equal chance to fulfil their ambitions. However, a more likely explanation is that this is evidence of the pervasive influence of neo-liberal discourse that creates a self-regulated governmentality and produces

what Bourdieu refers to as misrecognition. Looking at the survey responses to questions pertinent to class we might suggest that many of the Montesano High respondents have internalised the neo-liberal rhetoric of a classless meritocratic society despite their own, quite obvious socioeconomic and educational disadvantages that they do readily identify elsewhere. This does seem to align with the reflexive modernists' notion that class position is becoming less important in terms of self-identity. Nevertheless, while there is acceptance here, there is also resistance.

The data from survey questions that pertain directly to class inequality indicates that class can be acknowledged when discussed in general terms in regard to 'society', yet may be denied by the individual respondent when asked directly about their own chances. Class seemed to be talked about as a 'thing' that largely affects or labels others, not as a determinant of one's own individual life chances. A deeper understanding of how class inequality was understood by respondents was gained through analysis of the qualitative data.

Qualitative Responses

While the survey responses were somewhat ambiguous on the subject of class inequality, focus group participants did express attitudes or speak of experiences that looked a lot like personal encounters with class. Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High students seemed to discuss class in a much more observational, detached or analytical way. They could see the disadvantage of others and were often aware of their own relative advantage in terms of economic and cultural capital. This finding supports Bourdieu's observation in *Distinction* (1984) that abstraction itself is an essential facet of the cultural capital of the middle classes. At Montesano High, the

acknowledgement of class position and class inequality was prevalent in responses to other, less direct questions.

The following discussion of focus group data considers attitudes towards class in a number of ways. Firstly, there are implicit discourses about class that emanate from discussions about obstacles to their own ambitions. Secondly, there is class awareness that manifests when the participants discuss the two other schools involved in the research. Thirdly, there are reactions to graphs of survey results pertaining directly to class. The use of these graphs as prompts for discussion encouraged the students to think reflexively about class and stimulated an additional and vital level of analytical discourse.

Montesano High

Although the data on obstacles to ambitions is focused on in detail in Chapter Eight in relation to reflexivity, it is worth briefly considering here some of the focus group discussion about obstacles to ambitions for what they reveal about class inequality. Asked about foreseeable obstacles, Elly at Montesano High immediately nominates money. The other participants enthusiastically agreed.

Interviewer: OK, so is there anything that you guys can see as being the major obstacles of stopping you doing what you want to do?

Elly: Money.

Elly and Tina: Yeah!

Elly: Yeah, cause my family is not all that rich or anything, so trying to save up money to get into and do Uni is going to be... it's going to be money, that's going to be my biggest stop.

Interviewer: [to Clare and Tina] Do you agree?

Clare: Yeah. (Montesano).

However, when further prompted to comment on the class position of *others*, class issues, in this case examples of cultural capital, were nominated by focus group

members even while maintaining that individual application to task can overcome these inequalities.

Interviewer: Do you guys think that the people at Rydell Grammar have more advantage than you?

Elly: Yeah, I think they have more advantage because they have better access to resources and things like that, but like Chloe said, if people apply themselves enough then they can be as good as those people.

Clare: I think their class sizes are smaller.

Elly: Yeah, well private schools get a lot more money than public schools so... Yeah, and they get more attention than what we do 'cause we have like 30 kids in each class. I just think that if people have the right goals of what they want in life then they can achieve them if they put their mind to it (Montesano).

When prompted, the Montesano High girls acknowledged the advantage that the relative wealth of Rydell Grammar families provides in terms of educational resources and provisions. Although many of the students at Rydell and Sunnydale schools have part time jobs, Montesano focus group participants believed that Rydell and Sunnydale students would not need part time jobs, providing them with more study time.

Elly: They probably have rich families with a lot of money so their parents can pay for a lot of stuff, pay for Uni and pay for travelling.

Clare: And they can concentrate on themselves, like academically, they don't have to worry about other things like getting a part time job or... like, they might still work and that, but maybe their parents have set them up there, which helps for the future.

Interviewer: Do you think you guys would get a better UAI [University Entry Score] if you went to that school?

Clare: Probably... I probably wouldn't muck up as much as I do here [laughs]. Not that it's cause of this school but...and if it was \$4000 a term I wouldn't be stuffing around [laughs] (Montesano).

Clare's statement that 'Maybe their parents have set them up there' is an acknowledgement of social capital. Moreover, her joke that if her parents were paying a substantial amount for her education she would work harder acknowledges the importance of economic capital to provide access to cultural capital. In fact, in their

focus group, Rydell Grammar students stated that the huge cost of attending their private school does create an added pressure to perform well academically.

Between Status and Opportunity

In the focus group interview with males at Montesano High, similar assumptions about pressure to succeed and high expectations were made about students at academically selective Sunnydale High.

Dan: I think what the major difference [between Montesano High and] Sunnydale High is that we get told to do our homework 20 minutes per unit a night. While we get told to do it, sometimes we won't do it. They will do it every single night for every single subject, they will do what they've gotta do, and like, for all the Year 10ers, you know how people can leave, like even if you are coming back next year you can sign out [here], they have to stay at school to keep their spots for Year 11 and 12, so they have got incentives to keep working and that gives them a head start, 'cause they are starting to work earlier than everyone else (Montesano).

Tim added that at Montesano High there was more or less a 'don't care' attitude while at Sunnydale High 'their standards are so high and some kids are all trying to beat each other'. He acknowledged that there were some 'competitive' classes at Montesano High but 'then it just drops'. Tim acknowledges an anti-school culture at Montesano High reminiscent of that identified in Paul Willis' (1977) seminal research on British working class males at school.

When asked about individual chances to succeed in life, class was both denied and acknowledged by the Montesano boys, as the following exchange illustrates.

Stew: If everybody has the same attitude, the same drive to what they want to get, it doesn't matter what you look like or how smart or how dumb you are, well it might with smart or how dumb you are. But if you want it enough you can get it.

Tim: I disagree, I reckon that in terms of jobs... like my aunty said to me that 'if I look at a resume and see that they've worked at McDonalds, straight away that looks good because McDonalds'

training is the best'. Whereas they don't hire people, I mean a lot of people employed by McDonalds if it is in [local suburb], a lot of them are from [a local high school with a much better reputation], they don't seem to go for anyone from Montesano (Montesano).

Danny agreed with Stew rather than Tim:

Danny: But if you are willing to get out there early, like if you identify the need, like the employment will come and you'll benefit later in life. Like, it doesn't matter if you are from Montesano or anything... if you have got a good head on your shoulders it doesn't matter what environment you are in, if you are doing everything right, you can still go places (Montesano).

In this focus group the boys developed quite a strong analysis of habitus in relation to the chance of upward class mobility. Tim alludes to the personal influence of his working-class father in positive terms:

Tim: My father for instance again, he was brought up in a low [socio-economic area], and you can tell like the way with the discipline on his children, like he's much more strict than someone who was brought up with a lot of money that sort of got everything for them. So, I think your parents have a lot to do with where you are going to go. If they push you to be more proper and better mannered, well, you'll get employed obviously, and if you look a bit more appropriate for a job that has a lot to do with it (Montesano).

Tim is discussing how there are gradients even within working class habitus that may influence how one individual may 'succeed' while another may not. These exchanges highlight the complex, even contradictory nature of the Montesano High students' attitudes towards class. Tim acknowledges the structural disadvantage of coming from a school like Montesano High, but he also implies reflexivity in the form of self-imposed discipline as important for achieving goals. He also talks of being 'proper and better mannered', which can be seen as elements of cultural capital, as capacities that can be learnt. Furthermore, he also discusses the prospects of being 'employed' as such, implying the possibility of being unemployed. The possibility of being unemployed was completely absent in discussions on this topic at Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar.

The Maintenance of Hope: ‘I Don’t Believe in Classes’

The focus group participants were shown graphs showing the different attitudes to class and chances of achieving ambitions for the three schools.

Interviewer: Can you guys maybe tell me why there was difference in the schools like that?

[Long Pause]

Interviewer: Ok... why do you think that the more socioeconomically disadvantaged were more likely to say they had equal chance?

Elly: The area that is around here, I’m not saying it’s bad or whatever, but...

Clare: Most people live in the Housing Commissions.

Elly: Yeah... [fades off] (Montesano).

Here, the girls are struggling with the same contradictions in their attitudes towards class as the survey results show in the graphs; between their personal experience of class disadvantage and their denial of class inequality. Finally Elly said:

Elly: I don’t really think that there is such thing as class, but there are people that aren’t as better off as other people, but I don’t believe in classes, I don’t think we fit into a class like ‘that’s what you are’. I believe that you can make your own way even if you do come from a lower economic family or whatever they call them, or you live in a housing commission, you can still be in a high class in later life... It doesn’t matter. So, I don’t believe in classes (Montesano).

This is illuminating. Elly sees class in terms of an inhibiting label where class denotes one’s standing in society that shuts down opportunity. She doesn’t want that to happen to her or her friends so she doesn’t ‘believe’ in class as a determinant of who or what someone can be, where class is a prescribed role for one to play. Class is associated here with low status and the stigma of living in a suburb that was once dubbed in a newspaper headline as the ‘worst postcode in the state’. In this sense, Elly is reflexively asserting that class has nothing to do with her self identity, a claim that resonates with the notion of detraditionalisation. This is very close to the identified problematic of ‘forcing the working class to tell themselves’ (Skeggs 2004: 119-127),

whereby access to resources aids the possibility of successful reflexivity. Skeggs describes the effect as follows:

This constant denial of the class-resourced-based nature of the self is continually produced and authorized, thereby making, constituting and producing difference and inequality, not challenging it (2004a: 134).

The class denial here is also reminiscent of the ‘defensive’ and ambivalent class identities found by Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2001) in the northwest of England, where most people like to see themselves as ‘outside’ of classes.

In the male focus group at Montesano High the denial of class position was directly seen as a mechanism for maintaining hope.

Interviewer: Why do you think that so many people here said that ‘there is no such thing as class’?

Tim: They don’t understand the question [laughter].

Interviewer: Do you reckon it’s as simple as that?

Tim: This is what they want [points to the graph]. They want an equal opportunity, they want there to be no class, they want there to be no difference between them and those who live [on a road along the local beach with very expensive real estate] in those massive houses, they don’t want any difference.

Danny: It’s like tunnel vision, straight down the alley, not looking at the broader process (Montesano).

The boys see the apparent denial of disadvantage by others at their school as more of a rhetorical or motivational device to maintain hope for achieving one’s goals rather than lack of awareness of the reality of their social situation, a situation highlighted by Willis (1977) where to include oneself in a discussion of disadvantage represents ‘giving up’. These are examples of the denial of class as resilience and strength, not as false consciousness or constitution of oneself as a cultural dupe.

In Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst’s (2001) study, the key distinction in attitudes towards class identity was heavily tied to cultural capital. Those with less cultural

capital, whilst also sometimes displaying elements of reflexivity, tended to feel threatened by the implications of including class labels into their own formations of identity. Those with more cultural capital had the ability to ‘play reflexively’ with the ‘external criteria’ that defines class ideas. As shown in the following discussions, there is a very similar distinction between the Montesano High students and those at Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High.

Sunnydale High

In the Sunnydale High focus groups, disadvantage was largely spoken of in analytical terms and rarely in terms of personal experience. When asked about class as a determinant of opportunity, the mixed focus group at Sunnydale High saw inequality increasing.

Lee: I think the importance [of class] is increasing all the time. Degrees are getting more expensive to go into specialised areas of work, living in a house or apartment is costing more and more, so people are staying home longer, so it is just gradually getting worse, I guess (Sunnydale).

Lee points out several factors in contemporary youth transitions also highlighted in some recent youth studies literature, implying that the greater the economic disadvantage, the less likely a young person is to gain adult independence.

Any expression of financial concern at Sunnydale High was largely bound up with access to quality education. When asked specifically about money and class, the Sunnydale High female focus group participants referred to the public/private school divide (despite attending an academically selective school), and the regional/city divide between the Sunnydale area and metropolitan Sydney.

Mel: Well, look in Sydney, I have a lot of family there and if you say the words ‘public school’ they like recoil in horror. The private schools there

get the best teachers, they get the best resources like they have computers that don't break down, and they have recording studios. We have no air conditioning, we have no swimming pool, we have nothing... we have guitars in the music room that are all out of tune that you can't actually play, they have holes in them... our drama room consists of a room about this size [makes 'small' sign with both hands] that they have painted black and they claim that's the studio because it's black... and we are like, 'no, things don't become a studio just because they are black' [laughter]... we've got the mirror that somehow doesn't reflect anything that's actually in the room, you can be right in front of it and I can't see myself (Sunnydale).

This has a similar ring to the comments made by Montesano High students about the resources at Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High. The girls here are aware that their school has limited public resources and feel that it is a hindrance to their artistic and academic ambitions.

'We Know': Our Intelligence, Their Hope

At this point they were shown the quantitative data:

Nell: Wow! Check out Sunnydale on that [88.7% response of 'no' to the question about equal chances to achieve their ambitions]... [laughter] We are so much more realistic!

Mel: Montesano all thought they could achieve their ambitions but aren't they the ones that are most likely to be disadvantaged? (Sunnydale).

Here the Sunnydale girls do some analysis of their own, an example of their apparently effortless exercise of reflexivity in the interview context. They view their own responses as 'realistic' in describing financial inequalities. They can see this contrasts with seemingly unrealistic responses at Montesano High.

Sara: Isn't it because it does all come back to money in the end, people who have money... it's like their parents can pay for them to go off to Uni and they can... They can go and like, hand pick the jobs that they want and then there's the people that come from lower socio-economic backgrounds that their parents can't pay for them go to Uni, so they've got a HECS debt as soon as they finish, they've got to find a job, they've got to start paying that off, and meanwhile they are trying to work their way up in whatever they are trying to do. There should be equal chance for everybody but there's not (Sunnydale).

Freely analysing other people's situations, they do not see class problems in relation to their own life narratives. Furthermore, Mel notes other possible contours of inequality, such as gender and religion.

Mel: But things like gender inequality and racism have improved... but there is the 'glass ceiling' still and there's prejudice against Muslims in our society, so I wouldn't think that *they* have an equal chance because of prejudice in society (Sunnydale).

In terms of class, these are analytical responses about other people. This absence of personal class-related problems, whether economic or cultural when comparing themselves to Montesano High, is itself an implicit acknowledgement of their *own* advantage. As Skeggs points out,

Just as the middle-class has always been able to use and access the bodies of the working class for labour, now knowledge of and experience of others are used to shore up the composite of the academic reflexive self (2004: 129).

Quizzed further about the apparent misrecognition of equal opportunity by Montesano High students, the Sunnydale girls initially mention both 'hope' and 'intelligence' as reasons, but go on to explain in a highly reflexive way that their own superior education provides them with a more realistic and nuanced appreciation of society:

Mel: It could be also education, like, 'cause we know, and we take an interest in things like the media and we look at things and analyse and maybe they don't, so they just assume Australia is egalitarian...

Nell: Maybe in their school it's all pretty equal, I have no idea.

Interviewer: So who said hope? [Kath] So are they talking more about what they want it to be like, rather than the way it is?

Nell: Maybe they don't have a distinction between the two.

Mel: Yeah, they just assume that... I think that 'it will all work out in the end' is a mentality in everyone, so maybe that is a thing too. And also if you come from a poor background and all you want to do is get out of it and, you know, become rich and all those things, you wouldn't want to think 'no, I can't achieve that'.

Kath: It could make you work harder...

Nell: Or just give up (Sunnydale).

Nell wonders whether the Montesano students can distinguish between the denial of class as a rhetorical device of hope and their *reality* of disadvantage.

Nell: Maybe in their school, maybe their perception of the world is like that, and like Mel said, education and what they've learnt is maybe not as developed as people that go here [to Sunnydale High] who realise that there is inequality (Sunnydale).

Both Nell and Mel see their own education as providing them with a 'more realistic' understanding of class inequality, or at least a better understanding of inequality and opportunity than their Montesano High counterparts – they 'know' about class in the academic sense, which is really an acknowledgment of their own (superior) cultural capital.

Mel: So with education, you become more aware of where you stand in the world, like we become more aware of how Australia stands in the globe, like we know we are pretty insignificant, so maybe they haven't realised that, like, they haven't educated themselves (Sunnydale).

The theme of hope also was present in the mixed group at Sunnydale High.

Soon-Yi: They probably don't, or don't want to, look at themselves as inferior to others... I suppose it gives them ambition.

Brianna: Yeah, it gives them some hope, that if they are not economically high then they can be, it doesn't have to be such a big issue to be working class, middle class, ruling class (Sunnydale).

Lee had earlier pointed out that in terms of status, the Montesano High students might not see themselves as inferior while acknowledging the denial of disadvantage as a mechanism of hope.

Lee: Well they might not be economically advantaged but they still might have a good life, they might still be happy even if they are not rich or have a lot of money, so they might not really see it as being that negative a class, or they don't see the classes above them being so great (Sunnydale).

As these quotes from the Sunnydale focus groups show, responses regarding class inequality were more analytical in tone and more detached and depersonalised than of the focus group discussions at Montesano High. Implying the generative dispositions

of class-based habitus, the mixed group at Sunnydale imagined that Montesano High students would have different expectations and ambitions from them:

Lee: Yeah, I know a lot of people who go to Montesano High and a lot of them are smart people, but they are just happy being an electrician or just working in a simple job or something to just sustain their life, nothing that academic or that ambitious, they don't see those things as that big an issue so they still see it as achieving their goals (Sunnydale).

Interestingly, two of the girls indicated they thought class consciousness in form of educational ambition at both schools was largely socially constructed:

Soon-Yi: Maybe because at our school we are given the impression that we can achieve and we can do whatever we want, and so they are not really pressured into thinking they can achieve...

Brianna: Yeah, 'cause of the ambition thing, maybe they are not being told (Sunnydale).

The attitudes towards Montesano High students' apparent denial of unequal opportunities prompted an array of analytical responses from the Sunnydale High students. They suggested reasons for this disparity ranging from ignorance and lack of education to resistance and the maintenance of hope.

Prestige: Smart but not Special

In the Sunnydale girls' focus group there were many implicit references to their own education and intelligence. They regarded themselves as relatively 'smart' due to their ability to pass a stringent aptitude test to get into their school, but were reluctant to see themselves as 'special'. They were also aware of the prestige of their school, but were quick to deny it at an individual level.

Interviewer: Don't you think that your school here has a fair bit of prestige?

Nell: Everyone thinks that.

Mel: But we don't.

Sara: We're not really that aware of it, maybe other people are.

Nell: I think it's a bit more ordered than other schools because people have a lot more eagerness to learn, they came here because they

made the choice to come here, or their parents forced them, either way, so they have that sort of initiative to learn and want to learn, where at other schools they go because they have to (Sunnydale).

When Nell says that her school is ‘more ordered’ she is referring to the absence of a Willis-style (1977) anti-school culture that the boys at Montesano High were quick to point out. The girls recognise the ‘advantageous attribution’ of attending an academically selective school. At the same time, they reconcile their advantage with the notion of being normal or ‘in the majority’. They claim that they don’t want to stand out in terms of status, but are obviously happy to use their cultural capital when it comes to the more pragmatic task of gaining employment – they use the selectivity of their school selectively – deliberately fashioning the public presentation of a successful self.

Sara: Yeah, we don’t go around saying ‘I go to Sunnydale High, the academically selective school’.

Mel: Yeah, but I say it’s academically selective when I’m going for a job

Others: Yeah [laughter].

Mel: I put that in bold... ‘the only academically selective high school in the area’ [laughs] (Sunnydale).

The mixed group somewhat reluctantly acknowledged the prestige of their school, but felt that this was accompanied by extra pressure being put on them.

Soon-Yi: I think also with our school, we get pressured a lot to do really well and so the teachers, having given us the idea that we can do and all have the potential to do really well, we all try to do the best we can. Whereas at other schools, they don’t really have that motivation and they just aim for what they think is OK.

Brianna: The whole pressure thing is a negative as well. The pressure put on us is that you must do well and like 17 out of 20 is bad, whereas if you go to another school... like if I said that to a friend at another school they’d be like ‘that’s really good’ and you would have got top of our class, but then you were told that it is bad at our school and that does happen here, so I guess the pressure and the stress is a positive thing to motivate us but it is also a negative thing (Sunnydale).

Pressure to perform academically was seen as a common problem or risk at Rydell and Sunnydale schools, but was completely absent as a stated problem at Montesano High. This is discussed in detail in Chapter Nine.

Perceiving a ‘Culture of Poverty’: Struggle and Unhappiness

At this point the Sunnydale High students were asked their opinion of their Montesano High and Rydell Grammar counterparts. Their responses in regard to Montesano High, through a veil of political correctness, often pointed to themes that relate to a ‘culture of poverty’ discourse.

Interviewer: So what do you guys think of the people out at Montesano?

Nell: If I said what I thought it would be very rude and probably wrong...

Mel: Well, lower socio-economic classes have lower education, and also like, being poor it wouldn't be nice. There's these whole prejudices and all these things that you have to struggle against, like you wouldn't be very happy people. I think that the lower of the working class who don't have enough money to buy food everyday, you would be resentful.

Nell: If you asked my mum this she would get angry and go on about how they're just dole bludgers and ra ra ra, because we were born in Bulgaria and we came here when I was four in 1993, and for the first year when we lived here for a family of four we had fourteen thousand dollars a year to live on and from there we have been able to work into the middle class, so my parents would say it's not a matter of class so much, it's a matter of laziness.

Mel: Yeah, but your family is pretty intelligent, so if you're not intelligent... [trails off] (Sunnydale).

As we can see Nell began to answer in highly negative terms, but was interrupted by Mel's analysis that equates poverty with less education and resentment whilst acknowledging some structural prejudices. Nell follows up, apparently echoing the opinions and experiences of her parents - equating poverty with laziness. Mel counters this by pointing out that Nell's family is intelligent and therefore has an advantage, implying of course that families of pupils at Montesano High may not be

intelligent. In the following extended discussion, the generative dispositions of working class habitus are alluded to:

Sara: If you're born into a family where both your parents haven't had full education and maybe dropped out in Year 10 or only went to Year 12 and then didn't go into a career, just went into a job and have been doing that same job or different jobs like working in a supermarket or being a mechanic and that sort of thing, like, there's nothing wrong with that, but it's more likely that you are not going to be able to get out of it, it's going to be really hard for you to break away from that and get out of it.

Mel: If that's what you're used to as a family unit...

Sara: And you don't know any different.

Kath: You have lower expectations.

Mel: Yeah, but it also becomes like, I know 'cause I went to a lower socio-economic primary school, and it was accepted that all people's fathers would go out every Friday night and get absolutely smashed and like stagger home breaking things. But my father would never even dream of doing that, so they thought I was strange because drinking and smoking and all these things really weren't an issue to me...

Nell: Why do they have to be issues for people? I guess that's the sort of thing that affects their perception of them.

Mel: But if your life is crap, you want to do something that makes your life seem less crap (Sunnydale).

Nell and Mel, whose parents are professionals, struggle to understand what they perceive as 'acceptable' working class behaviour including drinking and smoking as forms of escapism. But Sara feels like she has a better understanding because:

Sara: I come from and have been raised in places where people's fathers just work on trucks and their mums do desk jobs and then coming here [Sunnydale High] was really weird because people's parents had professions and careers, it's like two completely different worlds. They are so separate, like how I was growing up and what it's like for me here now (Sunnydale).

Sara then took umbrage with Mel's comments:

Sara: But they don't think of their life as crap though, that's the thing. Sure, they can be unhappy with their situation but a lot of them don't know any different and they don't know that they should be unhappy and that there is more out there for them (Sunnydale).

She then distinguishes herself:

I went to school in [outer low SES suburb]. I was in an Opportunity Class and my mum has always encouraged me because I was slightly

smarter. I'm not going to say I was heaps smarter, but she always encouraged me (Sunnydale).

In effect, Sara is talking about habitus. She feels she shares some attributes of the working class, but her own intelligence and encouragement by her parents – cultural capital – have helped her. She tells of feeling different upon entering her new school. She proposes that while some people in lower socioeconomic positions are unhappy with their situation, the others should also realise that there is 'more to life'. The discussion then moved to a debate about whether poverty leads to unhappiness, a simpler life, or both. Mel equated poverty with unhappiness. Nell expanded her analysis to global relations, maintaining that the poor in the developing world are largely ignorant of our higher living standards and are therefore relatively happy despite their poverty. But equally, because the poor in the Western world see high living standards around them and cannot observe or obtain such standards for themselves, they are much more likely to be unhappy.

This discussion is obviously quite judgemental. The girls here were quite candid compared to all the other focus groups in the research. They do not seem to think they are being judgemental, they think they are being analytical, with an authority (analytical expertise) provided by their 'intelligence' that is proven by their attendance at an academically selective school.

The Epistemic Problem of 'Political Correctness'

When asking the students about the other schools, overall there was a reluctance to be judgemental or to say anything too controversial. The above exchange in the female group at Sunnydale High was the most open and honest discussion in this regard. All the other groups were quite guarded in giving their frank opinions about the other

schools, which they would quite probably express in no uncertain terms in a less formal situation. For instance, in the mixed group at Sunnydale High, respondents tried to identify with Montesano High students as it is a public school like Sunnydale High. They seemed reluctant to say anything negative, and were positive about students there being 'sporty'. There were some stronger opinions were expressed about Rydell Grammar students, but they were quite muted as well.

Interviewer: What do you guys think of about the students who go to Rydell Grammar?

[laughter and groans]

Lee: I don't know any of them personally so I can't say much really.

Craig: Just generally they are a lot more uptight, upper class; all of them have parents who think that they are giving them a better education and stuff (Sunnydale).

These exchanges highlight a problem that reflexivity itself may bring to the research process, where the participants self censor in attempt to portray a certain academic sensibility. In this regard, their everyday discourses can be hidden by a deliberate performance.

Rydell Grammar

The Rydell Grammar students had quite similar attitudes towards class and inequality to the Sunnydale High students. Nevertheless, there were some obvious and subtle differences. The Grammar students seemed much more reflexively aware of their own privilege. They too discussed class analytically, but unlike the Sunnydale High students who almost ridiculed the possibility of equal opportunity, the Rydell students maintained a more ambivalent attitude.

Privilege and Protection

In the Rydell Grammar focus groups, acknowledgement of the better reputation and facilities of their school – their privilege – was the most common form of engagement with class discourses. For example:

Tony: I feel... not lucky... but I prefer to be at this school than those others. I went to public school, just the local state school, and absolutely loved it, had nothing against it. But I think that for senior school education, I'm happier being here because of the reputation of the school, I think it has better facilities.

Interviewer: So you think that the reputation of the school will be an advantage to you in the future?

Nat: Well, the results that this school constantly puts out would say that it's advantage to go here. And it's horrible to say, but financially it is an advantage as well, because to get into the higher education institutions, you have to pay a lot of money sometimes, and we have the financial backing of our families to do that. But some people don't have that, so they have to work a lot harder to get a scholarship or a position at those Unis, but we will have no trouble (Rydell).

The boys also felt that it led to a protected point of view.

Tom: I've been at this school since kindergarten, which I think is way too long. I think coming to our school we have an advantage academically in the last years, but I personally feel that I was really lucky to start playing football because if I hadn't have done that, in terms of social development... like, I got to mix with people from a broader range of cultures and ethnic backgrounds and socio-economic classes and I think that people who have been at this school for a long time, or a school like this or whatever, they just don't have as much of an understanding that people are equal and there is also a feeling that you are better. So I think it was lucky...

Nat: You can fall into that trap quite easily because we have a very sheltered life here. So you can fall into the trap of thinking that you are superior to other people (Rydell).

The female group also acknowledged that the reputation of Rydell Grammar was an advantage for instilling discipline and education – forms of cultural capital. Yet they were careful to say that didn't necessarily mean that they were 'better' than people at other schools.

Lucy: I think that an advantage is that we are taught to dress decently, 'cause I know my friend's sister who went to this school said to my mum that when she went into the workforce, she understood what was

appropriate and what wasn't, because of the school uniform, and that helped her to get jobs and whatever.

Kim: I think the school does advantage students; because you go out to get a profession and try to get a job and they see you go to this school and go [makes motion of putting an application into the 'good' pile]. I know that when I went for a job at McDonalds, they said to me that they would pick a person from Rydell Grammar over any other kids in the [local area], simply because they go to that school.

Lucy: So that's probably why people think that we are spoilt little brats and rich.

Kim: Exactly, so that's just a stereotype that gets repeated. What I'm saying is that when employers look at kids it is a stereotype that Rydell Grammar kids are better than [local public high school] kids and it is not necessarily the case (Rydell).

Note that Kim talks about the exact same 'McDonalds' issue that Tim spoke about at Montesano High, but from the other side of the coin in terms of social and cultural capital. The reflexivity and empathy displayed in this exchange was not necessarily a case of 'political correctness' or false modesty. The Rydell Grammar students in general were quite aware of their own privilege, much more so than the Sunnydale High students, despite very similar levels of cultural capital. This relates to levels of economic capital: Rydell Grammar students are wealthier than their Sunnydale High peers. This seems to manifest in a sharp awareness of their upper position in social space. In terms of wealth, Sunnydale High students were in between Montesano High and Rydell High: very high in cultural capital, but medium in terms of economic capital. This seems to engender a much more defensive attitude toward their relative privilege.

Analysing Inequality: Realism, Resistance and Hope

When the male Rydell Grammar focus group was shown the quantitative data graphs, and asked for an explanation of why Montesano High students were more likely to claim class does not exist, they began by pointing out education (cultural capital) and symbolic capital issues:

Nat: Maybe they've never really been taught about socio-economics and stuff like that, so it's not a big issue. Maybe the fact that this school is in a higher range of socio-economic status means we are probably more aware of it. It's 'cause we can see the advantage we have got. We walk into school in a tie; at Montesano they go in a Polo shirt and jeans, so you can actually see it... It symbolises the difference and it is cruel to say, but there is an inequality there (Rydell).

Tom had a different take. He regarded Montesano High students as less competitive, less concerned with success, and more concerned with 'realistic' ambitions and happiness.

Tom: I think that at Montesano High, like if you look at Sunnysdale it's got the highest saying 'there is not an equal chance', and it is a selective school. So I think it shows that Montesano has a stronger moral grounding in that life is more about happiness than academic success; and if they have ambitions ranging across a broader thing than just getting to the [makes quote marks with fingers] 'top of the pile', then they will see that as more achievable. As opposed to Sunnysdale, where nearly everyone in there, 88.7 per cent [who said that there is not equal chance to achieve ambitions], are after becoming the best at whatever they choose to do. I think Montesano might be ignorant to some parts of society, but overall that is not the issue. I think it is more that their ambitions are more realistic and based more on happiness than on academic achievement. Whereas at Sunnysdale, I think they see their ambitions as becoming the 'top of the pile' (Rydell).

Tom is outlining a description of what he perceives to be a working class habitus. While he thinks that lack of education may be a factor in Montesano High students' apparent misrecognition of class importance, Tom sees the Montesano High students' responses as equating to a better 'moral grounding' than students at Sunnysdale High because they are not striving to get to the 'top of the pile' or advocating that they are 'better'. Tom displays a somewhat romantic – even condescending - view of the working class and associates their denial of class inequality with humbleness, honesty and humility - comparing this to what he sees as the brash competitiveness of Sunnysdale High student's lofty ambitions.

The female focus group responses were similar, but there was less romanticising about 'happiness', and more recognition of class denial as resistance:

Kath: Because they don't want to define themselves as a lower class. If that is the way that you see them, as a lower class, they don't want to put themselves into that category... I don't know. Maybe it's a tall poppy thing kicking in that we don't realise we have. Like, we see it as though we have a better opportunity, but they are like, 'oh, they are not better than us, they are just normal people'.

Lucy: They are probably more positive because they know that maybe there is a limit in what they can achieve, and they want to beat it, to prove it wrong (Rydell).

In a similar vein, in the mixed group Andy argued that if Montesano High students admitted unequal opportunity it 'would be like admitting your own doom'.

Interviewer: Explain that to me?

Andy: Well, if you are at the bottom of the food chain, you like to think that you are not, I guess [trails off]... You like to think that you are not at the bottom... [long pause]... it is just easier to think like that (Rydell).

The interpretations of Montesano High's apparent class denial offered by Kath, Lucy, and Andy imply that Montesano High students need to pursue and maintain a discourse of the triumph of agency over structure. In a way their analysis recognises that the disposition of working class habitus is not to remain happy and complacent in the face of unequal access and opportunity, but to be competitive and offer resistance in the form of resilience and effort.

Class or No Class? Status or Opportunity?

The mixed group at Rydell Grammar thought that Australia was less class oriented than other countries.

Laura: I guess it's more because that in Australia we don't have a set class system where in other countries there is a definite line between the classes. But in Australia it is not really like that, it is more subjective which class you are in.

Andy: You can sort of compare it to suburbs and such, like if I say 'Montesano' what do you think? [laughs] But if I say 'Lakelands Estate' you would think differently, 'Estate' versus 'Housing Commission', you

can sort of see which classes belong to each. So we do have some sort of rough class structure, but definitely not as defined as other countries (Rydell).

These Rydell Grammar students define class more in terms of status than opportunity, in keeping with an abstract analytical view of Australian class relations. Comments about class relations at Montesano High were of a much more personal and defensive nature. When asked directly about opportunity, the Rydell Grammar respondents acknowledged the existence of unequal life chances for youth, using examples of social and cultural capital:

Andy: I guess if you have more money, more standing in class, more friends, you know, you can probably get your way much easier in life.

Gina: It's not about what you don't know, it's about who you know. It's about relationships. The [local area] is quite small and I used to go to a different school and everyone there thinks that the people here are completely together everywhere. If you realise that if you grew up and still live here you will still see the same people and you'll still be in kind of the ruling class, even though it is not that apparent, it's just like that the boss of a company might be around (Rydell).

These exchanges show the wide array of attitudes of Rydell Grammar students have towards class issues that illustrate a general ambivalence towards the topic. They often acknowledged their own privileges. Sometimes they spoke of egalitarianism. Sometimes they analysed class in terms of status or opportunity, or both, or neither. Other than the following example highlighting the stigma of going to a private school, they always spoke of class in analytical terms rather than using discourses of personal experience.

The (Not so) Symbolic Violence of Privilege

When asked about how attending Rydell Grammar affects the social capital relationships expressed in some of the above discussion, the mixed group quickly fell

to discussing how attending a prestigious private school engenders its own encounters with stigmas and stereotypes. This was strongly worded, with some swearing.

Interviewer: How does going to Rydell Grammar affect those relationships?

Gina: It changes with the people from my old school. You can get enemies or you can get friendships from it, it just depends on how they view that.

Interviewer: [to Andy who was making mocking shocked noises]: What do you think?

Andy: Well, just walking down the street in my tie, I've been spat at before; I've been called 'a fuckin rich boy' just by random people who I don't even know from the general public. You don't have people go, 'oh look, you're educated, you look very smart in that tie'. I had some drunk come up to me and say how uncomfortable I look in my 'fucking tie'. They are the only comments you ever seem to hear. There might be 80 per cent of people who like you, but you only hear from the 20 per cent who don't. So you get the feeling that you have a bad reputation.

Interviewer: Do you find yourself defending yourself whenever you say you go to Grammar?

Allen: Yeah, I say, 'now, I go to Rydell Grammar, but hear me out!' [everyone laughs].

Lauren: When they ask what school you go to it's always a bad question to be asked, you go, 'Rydell Grammar, don't hold it against me' (Rydell).

This is the only instance where Rydell Grammar students engaged personally with class discourse, that is, in their own engagement with expressed resentment from others about their own class privilege.

Concluding Remarks

For those proclaiming the end of class, the apparent lack of contemporary class-consciousness legitimises their claims (Pakulski and Waters 1996: 140-141). Certainly the claim 'I am working class' seems increasingly rare (see McDonald 1999 on marginalised youth). In Australia, working class identity is routinely denied – usually replaced with an aspirational middle-class discourse (Huntley 2006; Hamilton 2006). In the survey data Montesano High students more often agreed with the

statement ‘there is no such thing as class’. Moreover, despite the fact that most came from working class families, the majority claimed to be ‘middle class’.

This should not be interpreted to mean socio-economic class has somehow disappeared. Rather, the complexity of contemporary risk society and the information age combined with an ‘aspirational’ individualised, neo-liberal governmentality seems to engender a lack of class consciousness as a ‘latent side effect’ (Beck 1992: 132). In fact, as some of the young people in the Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar focus groups pointed out, the very denial of obvious class inequality and their own disadvantaged class position by Montesano High students asserts a specific kind of working class *illusio* – a resistance to structural inequality by maintaining that the game is worthwhile playing. So while there is not a ‘class consciousness’ in the classic Marxian sense of organising against capitalism, the different attitudes, opinions and experiences of the different schools does highlight how *habitus* generates very different ways of experiencing and observing inequality.

Further evidence that Montesano High students were quite conscious of their specific class location lies in their indications of future jobs and how they intended to get them. Central to Bourdieu’s theorising of social reproduction is how *habitus* instils ‘a sense of one’s place’ (Bourdieu 1984: 466). Individuals are therefore reluctant to pursue experiences or positions outside what is ‘normalised’ for their particular *habitus*. Ample evidence of this was identified in the survey data. Respondents tend to frame their different ambitions within the normalized choices their *habitus* seems to favour. Many Montesano High students had ‘working class’ ambitions. Nevertheless, some also had aspirations of middle class careers, but were already planning alternate

routes to get there because they acknowledged that the road to university would not be straightforward. These ambitions were embedded in the parameters of their 'class' location, even while most denied that class exists, or that they were from working class families. This is discussed in more detail in Chapter Eight.

In short, the lower socio-economic cohort in this study was much less likely to acknowledge the disadvantages of their 'place' in social space, while the more privileged cohorts seemed to be quite reflexively aware of their own privileged class position, in part signalled by talking about class inequality primarily in the abstract rather than as lived experience. Tellingly, when Montesano High students were asked in focus groups why the majority among them denied class inequality, most replied – showing some reflexivity - that it was probably a case of indicating how they would like things to be in the attempt to maintain some hope of achieving their goals, rather than how things really are. This fits with claims by Huntley (2006), Hamilton (2006) and others that Australian working class identity tends not to be acknowledged. Instead an aspirational middle-class discourse is expressed. It is in instances like these that lower SES youth experience an 'epistemological fallacy' (Furlong and Cartmel 1997: 109-114): a disjuncture between the rhetoric of the classless, individualised neo-liberalism of late modernity, and the material and ontological reality of lack of opportunity and privilege in their actual lives.

The different experiences, attitudes and opinions displayed by the research participants above highlight the persistence of 'class' as a relevant and vital aspect of the experience of contemporary Australian youth. Class position itself continues to provide very different opportunities and very different outlooks on the world. At

Rydell Grammar, students were well aware of their own privileged position, often to the point where they viewed it as potentially problematic. They were relatively comfortable with uncertainty whilst seemingly possessing the greatest range of post-reflexive choices. It was as if their only real personal experiences with class were being picked on for being perceived as being a 'snob' or rich.

Sunnydale High students were quick to deny being special or privileged just because they attended an academically selective school, yet constantly referred to their own intelligence and education to justify their implicit judgements of others. Whilst they displayed some personal engagement with class issues in regard to city and regional divides, and also in regard to public and private education debates, the Sunnydale High students largely engaged with class analytically. These are examples of cultural capital in action in two ways. Firstly, while they recognise privilege, they have rarely experienced any real social inequality themselves. Yet they proclaim their ability to see class inequality clearly and realistically, because of their own intelligence. In short, they emphasise their 'advantageous attributes'. Secondly, their demonstrated ability for abstract analysis is itself an example of cultural capital in action. This abstract analysis was sometimes implicitly present at Montesano High, but was certainly not as confidently or readily expressed. In Chapter Eight this finding is expanded through the argument that reflexivity itself needs to be understood as a form of cultural capital.

Both Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High students were quite adamant that there were large variations in distribution of opportunity in society yet mostly had little personal engagement with it themselves. Montesano High students had a somewhat

contradictory attitude towards class where there were struggles to reconcile their own experiences of disadvantage whilst denying class as a distributor of opportunity. They spoke of less access to, or possession of, various elements of cultural and social capital, whilst still maintaining the aspirational discourse that hard work can get you there in the end. Rydell Grammar and Sunnyside High students largely analysed this as Montesano High students maintaining a discourse of hope as a form of resilience.

In summary, the analysis of data in this chapter indicates that identifiable class positions of advantage and disadvantage are still strong even though classically-defined class consciousness may not be. With this in mind, there is a real need to synthesize a productive new interpretive paradigm about how enduring class-based inequality still shapes the experiences of youth in late modernity. This can be achieved by using the concepts of risk and reflexivity to inform the claim that new forms of class-based cultural capital are emerging as generative dispositions of youth habitus in late modernity. It is here that Bourdieu's key concepts still have primacy, especially his theorising of the 'relationship between the conscious self and the unthought' (Lash 1994: 154). The next chapter looks at how young people at the three schools imagined ambitions, and obstacles to those ambitions, in their future life.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Ambitions and Obstacles

Introduction

This chapter discusses the ambitions of young people at the three schools and the obstacles and risks they perceive they may experience along the way. This data must be conceived as perception; we must understand the discourses presented here as young people imagining their future, not how their future will necessarily unfold in practice.

There has been considerable study of young people's visions of the future. For instance, Leccardi's (1999; 2005) Italian research sees utility in Melucci's (1989) metaphor of 'nomads of the present' in the biographical trajectories of young people, where existence is somewhat 'de-temporalized'. Life is no longer planned in a straight line and decisions are made on the run; this is especially the case for the highly educated (Leccardi 2005: 141). Reiter finds that Austrian disadvantaged youth have a difficult time establishing a stable and future-oriented conception of time. The disadvantaged in this case tend to cling to more 'traditional' conceptions of the future, envisioning a 'life along a given biographical norm' (Reiter 2003: 274) which is not congruent with the uncertainty of, and the flexibility demanded by, the current labour market. Gordon and Lahelma (2002) note in their Helsinki research that future orientations are expressed in terms of 'dreams and fears' that maintain a strong sense of personal agency, but they continue to be framed by existing social structures. The Swedish research of Adamson, Ferrer-Wreder and Kerpelman (2007) noted that

students with a poor concept of their own 'self' not only thought about similar things when it comes to the future, but also had significantly more negative views than those with a consistent self-concept.

Studies of youth in the Netherlands (for example Plug, Zeijl and Du Bois-Reymond 2002) found a number of trajectories that young people envision for their future: most follow hegemonic institutional logic; some have specifically parental trajectories; some foresee a trajectory of extended education; and a large minority see an individualised 'combination and switch' trajectory. The latter trajectory contains both young people who seem ready to adapt to uncertainty and those who have not made a specific choice of what they want to do (Du Bois-Reymond *et al* 1994). All these trajectories are influenced by levels of cultural capital. The young people with high levels of cultural capital engage readily with the opportunities offered by the new labour market, running and accepting considerable risks while backing themselves by 'trusting their own abilities and flexibility' (De Bois-Reymond *et al* 1994: 48). Whereas those with more resources maintained complex visions that included both work and family alongside individual developments, those with fewer resources found the transition more difficult and tended to envision 'adulthood' simply in terms of starting a family and getting a job (Plug, Zeijl and Du Bois-Reymond 2002). This suggests a dichotomy between those who can maintain a 'choice biography' that embraces flexibility and uncertainty, and those who are constrained to maintain a 'normal biography' (Du Bois-Reymond 1999). Nevertheless, despite all this talk of 'choice', it is affirmed that 'social class is still influential in shaping the life-course' (Du Bois-Reymond *et al* 2001).

In the UK, Thomsen *et al* (2002) observe that there are ‘critical moments’ in the transitional period that not only vary due to class and geography, but are dealt with in different ways depending on these same structures. They conclude that ‘a “can do” approach to life may be a necessary condition for progressive personal change, yet it is unlikely to be sufficient in the face of structural constraints’ (Thomsen *et al* 2002: 351). US research has shown that some young people are ‘absurdly ambitious’ to the point where their dreams are unrealistic because gender, race and class lines still play a large role in the possibility of achieving one’s dreams (Baird, Burge and Reynolds 2008). In research conducted in the England and Germany, there was some evidence that ‘fate’ was being reconstructed as ‘choice’ and there was a general attitude of ‘life being in your own hands’ regardless of socio-economic background (Evans *et al* 2001: 22). Nevertheless, this agency was constrained by social structures. In Britain and Norway, Brannen and Nilson (2002, see also Anderson *et al* 2005; Brannen and Nilson 2007) propose three typical ways young people perceive the future: deferment, adaptability and predictability. Following Bauman they state:

In a society where individualism and choice are a dominant motif, the privileged stand a better chance of being the choosers. Those who have followed more traditional patterns, who have a strong sense of belonging to traditions which offer a well-trodden route into adulthood, are less inclined to see their futures in terms of individual choice and as a risk to be taken and a challenge to be conquered (social class traditions are also relevant here) (2002: 531).

Australian research has found similar trends. For instance, te Reile found that individual choice is still restricted by structural factors such as education and institutions.

Risks and opportunities are not evenly distributed. Moreover, the impact of ‘risky’ experiences is mediated by the social and material resources available for negotiating them, and these are also unevenly distributed (te Reile 2004: 254).

Bulbeck notes that in the ‘schemes and dreams’ of young Australians, the more affluent and better educated do exhibit imagined biographies that are more self-reflexive. Nevertheless she concedes:

While young people desire much the same thing along class lines, the less advantaged are unlikely to realise their aspirations, producing either resentment or despair. Class differences will remain acute in outcomes if not in desires (Bulbeck 2005: 74).

These studies highlight the importance of the very conception of ‘the future’ and the centrality of the notion of ‘choice’ in young people’s lives, but also emphasise the ways in which ambitions and expectations are shaped by social structures. The finding from data in this project supports the conclusions of many such studies. In this study, class-based habitus as a set of generative dispositions provides for different experiences and resources that shape the students’ impressions of how their lives will pan out.

Ambitions

Responses to the survey and focus group question ‘What is your major ambition in life?’ revealed the young people had mostly positive views about their future and individual lives. A very small minority had quite negative views or had not yet decided what their ambitions were, whilst a larger minority sketched out a list, often in order of intended achievement. This seemed to constitute a perceived ‘narrative’ or ‘trajectory’ of the self (Giddens 1991). Mel’s focus group response at Sunnydale High was a typical ‘narrative of the self’-styled ambition:

Mel: I want to get a UAI of 85 so I can get into a Bachelor of Arts and then do a Bachelor of Psychology. First do a year off to work to raise some money because I’ll have to move to Sydney. After I finish my degrees I want to move to Ireland or England and travel around Europe and I have family in America and in Greece and stuff so I can do all that and I think I’ll stay overseas... and 3 kids! [laughter] (Sunnydale).

In response to the open question on ambitions in the survey, some wrote down a specific job or career, while others wrote about their ambitions in general terms of ‘happiness’, ‘success’ or both. Some dedicated their ambitions to helping others, whilst a few spoke of individual fame and wealth.

- To go to Uni to study medicine, establish a career, travel to Indonesia, be happy with what I do (Sunnydale female).
- University, children, marriage, travel (Rydell female).
- I would like to have a great family with healthy children, be a happy and wealthy person. I would like to work in an Insurance office. That would be my dream job (Montesano male).

One Sunnydale High focus group comment exemplifies the middle-class dream for young women,

Kath: Well, I want to get a good UAI and go to University and be a Vet, and get married and have 4 kids (Sunnydale female).

These self-biographies tended to be mediated by the externalities of habitus: by socio-economic class and locality. They were definably different for the three cohorts.

In response to questions about ambitions, some measure of reflexivity – self-styling, picking and choosing, consciously reflecting on career and life options – was identified in all three cohorts, but this was shaped by the structural constraints and possibilities relevant to their different socio-economic locations. Adams points out that reflexivity itself ‘does not equate with the choice to move beyond the parameters set by these externalities’ (Adams, 2006: 13). For example, the limiting effect of those externally driven parameters was indicated by the much greater concern about money and material security in Montesano High responses, as shown in the following written survey responses:

- To get a job and a house and a car and settle down and not have to worry about money (Montesano male).

- Get a good paying job, have nice house and cars, enjoy life and maybe have a family (Montesano male).
- To get a great job that pays well! Have kids and find a really hot and nice husband! (Montesano female).

Discussion in the Montesano High focus group expanded on upon similar themes, for example:

Danny: I don't really want to hang out at home for all that long, I want to get out and experience the world and travel a bit, but because I want to get an apprenticeship as a fitter and turner, I want to get another job as well to try and get the money so when I finish my apprenticeship or something I can travel overseas and maybe play cricket over in England. A couple of my mates said it's good over there, so money is going to be the major thing (Montesano).

Danny acknowledges that he is aiming for a relatively low paid career and will need a second job to fulfil his ambition.

In contrast, as the following Sunnydale High focus group quote shows, money was also mentioned at the other two schools, but was more often referenced through a casual attitude that implies a relative material comfort:

Sara: I want to do journalism at Uni. I'd prefer to go to Sydney but I don't mind staying here because then I don't have to pay as much money 'cause I can live at home exploiting my parents for a little longer [laughs]. And I don't know if I'll wait for a year to go to Uni or not, it depends on the marks and the money and stuff, if I don't get high enough marks, teaching is my back up. I want to work in England for a while and, I don't know, maybe eventually marry, have one kid maybe 2, that's if I like the first kid enough to make me think I'd like another one [everyone laughs] (Sunnydale).

Sara's 'exploitation' of her parents is a reflexive realisation of her more than adequate support. She also alludes to what is commonly referred to by Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar students as a 'gap year', where students take a year off to work and travel in between high school and university. The gap year was not mentioned at all by students at Montesano High. This is but one example of how the Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar cohorts were much more likely to envisage a self-reflexive

freedom and wider choice in their perceived future narratives, a discourse that was virtually non-existent at Montesano High.

Habitus Shaped Ambitions

Montesano High youth nominated the most specific ambitions. Most said that they want to ‘make it’ in a sport, which is understandable considering the Targeted Sports Program (TSP). However, only a tiny percentage do actually ‘make it’ in sport, while most sporting aspirants devote most of their time and energy towards training, often at the neglect of their studies. Respondents at Montesano High who did name a specific job were more likely than the other cohorts to choose ‘blue collar’ apprenticeships such as mechanic or fitter and turner for males. For females, becoming a hairdresser, or sales and clerical positions were nominated. It must be noted though that the majority of participants at Montesano High named professional or para-professional careers. In relation to habitus, many Montesano High respondents nominated jobs ‘above’ the normalized choices of their family’s current socio-economic status position, a trend that aligns with the aspirational discourse of the working-class ‘battler’ (Everingham 2003: 39-54) so prevalent in Australia.

The Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar students who wrote down jobs as ambitions exclusively chose professional careers. Sunnydale High youth were most likely to nominate teaching and social work. Artistic pursuits were also common, for instance, through ‘Have a career writing music’ (Sunnydale male) or being ‘Curator for the Museum of Contemporary Art at The Rocks in Sydney’ (Sunnydale female). Furthermore, Sunnydale High youth showed higher levels of idealism and philanthropy in their stated ambitions:

- I want to start my own alternative school for the disadvantaged students who are not benefiting from the current education system (Sunnydale female).
- To make a difference to people's lives, to improve their lot. To improve our country. To give a peaceful, calm influence. Fire up the passion in apathetic people and give them the fire of life. Travel the world (Sunnydale male).
- To be a good person, and to make a difference in our world which is drenched in corruption, violence and poverty (Sunnydale male).
- To help those around me be happy with themselves and their life and help them achieve their dreams (Sunnydale female)
- To run UNICEF (Sunnydale male).

As Soon-Yi indicated in a Sunnydale mixed focus group, these more altruistic responses also revealed an awareness of limiting factors such as money and parental influence:

Soon-Yi: I'd really like to help people. Right now I don't think that income is an important factor for me, but according to my parents it is, but I'd just like to get out there and do social work and help people improve their lifestyles in a South East Asian country.

Interviewer: What do you mean about the income thing and your parents?

Soon-Yi: Well, a lot of what I want to do is volunteer work so I don't really know about income or anything, I don't really know what I'd be doing, it's just going out and trying to help people. It's not like an office job where you know what you are going to be earning and what you are working for, so money isn't really an important factor, but my parents think that the reason that you go for a job is that you want the money that comes with it, but that's not really an important factor for me (Sunnydale).

Soon-Yi here acknowledges the pragmatic obstacles to her goals and that her relative comfort (compared to the Montesano High students) allows for a reasonably nonchalant attitude towards financial issues. This may indicate a move towards the 'post-materialist' values that Inglehart (1997) sees pervading societies that experience a relatively high degree of economic security. Certainly there was more concern for non-material political issues at Sunnydale High than at the other two schools. It also turns our attention to the traditional left-of-centre political concerns of those high in

cultural capital, but with low to middle socio-economic status (Bourdieu 1984; Threadgold and Nilan 2004).

Rydell Grammar youth favoured high profile professions such as law, medicine, business and finance, as well as artistic pursuits, which is understandable considering the school's music programme. For example:

- Play music as a profession if possible, if not as a hobby and do medicine, but only because these things make me happy and enjoying my life is my paramount objective (Rydell male).
- Write a screenplay that is bigger than *Lord of the Rings*. Write a book more popular than *Harry Potter* (Rydell male).
- Finish school and go to the Conservatorium of Music for 4 years so I can get my Bachelor of Music degree so I can work in the music industry (Rydell female).

Rydell Grammar also had a small number of respondents who tied their ambitions to concern for others, but these responses mostly packaged their concern for others with playing important roles in international institutions:

- To do something in International Studies. For example, work for United Nations, as a foreign ambassador etcetera. Travel and experience different cultures (Rydell female).
- Travel through Rotary International – work my way up into foreign relations – some kind of ambassadorial role for Australia, a diplomat (Rydell male).

Travel was a common ambition across the three cohorts, but it was in direct proportion to habitus. Students at Rydell Grammar mentioned travel the most, which is logical given that they come from the wealthiest families. Travel was also mentioned quite often by students at Sunnyside High, but least at Montesano High.

In summary, Rydell Grammar youth aimed the highest in their ambitions in terms of career and had a more international and global focus than the other cohorts. The Sunnyside High students displayed both international and national aims, whilst the

Montesano High students revealed ambitions that were primarily local and regional in scope. This aligns with Du Bois-Reymond's (1999) conception of a dichotomy between 'choice' and 'normal' biographies where more educated and resourced young people perceive greater freedom than those with less. In this regard, Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar students do not perceive national borders as obstacles; they are a choice to be negotiated. The lack of resources of the Montesano students seems to create likely options that are inherently local, engendering expectations that largely remain within that realm. As Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005: 118) point out, this is not necessarily a passive or unreflexive acceptance of 'their lot' but an acknowledgement or even acceptance that their choices are limited.

Between Career and Happiness

Rydell Grammar students were the most likely to respond to the question about ambitions with general responses in which happiness or success was mentioned. Many Sunnydale High also responded like this, but not as much as the Grammar students. This kind of response did not feature much at all at Montesano High. For example:

- To be successful in whatever I do, own my own business (Rydell male).
- To be successful and satisfied in what I have achieved in life (Rydell female).

In a mixed focus group at Sunnydale High, Craig's response was indicative of the 'success' oriented answers at that school:

Craig: Well, I just want to have a reasonable amount of success, I don't need to become a multi-millionaire or anything, as long as I'm healthy and living comfortably then it will be OK. Travel would be good, see the world, don't want to be in Sunnydale for the rest of my life in a desk job (Sunnydale).

Craig's attitude to the future is fairly relaxed and his ambitions are quite non-specific. Nevertheless, not all 'success' themed responses were quite so general. Brianna, a Sunnydale High focus group participant, was more specific:

Brianna: Well, I'm pretty ambitious, I don't want to have a gap year before I go to university, I want to go to University and do business or commerce or something like that. I want to be successful, I want to own my own business so I have my own control over it and the leadership and success that comes with that, and the challenge as well, you know, it's not easy to do that and I think that would be challenging and exciting. I've always wanted to do that, there's nothing underlying, like my parents don't have their own business and I don't know people that are really successful, that's just what appeals to me (Sunnydale).

So, while this response is relatively specific, the 'business' Brianna talks about is unspecified. She wants success. She wants control. She wants challenge. But her lack of specificity exemplifies a relatively relaxed perception of the challenges in her future trajectory.

In terms of defining what 'success' is, participants in the mixed focus group at Sunnydale High outlined similar views:

Lee: I think it is more about making an impact, like say studying in a certain field or doing some certain area of work, it's about making an impact in that area or doing a good job of it. It's so the people know that you have done something and it hasn't been in vain.

Brianna: I think success for me is part monetary. I like to live comfortably, not be a multi-millionaire, but live comfortably, but also to be able to say that you did your job and you did it well, that you didn't do it in a wrong way, you weren't interfering with anyone's lives, you were doing a positive thing for them.

Soon-Yi: I think it's about being able to achieve your goals to your highest potential and about feeling that you have contributed well (Sunnydale).

Whilst acknowledging the importance of money for achieving a 'comfortable' living standard, these responses display an almost disdainful attitude towards financial gain as a legitimate ambition in itself. The notion of control and freedom was also a factor in the 'success' or 'happiness' oriented ambitions, especially at Rydell Grammar.

Laura: Probably University, get a degree, preferably in the Science area and travel. Go out and get a job, and just try to live the way I want to.

Andy: I thought you were going to say 'go out and get a guy' [everyone laughs].

Laura: No, I was going to say job!

Interviewer: OK, what about you Gina?

Gina: Just to survive and be successful...

Interviewer: That's very general, no specific ambitions?

Gina: Yeah, definitely, be able to look after myself and sustain myself and not have to worry about anyone else looking after me, to live how I want to (Rydell).

Laura and Gina want to 'live the way they want to' and 'not have to worry about anyone else looking after'. In the context of this discussion these comments imply two forms of independence. Firstly, independence from the support of their parents, and secondly, independence from a future partner or husband.

While some Rydell Grammar students did express specific ambitions, quality of life is paramount over career trajectories and income, even though parents put pressure on them to pursue specific professions. This is shown by Tom's focus group comment:

Tom: Both my parents are doctors and my Dad especially, I think, probably expects me to go in to something that society thinks is successful in the future, a high profession. But I've been thinking a lot about that sort of stuff and I've been thinking more about what would make me happy in life other than a career and stuff. So I want to keep a good balance in life between stuff, but it's more about happiness (Rydell).

Despite his parents' wishes, Tom has the privilege of not having to be overly concerned with pursuing financial security. Money worries were not mentioned at all in focus groups at that school. The Rydell Grammar students were also most likely to be more accepting of uncertainty and to display a flexible attitude towards their future. For instance, whilst Nat is largely 'lost' – as he says - in terms of deciding what he wants to do, he is not really concerned:

Nat: I'm incredibly lost in my aspirations for the future. You know, every so often you see something that's a great job and go, 'oh, that's what I want to be' and for a week or so you'll go around and you'll act and work towards that goal, and then a few weeks later you'll hear of something different, or your views on life will change or somebody will say some thing to you about it, and you will be like, 'no, I don't really want to do that anymore'. I pretty much think that is normal for 18 year olds – going, 'that's not me, that's not me', 'cause I won't have one career, I'll probably have six or seven. So I really haven't got any set guidelines. I'd like to travel, that would be good...something like that (Rydell).

Nat understands that a job is no longer for life, nor a necessary factor for his self identity, and seems comfortable with the notion that he will have 'six or seven' careers. Kath displays a similar attitude:

Kath: I don't know what I want to do job-wise, I don't feel under any pressure to make that decision. But all my life people have been asking 'what will I do' and I've said something like graphic design, but I've never known what I've wanted to do and I don't feel any pressure to decide. The only thing I know what I want to do is travel, and so I'm going to Europe and I want to do aid work as well, so next year I want to go to South America and do that there. That's really the only thing I know I want to do (Rydell).

There is a high level of freedom and flexibility in this response. Casually accepting future uncertainty was common at Rydell Grammar, prevalent at Sunnydale High, yet virtually non-existent at Montesano High. In terms of mapping out the future, Andy's description of his future ambitions perhaps best sums up the Rydell Grammar attitude:

Andy: Well basically, rather than putting up all these great plans that will fail on me, I'd rather be happy and take things as they come. I've been thinking that once the HSC is over I will learn Japanese and eventually end up in Japan teaching English. That's the idea at the moment; it seems like fun to leave the country [laughs] (Rydell).

In summary, Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High students seemed much more comfortable with how they perceived their own future as a series of personal choices over which they exercised a great deal of control. Nell at Sunnydale High illustrates this sense of comfort:

Nell: Well, I have this thing lately where I don't wanna go to Uni straight away or do the whole career stuff straight away, because it seems like the first 20 years of your life are the most eventful and then you do the same thing for 40. It just seems pointless. So, I was gonna maybe wait even ten years and do spiritual fulfilment stuff first [laughs].

Interviewer: What does that mean?

Nell: Well, I've always wanted to do music industry stuff, but I never thought of that as a career, I want to do more politics, sociology, English stuff at Uni. So I thought I'd do music stuff for a few years and just get it out of my system, because it would always haunt me if I don't do it and do all the things that you wouldn't have time for otherwise, and maybe travel for a bit, work overseas for a bit, then come back and do Uni and just look at it all as a learning experience (Sunnydale).

This is a very relaxed and confident attitude to future risk mediated through a middle-class habitus high in both economic and cultural capital (Nell's parents are both academics). Nell's circumstances seem to have produced a highly reflexive choice biography (Du Bois-Reymond 1999) embracing the uncertainties of the future. Nell sees the future as something she can navigate her way through relatively easily, to the point where she jokes that her 'gap year' may become a 'gap' decade! Life for her is all about 'experience'. Career and money are side issues to be negotiated on the path to a fulfilling lifestyle. In short, ambitions at Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High were usually framed up without obstacles being mentioned.

The responses discussed just above contrast with the theme and tone of focus group discussions about ambitions at Montesano High. Structural obstacles were often mentioned or implied even while they were talking specifically about ambitions. For instance:

Genevieve: It's like when you apply for a job, like if you live out in Montesano compared to in at Sunnydale or something, their parents are more likely to know each other which helps, plus they are likely to go to a school like Rydell Grammar rather than Montesano High, so that can have an effect on the job and getting it (Montesano).

Genevieve foresees the structural obstacles that attending Montesano High creates, in this case a lack of social capital – the kind of family connections that build a middle-class career. Through this contrast in responses we can see that reflexivity needs to be understood as ‘tightly bound-up with broader inequalities’ (Adams 2006: 13) and that ‘self-identity... still remains closely interwoven with the wider socio-economic inequalities which permeate... lives’ (Mitchell and Green 2002: 2). It is here that the notion of post-reflexive choice (Adams 2006, 2007) is most vital: the ability to put choices and dreams into practice is much more important than increased perceptions of choice. Ambitions themselves maintain key distinctions of class, but it is the general attitudes towards ambitions, the potentialities of the future and the engagement with uncertainties that most indicate the mediating nature of habitus for the imagined life trajectory.

Contrasting Capitals, Contrasting Obstacles

Contrast between ambitions as an indicator of reflexivity operating as a component of cultural capital is exemplified in the following two survey quotes. A girl from Montesano High wrote that she wished ‘to be a teacher and own my own house and have a family’, a response that is generally representative of Montesano responses to the question about ambitions. Her response encodes specific risks she perceives from her immediate social environment. Firstly, she wants a classic white-collar job traditionally associated with upward social mobility aspirations of young women from lower socio-economic backgrounds. She lives in an area of high unemployment where most residents are in subsidised government rental housing. So her second nominated ambition – owning her own home – symbolises overcoming a major status risk in Australia where home ownership has been traditionally important

regardless of social class (Crawford 2006; Horne 1987). Finally, she addresses one of the major status and risk discourses of adult femininity: remaining unmarried and childless (Crawford 2006: 77-147). These risks reflexively engage with the material aspects of life: money, home, partner. These specific risks are representative of her class-based habitus and therefore constitute an understandable expression of realistic 'schemes and dreams' (Bulbeck 2005).

In contrast, a girl from Rydell Grammar wrote that she wanted 'to be happy and healthy and take life as it comes. Have a successful career.' She begins not with a material goal – but with the more abstract affective domain of happiness, which implies the risk of unhappiness. Her third point – 'take life as it comes' – not only implies avoiding stress as an affective risk she can already identify with, but a confident attitude towards future risks and her ability to reflexively deal with them. Finally, she wants a successful career without defining a specific occupation or profession. This resonates with a stable and confident ontological security that allows her to foresee a self-biography of successful risk management. This is reflexivity as cultural capital – she possesses the choice to choose.

It can be assumed that Montesano High students were more likely to specify a job ambition because they perceive future risks and solutions in concrete, rather than abstract terms. They implied less flexibility in anticipation than the majority of Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar students - who were more philosophical and abstract in their answers. The highly specific nature of Montesano High job ambitions implies a more rigid and planned vision of the future which doesn't necessarily relate well to the competitive, ambiguous and ever changing contemporary job market.

The more general and relaxed nature of Sunnysdale High and Rydell Grammar responses, from those higher in cultural capital, implies greater acceptance of uncertainty and a willingness to be flexible and adapt. This was most prevalent in the Rydell Grammar student's responses, and is not surprising because it is they who have the most material and economic comfort. In this sense, habitus, with its unequal distribution of capitals, provides those higher in cultural capital with 'advantageous attributions'. The need for reflexivity is normalised and risks are often positively viewed. Their answers express a relative comfort with future life course risks, a casualness that highlights a more stable ontological security than their peers who possess less cultural capital. This was even more starkly revealed in how the young people perceived potential obstacles to achieving their ambitions.

Between Personal Traits and Structure: Obstacles to Ambitions

Obstacles to ambitions can be viewed as an example of risk perceptions. When it comes to possible obstacles to achieving ambitions, Sunnysdale High and Rydell Grammar youth were much more likely to list personal traits such as laziness, social distractions, procrastination and motivation. They were also more likely to see future failure as a result of poor choices. Montesano High youth were much more likely to foresee educational obstacles, financial problems, or the interference of 'other people'. It seemed clear in responses by youth from higher socio-economic backgrounds that reflexivity around risk was manifesting as a preoccupation with 'inner' qualities concerned with success and prosperity in the competitive middle

class labour market – such as appearance, perseverance, confidence and mutually supportive social relations – or the lack of these things.

Individual Traits

A male from Rydell Grammar wrote that his major life goal obstacles would be ‘my own motivation, my laziness, my poor work ethic’. A female from the same school wrote that she was ‘terrible at making decisions and opportunities will probably pass me by while I am trying to decide what to do’. There is an implicit acknowledgement in these examples of the importance of ‘choice’, yet youth from the more privileged backgrounds seemed to assume that the adequate material and cultural capital provided by their families would either bring them success in the future, or at least provide them with a more than adequate springboard. Not achieving their ambitions could only then be perceived as their own fault due to personal failings:

- My own personal flaw is distractions. I am provided for by my parents the perfect environment to flourish academically and work hard. If I am pushed off this straight path it would be because of my own lack of ability to concentrate (Sunnydale female).

As Soon-Yi states in the following focus group response, procrastination and motivation were also seen as common obstacles:

Soon-Yi: Procrastination, thinking ‘should I do this’, the whole idea of taking a year off, and thinking ‘I could do that and go travelling and go see the world and then come back to Uni’. But then you think ‘what if I don’t come back’, because there’s not enough motivation when you are seeing the world... you want to stay out there, so then your achievements are harder in the future (Sunnydale).

Here, the relative freedom of a ‘gap’ year and future travel is envisioned as a possible obstacle to long term goals, even though they are goals in themselves. It seems as if

too much choice can be perceived as a problem. Soon-Yi also noted that the possibility of less parental support in the future would also be an obstacle:

Soon-Yi: Maybe security, like getting out there and actually doing it, and having to move away from home, go to Sydney and stuff and being away from parents and really having no idea what is going on, and then maybe you will get really lost and really scared and you just don't... [trails off] (Sunnydale).

In the female focus group at Sunnydale High, personal traits were most commonly nominated as possible obstacles:

Interviewer: OK, so with your ambitions in mind, what do you think will be the main obstacles to stopping you achieving what you want to achieve?

Mel: Whether I can get the UAI I want, and that's it.

Interviewer: So what will stop you getting the UAI you want?

Mel: Me. Procrastination and laziness.

Sara: Yeah (Sunnydale).

The girls in this group were also aware, in Bourdieu's parlance, of the importance of learning the rules of the game when it comes to success in the field of the HSC examination, whether they liked it or not:

Nell: You could easily blame the whole HSC system [if her UAI is not achieved], it's not very good, the last year is ridiculous, it's not about how intelligent you are or how good you can do it; it's about beating the system. Two unit English is the best example, you just have to know exactly what they want, you have to have 'personal engagement'...

Mel: I know because in English it's all about interpretation of the text, but now they are saying 'No, you can't interpret it the way you want to you can only interpret it the way WE want you to'.

[inaudible uproar about various examples]

Interviewer: So you are saying that one of the main obstacles that you are going to encounter is learning how to 'play the game'?

Nell: I don't want to play the game.

Sara: If you interpret something in a certain way and you can back it up then you should get the marks for it (Sunnydale).

The girls' concerns for future success are exacerbated by their concern that the Humanities subjects they favour are scaled lower than Science and Maths in the HSC examination:

Mel: There is also prejudice if you don't do a science or maths...

Mel: And I was looking at scaling and stuff and you get scaled down for all the Humanities and I was like 'but why', you have to put so much work in, especially SAC [Society and Culture] where you have to do your PIP [a large research based assignment] which is what will eat up my entire year with stress and horror, and Four Unit English and everything else, and Drama, like Drama is scaled down... [incredulously] do they know??

Sara: It's ridiculous how they do it cause they take a subject like a Humanities subject and then they go 'OK, we'll compare this to, say like Physics and it's [sarcastically] nowhere near as hard Physics because Physics is all like 'numbery' and stuff so we are gonna bring this down heaps' and they scale them up, that's what they do! (Sunnydale).

In this exchange the girls, who obviously prefer Humanities, show their disgust for what they see as bias towards Science and Maths in the scaling and marking of the final year examination. In terms of obstacles to their own specific goals, this was as close to a 'structural' obstacle that the Sunnydale High focus group participants nominated.

The Paradox of Choice and Support

The Rydell Grammar students often struggled to nominate *any* obstacles at all to achieving their goals, and when they did, they never mentioned structural or class related obstacles. They mentioned personal traits and, ironically, the need to find independence from their 'support networks' and to be free of their parents. The following is an example from the male focus group:

Interviewer: Can you guys tell me what you envision might be major obstacles to achieving your ambitions?

Tony: Finding out what career path I want to travel, cause at this stage I don't have a clue... Um... [long pause]

Tom: Um, working out how society is making me think, like, I don't know if my ideals are being guided by my surroundings, I'm trying to work out what my actual ideals are. I'm trying to get away from society's ideals and work out what it is; I think that is going to be the hardest thing.

Nat: [It's] probably motivation to actually do something [laughs]. It will be hard, like when you think about it, especially from my perspective, I come from a family where I don't need to do much to get along...I'm in

a perfect position, I'm in a good position financially, I'm well looked after, I've got plenty of food...so motivating myself to work for myself and make my own way in life is difficult, cause of the position I'm in now.

Tony: That is the same for me as well, the way I've been brought up is so lucky, so after Year 12 I think it will be hard without having that support close, I'll also have less discipline. So as soon as I get out of Year 12 I'm gonna do a gap year to kind of get the motivation and the individuality and get out there and get independence as well. I think that will be the first trouble I find (Rydell).

The boys here all acknowledge their relative privilege and all the focus group participants at Rydell Grammar were quite self-reflexive about this to the point of embarrassment. Nat sees getting motivated as an obstacle, especially because he feels that he has it so good at the moment. Tom feels the need to avoid ideological pressures and influences so he can find his own way. Tony feels that actually deciding what he wants to do is an obstacle. It seems that the luxury of choice itself is experienced as a hindrance. The stress of choosing between possible ambitions and careers was certainly not seen as a problem at Montesano High.

The pressures of choice were also highlighted when Kim discussed recent social change.

Kim: If you look at 50 years ago, our parents were pretty basic in that they went to school, came home, played cricket, went to bed [laughs]...but today we have so many things to think about, like we go home and need to ring mum about what time the bus is, miss the bus, you have to ring someone else and catch a lift; we've got 12 different subjects, as opposed to just general Maths, English, Science...yeah, we've just got this extra pressure and because of like, back in the day, there was like ten different jobs... a teacher, a nurse, a mother... stuff like that...(Rydell).

Kim is talking about detraditionalisation. She sees life as much more complex now compared to what she perceives as the traditional past when education was free and life trajectories were relatively straightforward and predictable.

Interviewer: So you are saying that you have more options now and this creates more pressure?

Kim: Yeah, it does.

Interviewer: But isn't that more freedom?

Kim: I s'pose it's more freedom, but more freedom can lead to more pressure because if you want to be doing something that you have to solely do on your own it can create independence, but at the same time that brings a lot of pressure and stress to your environment. For example, going back a bit, 50 years ago they would start and get an apprenticeship, a profession and work and then get married (Rydell).

The contemporary range of choices available are therefore both empowering and problematic for privileged youth, because relative freedom to choose can lead to added pressures (Bauman 2007b; Schwartz 2003). These examples are analogous with the theories of choice presented in the work of Beck, Giddens and Bauman, where choice is the key mode of risk management. Choice itself, and the seen and unforeseen opportunities and failures that are inherent in a plenitude of choices, have become risks. However, the drive to choose is not experienced equally. The apparent paradox of choice was not at all present in the Montesano High discussions of ambitions and their obstacles, highlighting how the distribution of capitals mediates the distribution of choice.

Independence

Similarly to the focus group discussions at Sunnydale High, the girls at Rydell Grammar also discussed how finding independence away from the support of their family is important.

Interviewer: What do you think may be some of the obstacles to stopping you achieving your ambitions?

[very long silence]

Kim: Um... I think maybe educational wisdom. Like, if you go to a private school like Rydell Grammar school, they have the highest rate of drop outs at University because they just don't cope, because they've been spoon fed.

Kath: Yeah, they are hand fed.

Interviewer: So you think private school kids struggle in first year Uni?

Kim: Yeah, because they've had everything handed to them on a silver platter and I think you need to have self-motivation and that could be a huge obstacle for us. Particularly for me, because I've always had my family or friends or someone running around after me [everyone laughs]... no, I do... I have a really supportive network and I think that if I go to University and want to achieve these things that I need to become independent to survive, although I love being dependent on everyone [laughs].

Interviewer: It is interesting that you see having a really good support network as a disadvantage.

Kim: I'm actually very very grateful for my supportive network, but at the same time I think I need to break away. Not now! But when I'm 45 and married, maybe I will need to then [laughs] (Rydell).

Conceding that they will need to learn to do things for themselves once they go to university, which is itself a foregone conclusion, the girls acknowledge their privilege and advantage, yet are concerned that they will not be able to navigate future problems without support. This was also a concern in the male focus group at Rydell Grammar:

Tony: Gaining independence, I think, will be the hardest thing, you know, not having Mum there all the time...

Nat: For me, I haven't had to have a part time job, I haven't had to work at all for myself, so for me to finish Year 12 and go onto University, I'm gonna have to start making my own way in life. It's gonna be kind of difficult, 'cause I'm gonna have this image that I don't need to do much... which is hard for me to leave behind 'cause it's easy and go onto something harder. That will probably be my main obstacle.

Tom: I also have everything that I need, like everything seems to fall in my lap. My Dad got a farm where I did a bit of physical labour and stuff up there for money, 'cause one of my concerns was how was I gonna motivate myself to do anything if I'm undermining people's attempts to make me do stuff. Anyway, after doing work up there in that sort of environment, I think that one of the reasons that it is hard to motivate myself now is because there is no real reward, like even if you do a part time job and getting money, you have enough money that you need anyway. Like, it is a reward but it's not enough.

Tony: Like it's nice to get some money, but really, if you want money you can get it anyway, so there is no real motivation (Rydell).

In this exchange, the boys all recognise that they have ample financial and material support. Tony's comment that 'really if you want money you can get it anyway' is illustrative of the general attitude of Rydell Grammar students towards money.

Motivation for the boys to work hard seems difficult to imagine because they feel it lacks any real reward, given they are already well provided for. The need to break this cycle of dependence and comfort is seen as necessary for them to move on in life. This was not seen as a problem at all at Montesano High, less so at Sunnydale High, and is a prime example of the different class-based habitus. The economic and cultural capital of the most privileged families including: educational resources; family affinity with the requirements of education; and the provision of material comfort, generates a very different outlook for their offspring compared to those families with less capital.

The Persistence of Structure

Montesano High youth did sometimes nominate personal ‘weaknesses’ as obstacles, but these were often combined with concrete ‘outer’ or external obstacles. These included: not finding sufficient money for their education; not gaining the grades to go to university; class prejudice; and not knowing the right people. ‘Financial difficulty’, such as the problem of ‘paying for my HECS [higher education] fees’, was the commonly perceived obstacle at Montesano High:

Stew: Money for University. It’s a big responsibility if your parents don’t have the money to pay for it, I’m not sure what the loan is, is it HECS? It’s a big thing that you have to pay back as soon as you finish your qualification. So that could have a big impact on how you get a job and stuff.

Tim: Yeah, to get through Uni in a good course, you’ve gotta be constantly studying but by the time you finish Uni, you’re at the age where your parents don’t pay for anything anymore, so if you’re really pushed to get through Uni with a good mark you need another job, and it’s hard to balance both, to still pass, to still get paid and stuff like that... it’s not easy and it’s a pretty big division.

Stew: It’s a lot of stress (Montesano).

The problem of having to pay their way through life was a commonly perceived problem and risk for Montesano High students, and monetary and educational problems were often bundled together. The mixed focus group at Montesano High made similar comments when it came to identifying obstacles:

Kye: Getting past the UAI [getting into university]

Kayla: Same here

Alex: There are various other ways of getting there, like Open Foundation, so you might have to find away around it (Montesano).

Here, the concern with achieving a UAI to get into university in the first place is nominated, rather the issue of choosing a specific study program. In this regard, while issues surrounding HSC results were a commonly nominated ‘problem’ regardless of school, the actual problems identified were very different. At Sunnydale High and in particular Rydell Grammar, the HSC seemed to be all about keeping one’s options open. Any perceived problems related to what one would choose to study, not whether one would actually get into university. The option of not attending university was a choice that represented the option of relative freedom for privileged youth. At Montesano High by contrast, for those that intended to go to university, problems were about accessing this option at all and not attending university was not seen as a choice to be negotiated in the future, but a severe risk that needed to be overcome as soon as possible. As the above quote shows, Alex foresees the possibility of having to do enabling or bridging courses after high school to get in. At the other schools, when UAI concerns were discussed it about getting sufficiently high grades to choose the degree program that they wanted to do or what University they would choose to attend, rather than the problem of getting to university at all. These examples highlight how the very notion of choice often obscured by real inequalities (Ball, Davies, David and Reay 2002).

For those who do not gain university entry, the immediate imagined action is hard work to achieve upward mobility in the labour market, as Genelle indicates:

Genelle: Getting a start in life.

Interviewer: What do you mean by that?

Genelle: Like, even if you have to get a really crappy job for like a year, but then you work your way up. Like even if you don't go to Uni you can work your way up, it depends on the start you get, it helps you on your way (Montesano).

Genelle is using a discourse of hard work here that is largely absent from the other two schools where the focus was on the notion of choice. When pressed on what would stop them getting high enough entry scores to enter university, the Montesano mixed groups offered a mixture of structural and personal constraints:

Interviewer: So what are the things that are going to stop you getting the UAI that you need?

Kye: Behaviour, how much I learn.

Kayla: Attitude, value levels...

Kye: Pretty much, though friends can help through study and that.

Genelle: Teaching quality, like the quality of the teachers and the information we get.

Alex: Probably home life, like if your parents are helping you out and stuff, that would do a lot of good.

Genelle: Family allowing you to have the time to yourself just to study, a lot of people actually get interrupted by their siblings and stuff like that when they are trying to study (Montesano).

As well as personal traits that affect behaviour and attitude, Alex and Genelle note structural constraints by commenting critically on the quality of education they are receiving at Montesano High. They offer some examples that are factors of cultural capital: the ability of parents to help them at school; and the resources and space to be able to study effectively. These examples imply parents who left school early and small, crowded houses – both material ‘obstacles’ that allude to the conditions of working class life. The comments above are illustrative of Montesano High student perceptions of obstacles to their stated life ambitions.

Concluding Remarks

In summary, students at Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High appeared to see negative personal attributes as the main obstacles to achieving their ambitions, while Montesano High students nominated primarily structural problems and risks, although there were some references to negative personal attributes. This suggests that their lower socio-economic position is intensified by their higher 'risk position', which supports Beck's acknowledgement that risk and wealth are in inverse proportion. It also suggests that the very attitude that their distinctive habitus generates towards risks may be in itself a further motor for the social reproduction of economic inequality. Those higher in economic and cultural capital have the material foundation to feel comfortable with the reflexive self-disciplining and shaping apparently required for success. Those at the lower end of the social scale without sufficient economic resources have little opportunity to develop a highly reflexive confidence when they are faced with stark material difficulties in achieving upward mobility – schools that are difficult to learn in; homes that are difficult to study in; lack of money to support them through higher education; and a home address that carries a social stigma.

Neo-liberal discourse proclaims an entrepreneurial, classless society where everyone can achieve their goals. Yet class still clearly matters when it comes to young people's perceptions of their life chances. It is this disjunction between the rhetoric of neo-liberal discourse about the trajectory of the self in a classless society, and the reality Montesano High students experience in their day-to-day lives that proves problematic for their pursuit of a stable ontological security in the future. It is here that Bourdieu's notions of *illusio* and *misrecognition* are vital. Young people are

somewhat ‘objectively complicit’ (Bourdieu 1993: 73) in their attitudes toward the future in that they do believe that the game is worth playing. Nevertheless, they have very different *experiences* of the game. The Rydell Grammar and Sunnysdale High students tend to embrace the stakes of the game and possess a feel for it. The Montesano students play the game to the best of their ability, but experience the rules in much more demanding and confusing ways.

In relation to perceived ambitions and obstacles it was found that Montesano High students still tended to talk using the discourse of labour, that hard work in the present will be rewarded in the future where one can work one’s way to the top. While they acknowledged having to deal with risks (obstacles to their ambitions), these were mostly conceived as structural impediments to getting a good education and a good job. In contrast, students from Sunnysdale High, and especially those from Rydell Grammar, whilst acknowledging the need for a work ethic and studying hard, expressed many fewer sentiments in relation to the discourse of labour. Their ambitions were much less concrete and they were often pre-occupied with personal self-fulfilment. The future was viewed as something to be negotiated reflexively. Moreover, the obstacles (risks) they nominated were much less structural and material – they tended to be focused on individualistic personal traits. In the overall tone of their responses, those possessing higher cultural and (especially) higher economic capital showed a much more casual and relaxed approach towards the future. In Montesano High responses, their future trajectories were envisioned as much less negotiable than those with higher cultural and economic capital.

We can see here that reflexivity may be best understood as embodied cultural capital – an ‘advantageous attribution’ (Bourdieu 1984: 475-479) of middle class habitus. The concept of post-reflexive choice (Adams 2006, 2007) is paramount for understanding the unequal distribution of risks and privileges in reflexive modernity. In short, the self-identity of contemporary youth needs to be understood as ‘firmly *embedded* in complex, differentiating social structures (Adams 2007: 139-140 emphasis in original).

The class-based perceptions of Montesano High youth in the study do seem to imagine that the ‘prolonging of current calculable damages into the future’ is still predicated on their ‘current woes’ (Beck 1992: 33) such as low levels of resources and support. This confirms that ‘living in a class-divided society means that not all young people have the same resources, experiences and opportunities’ (White and Wyn, 2004: 16). When considering their future, the dispositions of youth from more privileged backgrounds seems to include reflexivity, and the idea that their personal biographies can be self-shaped and self-managed. At Montesano High however, the young people largely imagined the future in terms of concrete ambitions and risks. We may infer that their perceptions of risk were based on their own current experiences of scarcity, and were also modelled on the experiences of older people who surround them in their lower working class milieu.

This does not necessarily mean that the more privileged are inherently more reflexive, or that the disadvantaged are less reflexive or that they can be pitied as ‘reflexivity losers’ (Lash 1994). It does mean though that the generative dispositions of different

class-based habitus tend either less or more toward the development of reflexivity as a component of cultural capital to shore up future material success.

‘Reflexivity’ means different things and has different outcomes for individuals and groups depending on social positioning. Social stratification may work through the forms of reflexivity made available, or be consolidated despite them (Adams 2007: 150).

To rephrase Bauman (1998b: 86), all these young people look forward to an adult life of choices, but not all of them have the means to be post-reflexive choosers. As Lehmann’s (2004) research highlights, the conditions of reflexive modernity may produce tendencies toward individualization, but young people continue to draw on social experiences rooted in their habitus. Nevertheless, *rather than transitions and choices being either structurally determined or largely individualized, individuals form dispositions based on a reflexive understanding of their position in social space.* Similarly, risk and perceptions of risk are not distributed equally in the population but are inversely distributed along the lines of wealth and privilege. The following chapter deals specifically with risk

CHAPTER NINE

Perceived Day-to-Day Risks and Problems

Introduction

The data in this chapter reports responses to questions about risks and problems in the lives of young people at the three schools. Reference will be made to literature concerning the kinds of risks perceived and experienced in the lives of contemporary youth in general, to the notion of ‘risk’ itself, and to the levels and intensity of risk young people perceive in contemporary life.

Survey and focus group questions were framed about ‘young people’ in general. For obvious ethical reasons the students were not asked to discuss their own specific personal risks and problems at an individual level. Nevertheless, the differences in their responses highlight habitus at work. Their perceptions of the main issues faced by young people today are obviously influenced by their own backgrounds and experiences, and by their own engagements with, and interpretations of, various media, social and political discourses of risk. An important shaping theoretical premise for this chapter is that habitus distributes risk, both real (experienced) and perceived (discourse).

In the field of youth studies, there are a number of schools of thought when it comes to the notion of ‘risk’. Some focus on risk taking (Abbott-Chapman and Denholm 2003; Bell *et al* 2008; France 2000, Green, Mitchell and Bunton 2000; Pilkington 2007; Morrissey 2008). Others, especially those from a social work outlook,

emphasise ‘youth-at-risk’ and ‘risk factors’ (see Powell and Edwards 2003; and France 2008 for a critical analysis). There are also those studies influenced by reflexive modernization theory that investigate the risks of day-to-day life in terms of the transition from ‘child’ to ‘adult’ (Jensen 1997; Kelly 1999). The data here concerns day-to-day life risks and the young people’s attitudes towards risk discourses that *they* feel are relevant to them.

The Concept of ‘Risk’

The concept of ‘risk’ is increasingly prevalent in society, especially in the media. The use of ‘risk’ has exponentially increased in all manner of discourses (see Denney 2005). Moreover, risk has become a central sociological concept. Its popularity stems primarily from the influence of Beck and Giddens, and to a lesser extent from the work of Mary Douglas (1985, 1992, Douglas and Wildaksky 1982). Building on this work, the studies by Deborah Lupton and John Tulloch in Australia and the UK are important in regard to our understanding of how risk is defined and perceived by ordinary people. When their informants were asked to define risk, the dominant response was to identify negative and frightening notions that involved both the unknown and an element of choice and rational decision making. But importantly:

Risk was predominantly represented as an ever-pervasive part of life and also as strongly tied to individuals’ life situations, which were seen to both expose them to certain risks and to influence the ways in which they viewed phenomena as being risks or not (Tulloch and Lupton 2003: 37).

Their findings overall pointed both to Beck’s argument that people realise the control of risk is illusory because of the unpredictable and incalculable nature of risks per se, and to the persistence of ‘early modernist’ ideas about the control of risk. They also found that while Beck’s rational ‘risk actor’ did emerge from these discourses, there

were also several instances where risk taking was seen as a positive in terms of personal or financial gain, especially in relation ‘to a more exciting life or self-actuation, or as simply part of the human project’ (Tulloch and Lupton 2003: 37).

When it came to their informants engaging with risks that they felt personally exposed to, Tulloch and Lupton again found contradictions in their data. Firstly, there was much evidence of ‘reflexive awareness’ in terms of how day-to-day risks are understood and perceived, where the:

Scapegoats for risks identified by Beck – big industry, science, the government – do not appear... Rather, the interviewees tended to represent themselves as autonomous actors, rationally making decisions about which risks they chose to take (Tulloch and Lupton 2003: 38).

Yet, when asked more generally about the risks that people in their own countries are exposed to, the global risks which Beck speaks of such as acid rain, nuclear fallout and global warming were not at the forefront of people’s concerns, but blame and responsibility for these risks were placed on governments and multi-national corporations – they were seen as political, not individual problems. In short, where risk was concerned, individualization trends were found to co-exist alongside more traditional discourses of class and criticism of the state (Tulloch and Lupton 2003: 37). The data described below identifies very similar tendencies that are largely mediated by habitus.

Ranking the ‘seriousness’ of day-to-day risks

On a Likert Scale, survey respondents were asked ‘*Which factors are the most serious problems or risks for young people in society?*’ They answered by ranking the

seriousness of a listed range of 27 day-to-day youth related risks and problems. The results here present examples under four themes:

1. Discrimination Risks

Sub-themes: age discrimination; stereotypical, unfair or inaccurate media representation; gender inequality; racial inequality; victimization by the police; no representation in politics

2. Work and Education Risks

Sub-themes: unemployment; low paid work; can only get casual or part time work; poor education and training; combining school and work; pressure to succeed at school; sports injuries

3. Crime and Violence Risks

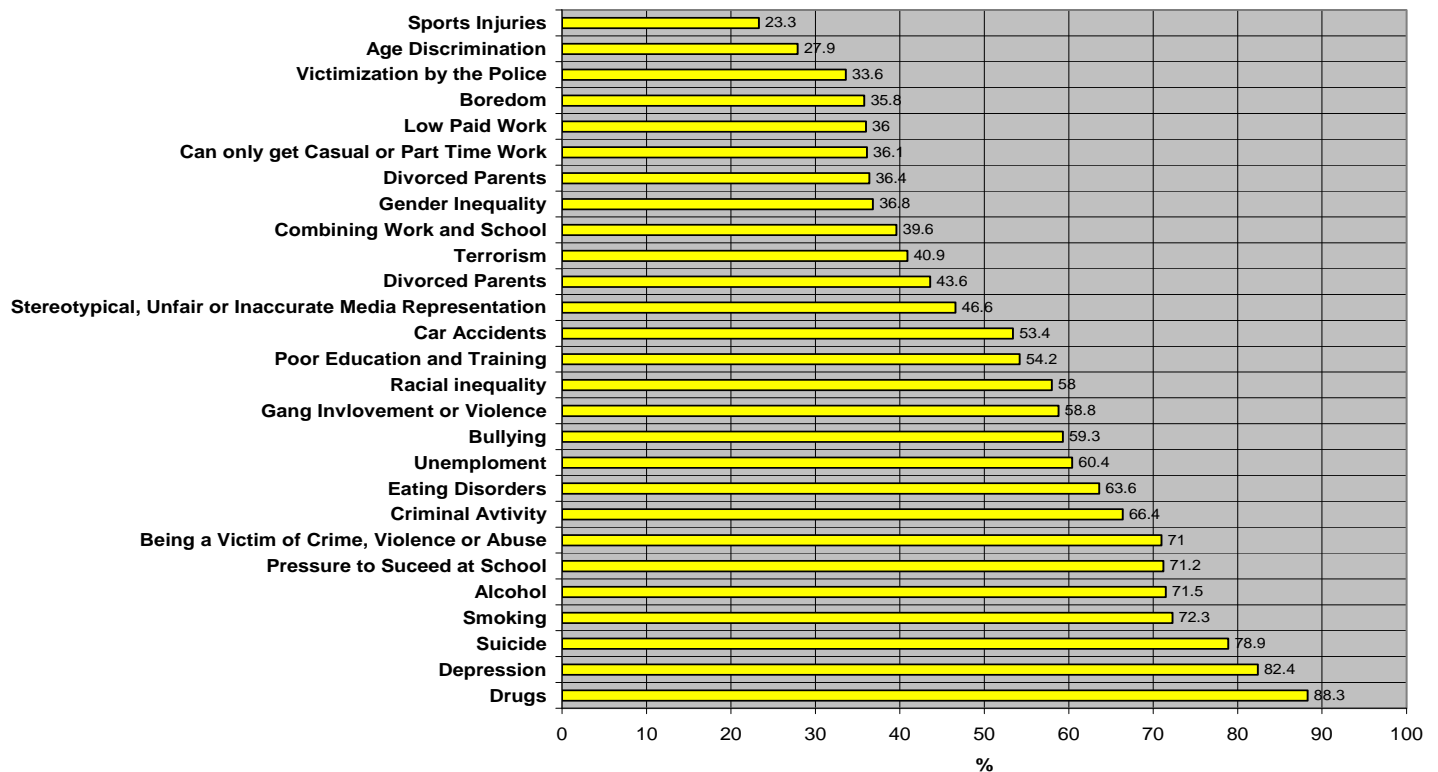
Sub-themes: criminal activity; being a victim of crime, violence or abuse; gang involvement or violence; bullying; terrorism

4. Individual and Personal Risks

Sub-themes: depression; suicide; drugs; alcohol; smoking; boredom; divorced parents; eating disorders; car accidents

The following table shows the combined percentage total of respondents that ranked each category as either 'Very Serious' or 'Serious'.

FIGURE 9.1: Seriousness of Risks



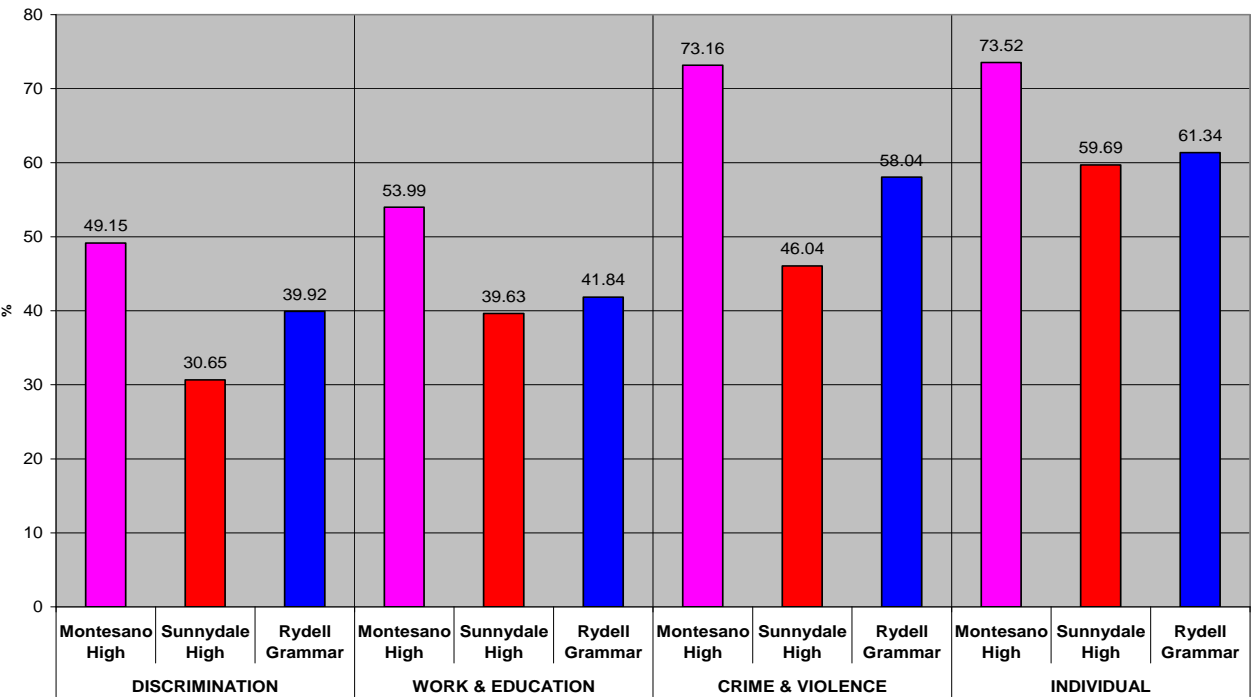
Overall, drugs (88.3%), depression (82.4%) and suicide (78.9%) were ranked by all respondents as the most serious risks or problems for young people (Figure 9.1).

Habitus Diffusion of Perceived Risks

In general, the Montesano High cohort ranked *all* the risks and problems in Figure 9.1 more seriously than students at the other two schools. Only two of the 27 categories: ‘Pressure to Succeed at School’ and ‘Depression’, were ranked by Montesano High students as less serious than by Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High students. Taking the wide array of stated risks more seriously in itself says something about the very nature of the class-based habitus of Montesano High students. They seemed to feel more intensely uncertain and threatened by the large range of nominated issues than their counterparts at the more privileged schools. When the 27 items are grouped

into the four themes, Montesano High had more respondents ranking all four as serious or very serious (Figure 9.2).

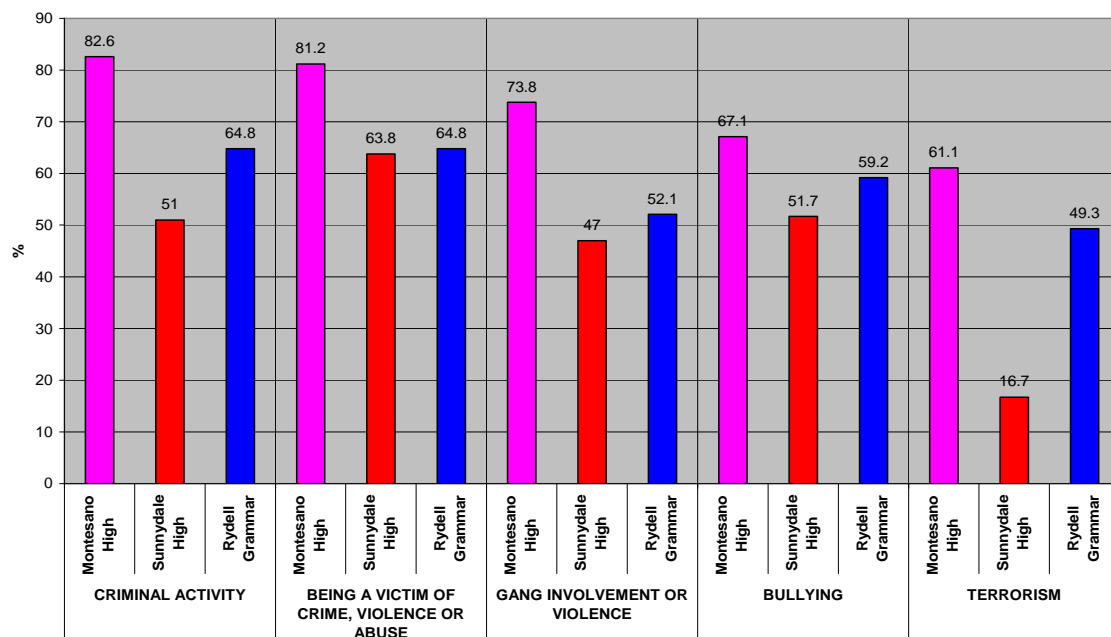
FIGURE 9.2: Seriousness of Risks in Four Themes



Crime and Violence

The greatest disparity between the schools was for the crime and violence risks. Montesano High respondents were 15 per cent more likely than Rydell Grammar and over 27 per cent more likely than Sunnydale High respondents to rank the risks and problems in this theme on the serious side of the spectrum. If we turn to sub-themes under crime and violence risks, a more detailed picture emerges (Figure 9.3).

FIGURE 9.3: Seriousness of Different Kinds of Crime and Violence Risks

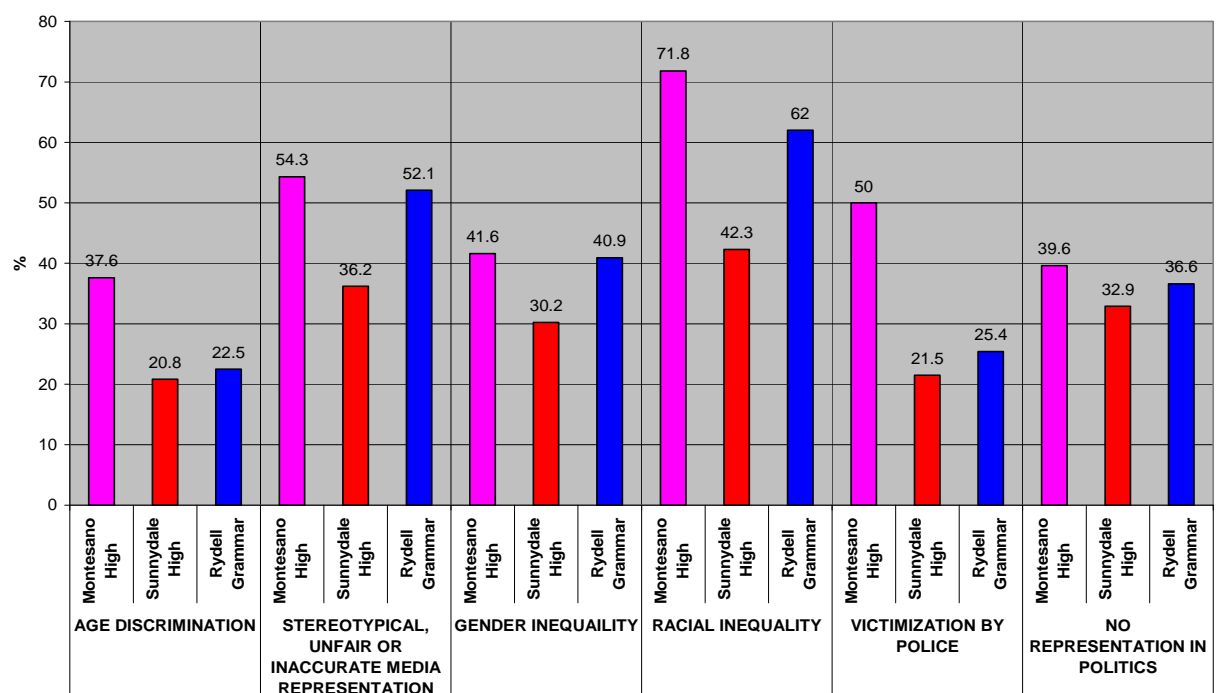


The results are somewhat skewed by the great differences in the response to terrorism as a risk. At Sunnydale High students have been exposed through the highly academic curriculum to a number of different pedagogic discourses about the risk of terrorism which plays down the panic approach. However, this was not the case at the other two schools, where students seem to have absorbed the sensationalistic panic discourse of risk promoted by the popular media (see Threadgold 2006 for a full discussion of this risk perception in relation to governmentality). Of the others, criminal activity, gang involvement or violence show the largest difference in evaluations as serious risk. This may be understood in terms of the area where Montesano High is situated. The neighbouring suburbs where some of the students live experience very high levels of unemployment and higher levels of criminal gang activity than the rest of the city. They have to deal with the threat and risk of crime and violence on a personal day-to-day basis. TSP students who travel to Montesano High from other suburbs and travel home late after training also have to deal with these kinds of threats. Finally, the

school itself has to deal with not only an anti-school culture, but instances of fighting and gang conflict during school hours. This is not the case at all for the two other schools and demonstrates how habitus mediates both the direct experience and perception of risks.

Discrimination

FIGURE 9.4: Seriousness of Different Kinds of Discrimination Risks

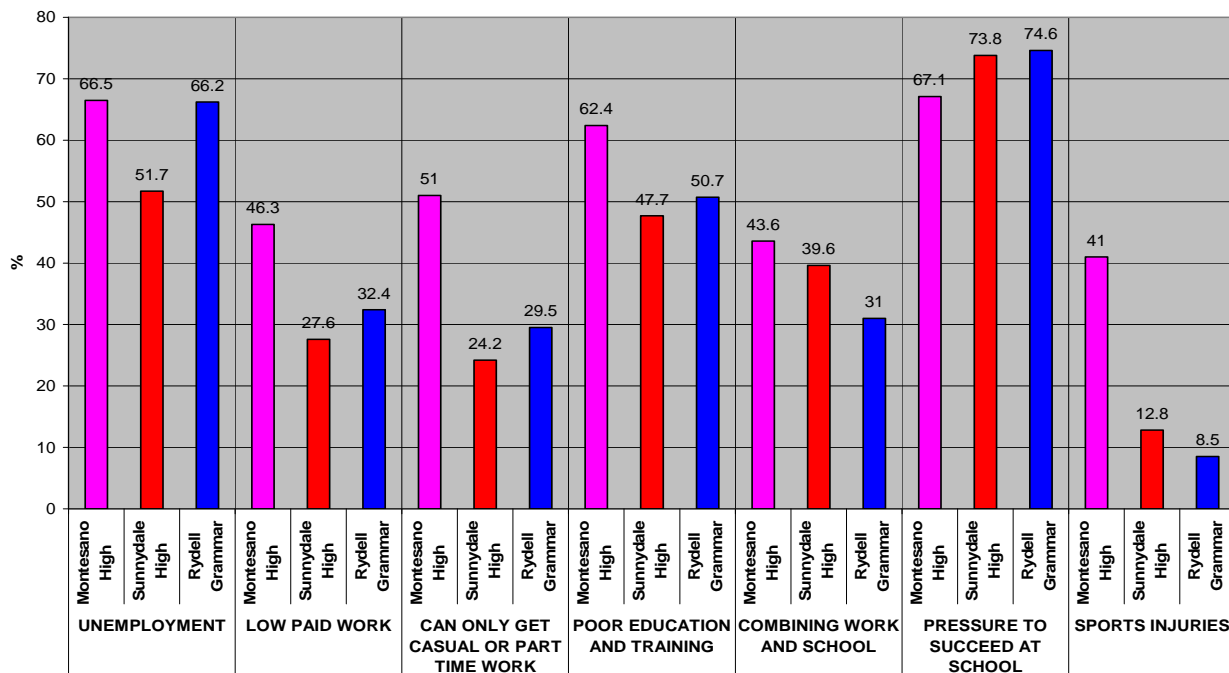


Of the discrimination themed responses, victimization by the police showed the biggest difference between the schools in terms of seriousness, with Montesano High having double the amount of respondents ranking victimisation by the police as serious or very serious (Figure 9.4). Similar to the previous point, it is highly likely that due to the school's location and the prevalence of local crime, students at Montesano High have to deal with the police on a far more frequent basis compared to the two other schools. Montesano High students also evaluated racial inequality as a more serious discrimination risk - which is understandable considering the much

greater numbers of Indigenous, Torres Strait Island and Pacific Island youth that attend the school.

Work and Education

FIGURE 9.5: Seriousness of Different Kinds of Work and Education Risks



The work and education themed responses revealed one significant factor which Montesano High students did rank as slightly less serious compared to the others - pressure to succeed in school (Figure 9.5). It has been argued that ‘professional class’ students are often intensely pressured in their studies (see Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979; Andres and Grayson 2003). This is not to say that Montesano High students did not feel pressure because 67.1 per cent indicated it was a serious problem. The Australian research by Connell *et al* (1982) found that there was a high level of commitment among working-class parents to motivate their children to do well at school so as to improve their life chances, dispelling the myth of working-class parental apathy towards school. The risk of sports injuries was obviously four times

more likely to be ranked as a serious problem by Montesano High students due to their Targeted Sports Programme.

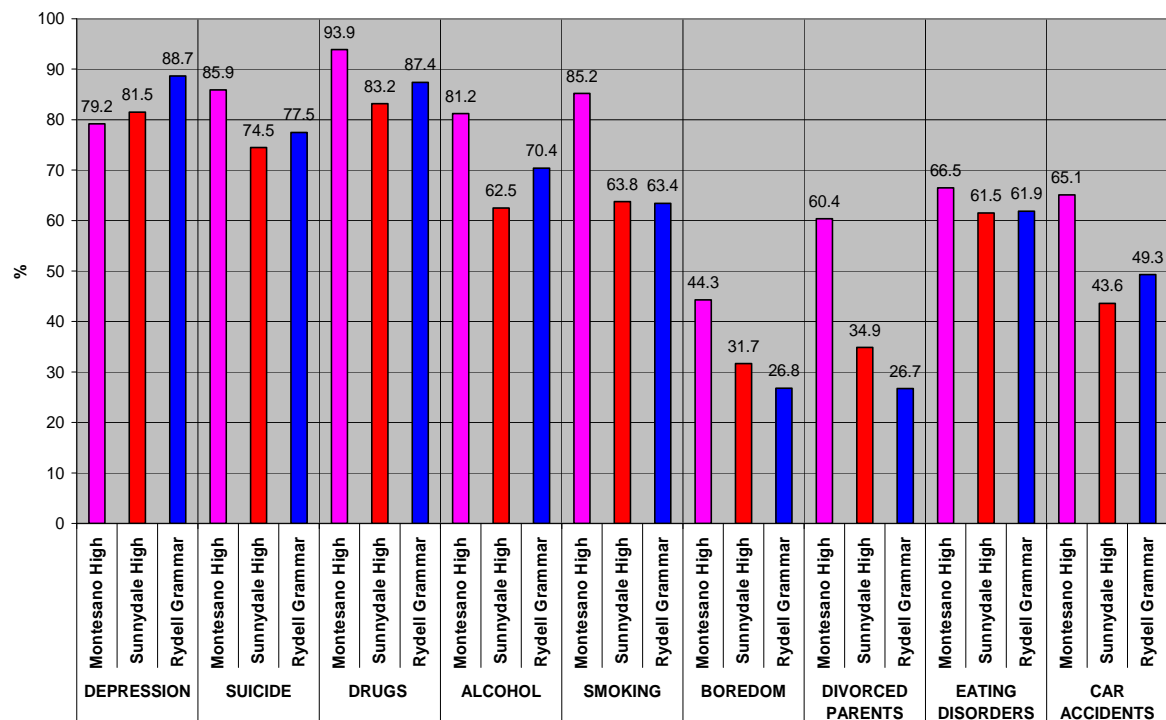
When it comes to work-related risks, Montesano High respondents viewed the risk of low paid work and availability of only casual or part-time work as considerably more serious. Interestingly, Rydell Grammar students viewed unemployment as almost as serious a problem as Montesano High students despite a very low unemployment rate in the areas where they live, the data on their own parents, and their own confident assumptions about employment prospects. In short, they are giving a seemingly analytical, even political, response. This corresponds with earlier data where class-related issues were more likely to be ‘analysed’ in abstract terms by Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High students, but were either minimised or discussed in personal terms by students at Montesano High. It also aligns with the data regarding ambitions, where Montesano High students’ replies were more often concerned with financial security than the Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale High students. Their ambitions rarely mentioned money but were based on more abstract notions of happiness or success. In short, class-based habitus in action is demonstrated in the different ways the question of risk in work and education is approached by the most disadvantaged youth on the one hand, and by the most privileged youth on the other.

Individual and Personal Risks

The ‘individual’ themed responses referred to a number of specific problems (Figure 9.6). It is acknowledged that some of these are not specifically ‘individual’ problems, but relate to other social problems, and wider economic, cultural and social factors.

They are grouped as ‘individual’ here because they pertain to individual actions, decisions, perceptions and/or consumption.

FIGURE 9.6: Seriousness of Different Kinds of Individual and Personal Risks



This theme contained the five problems ranked most serious overall: drugs, depression, suicide, smoking and alcohol. In responses to the open ended survey question, and in focus group data discussed below, these problems were often seen as linked. Depression was ranked as more serious by Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar students. It is difficult to analyse why this was the case from the quantitative data, especially as the notion of depression was rarely mentioned in the focus groups. Nevertheless, it was mentioned in the survey data in combination with pressures to succeed, and also with the issues of Australia’s high rate of youth suicide. In the focus group data there was extensive discussion of educational pressures to the point of having breakdowns, episodes that would dovetail with issues surrounding

depression and its medication. Further, it could be that the combination of pressure to succeed academically and depression is really one of the ‘worst’ things that can happen to relatively privileged young people, as opposed to the more material, economic and physical (such as bullying and gangs) risks experienced more intensely by Montesano High students.

In terms of the divorced parents category, Montesano High had by far the most responses ranking this seriously. From the demographic survey data, when it comes to who the students were living with at home, Rydell Grammar had the most nuclear families with 82.9% of students living with both parents, while 16.1% were living with one parent and 3.9% were in the ‘other’ category. Sunnydale High had 68.9% living with both parents, 27.2% living with one parent and 4% in the ‘other’ category. Montesano High had 66% living with both parents, 29.9% living with one parent and 4.6% in the ‘other’ category. Montesano High students reported a higher number of single parent families, so perhaps this is why they viewed divorced parents as more problematic than the other two schools. Nevertheless, the difference between the percentage of Montesano High students ranking this problem as serious (60.4%) and the percentage at Sunnydale High (34.9%) was much greater than the difference between the reported numbers of single parent families (29.9% compared to 27.2% respectively). This implies that the Sunnydale High students who are not part of a standard nuclear family do not perceive this as a big problem compared to the Montesano High students in similar situations. It may be that due to their social class position and their possession of privileged cultural and economic capital, they more easily adapt to these ‘liquid’ (Bauman 2003), ‘chaotic’ (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2005) or detraditionalised (Giddens 1992) settings. Put simply, local experience of

the relative poverty of the lower class single parent household plays a part in the way this family situation is anticipated and imagined.

It should be noted that, for the most part, when it came to identification of risks and problems in the survey there were negligible differences between male and female responses. On the surface this suggests that gender may be less a mediator of most perceived day-to-day risks for youth than socio-economic class. However, the reality is presumably far more complex. Unfortunately there is not room to explore the question of gender in this thesis.

The ‘Biggest’ Problem for Young People?

Respondents were asked an open ended survey question: *‘What do you think are the BIGGEST problem/s in the lives of young people today? Why?’* They were given eight lines to write a reply. In an indication of cultural capital at work, Sunnydale High students mostly wrote long answers that filled up the given space, Rydell Grammar students tended to write medium to short length responses and Montesano High respondents mostly wrote quite short answers.

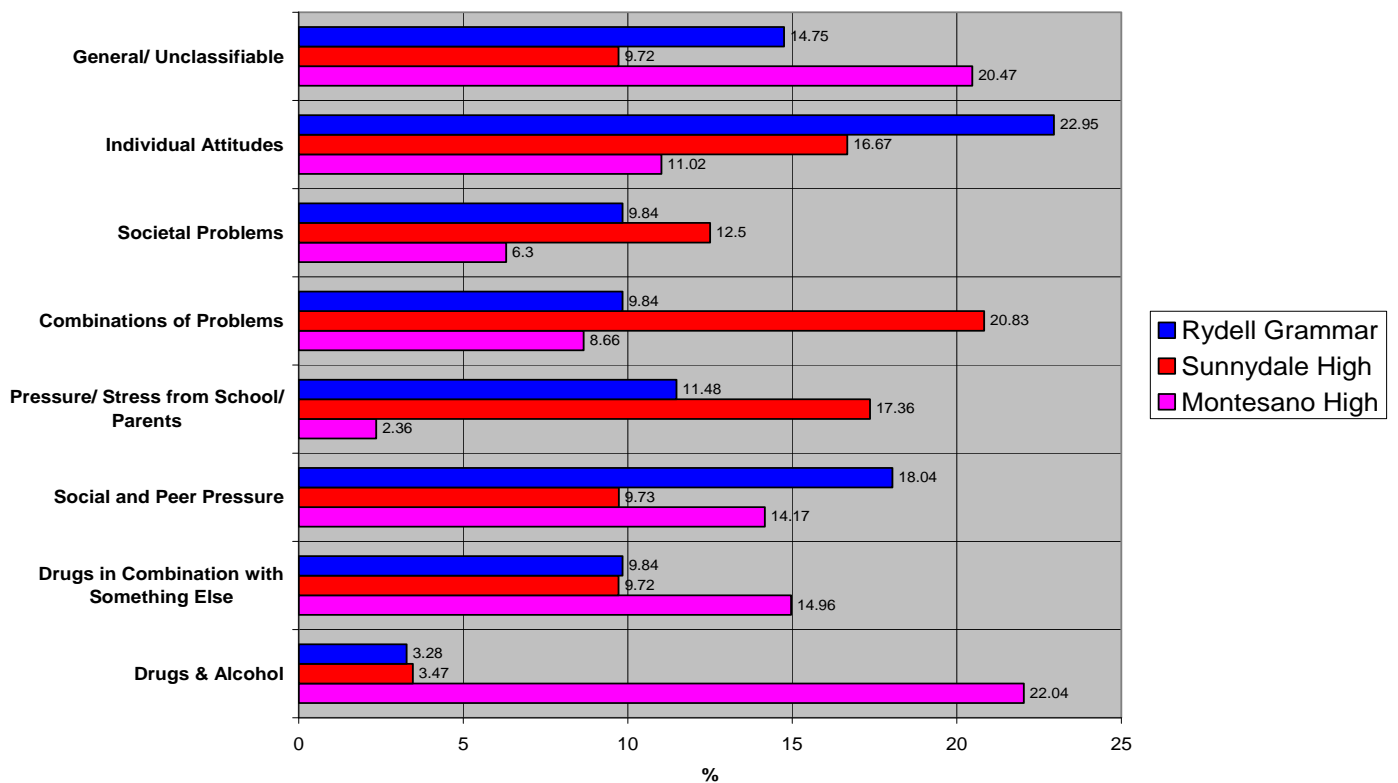
The question prompted a wide range of themed responses. Drugs/alcohol was the most commonly cited problem overall. It was mentioned alone in answers (‘Drugs’) or in combination with other risks or problems, often ‘peer pressure’, ‘pressure to have sex’ and ‘alcohol’. The risk of drugs/alcohol was identified by 41.73 per cent of young people at Montesano High as the biggest problem. Only 9.67 per cent of students at Rydell Grammar and 23.61 of Sunnydale High students emphasised the

problem of drugs/alcohol. Typical examples of drugs/alcohol related responses in the survey included:

- Young people are always trying to be popular and do things that they think will make them popular. They should do what makes them happy and be who they are. Everybody thinks that getting drunk every weekend is heaps cool, but in reality it's going to kill them (Montesano female).
- The influences of their friends. Peer pressure to do drugs and have sex. Some young people are missing out on their childhood/teenage years because they're too busy doing drugs to enjoy their life (Montesano female).
- Substance abuse, particularly alcohol. Causes lots of problems like rape/unprotected sex, road accidents. Binge drinking in early life means you have a greater chance of having drinking problems when you are an adult. Also, people probably resort to drinking alcohol because there is not much of a social scene for under 18s (Sunnydale male).
- Drugs, excessive underage drinking (Rydell male).

Responses suggested that young people are easily pressured and influenced and are naïve about the consequences of drug taking and binge drinking, especially on issues of health and sex. While the students at the three different schools all encounter drugs/alcohol and may use them at similar levels, the types of substance abuse may differ. The frequency of drugs being cited as a problem or risk seems to go against the recent argument that drugs are undergoing a 'normalisation' process (Schildrick 2002; Duff 2003), at least in the way these young people perceive the wider situation for youth. This is discussed in more detail in the following qualitative data section, where the 'problem of drugs' is spoken about in much more complex ways.

FIGURE 9.7: Main Types of Risks and Problems for Youth in Themes



When putting the responses to the open ended question about risks and problems into categories, a number of key themes emerge (see Figure 9.7 above). Sunnydale High students were most likely to nominate a complex combination of problems such as:

- Family issues: brothers/sisters/parents/step-parents - all can affect people's state of mind. Peer pressure. Drugs and alcohol. "Conformity" and the pressure to escape from it. Dealing with school/HSC/Uni without stressing out and falling behind (Sunnydale female).
- Negative attitudes in and about society. Less value on personal happiness in place of materialism. Peer pressure and pressure from society to be and think a certain way instead of being yourself. Pressure to grow up and take too much responsibility too fast (Sunnydale male).

There was a higher incidence of answers that nominated wider social and political problems at Sunnydale, for example:

- Being silenced. Being told we are in a country which is one of liberty and free speech, and then having our opinions completely ignored. People speak of oppression in places like Iraq, but we are not heard either (Sunnydale male).

The higher prevalence of political and social themed responses at Sunnydale High underscores their more critically engaged, yet often abstract responses to the survey and focus group questions in general; an indication of both cultural capital and the traditional left-of-centre values possessed by this cohort (see Threadgold and Nilan 2004). It also disputes the common image of the politically apathetic and selfish youth (Tanner 2003: 33). Quite a few questions in the focus groups at Sunnydale High elicited politically sophisticated responses. This kind of expressed political engagement – a form of highly intellectual cultural capital - was not as observable at the two other schools.

Sunnydale High students more often nominated educational pressure from parents and teachers as the biggest problem and this clearly relates to their own situation. Such responses are not surprising at an academically selective school where pupils are under competitive pressure to perform academically. Their responses were often succinct ('too much pressure on the HSC'), but others were more forthcoming. For example:

- The pressure put on us by family, school and other institutions, basically just society in general. If you think about it, a substantial percentage of teenage rebellion, suicide etc could be put down to pressure put on young people to ACHIEVE, especially at selective schools, and at private schools where it costs a lot of money to educate a child and therefore they should get good results (Sunnydale female).
- Young people have too much pressure put on them. There is also the problem of deciding what vocation they want for life which ties in with the pressure thing (Sunnydale male).

The second quote above shows the nexus between pressure and choice that was prevalent at Sunnydale High, and also present in Rydell Grammar student's responses about ambitions, obstacles and class.

Rydell Grammar students wrote the most responses that related risks and problems to individual attitudes, and Montesano High students the fewest, a pattern in inverse proportion to wealth. This supports some of the findings in the previous chapter in which a scale of reflexivity and individualisation trends was discerned in the pattern of identification for obstacles to ambitions. Some of the Rydell Grammar answers were quite short and spoke of 'laziness'; 'do not plan their futures. Do not prioritize'; 'apathy'; 'not motivated enough...'; 'no work ethic. People just cruise'; 'lack of direction'; 'too superficial' or 'we [youth] are too concerned with image'. Others were more detailed. For instance:

- We are very self-absorbed at times and can sometimes get into a mindset that people (such as parents, friends and teachers) will be there to pick us up after we fall. This isn't always true. Ignorance (through lack of knowledge) can also fuel prejudice against other sources or racial groups in our community (Rydell male).
- The fact that they are preoccupied with themselves. They need more thought about the big picture and the world as a whole - eg. inequalities and environmental problems (Rydell male).

Again, these themes dovetail with responses at Rydell Grammar in the previous chapter.

Summarising the quantitative data, overall some general problems were identified for all youth. Firstly, drugs, alcohol, peer pressure, depression and suicide were combined to suggest a complex matrix of risk for young people that many respondents identified as something that needs to be carefully negotiated. Secondly, pressure to succeed and do well in the HSC was a very common problem for middle class and also for some working class youth. Thirdly, some young people saw various economic, political and structural problems as limiting the agency of young people. It may be concluded that different class-based habitus generated considerable differences in what were perceived as the biggest risks and problems.

Qualitative Data: The Biggest ‘Risks and Problems’

Montesano High

In the focus groups where a similar question was asked, drugs/alcohol and associated issues did not come up as often at Rydell Grammar, and especially not at Sunnydale High. However, drugs/alcohol was still the most common response at Montesano High, as the following exchange with the male group attests:

Interviewer: What do you think are the biggest risks and the biggest problems in the lives of young people at the moment?

[instantly]

Tim: Drugs.

Stew: Alcohol

Tim: You go to parties and you go in town, I'm not meant to be in there but I've been in, and you look around and you can tell the people that are going to be doing the things and you are watching and it would be so easy for police to catch someone doing something but, I don't know, because they can get away with it, it just catches on. Popping pills is so common in clubs, you see it everywhere and there's no one doing anything about it (Montesano).

The theme of irresponsibility (on the part of both young people and the authorities) was common when discussing drugs/alcohol related issues at Montesano High. However, this was not apparent at the other two schools where there was a much more relaxed, confident and controlled attitude towards this issue. Peer pressure was commonly cited at Montesano High, both in terms of drug taking and risk taking in general:

Danny: I think pressure, peer pressure to do that stuff. Peer pressure to do anything is pretty big. Some situations, people just don't relate to. Say, going to the beach and you've got someone who doesn't go to the beach very much and they get pressured into going out into big surf or something (Montesano).

The mixed group had a similar response, for example:

Kylie: Peer pressure probably, like people wanting to fit in and going to extreme lengths to do it (Montesano).

Peer pressure and risk taking was not spoken about as openly at the other two schools.

Comments about the risk of educational pressure were also present in Montesano High focus groups, but not with the same intensity of the other two schools. For example in the female group parental pressure was the focus:

Elly: For me, the most important issue is the pressure we have on us for teachers at school, and my parents...cause they didn't go to Year 12, they just dropped out... they put a lot of pressure on me to get good grades and have a better life from what they say they did (Montesano).

Yet, not all the girls agreed with Elly's claim that there was too much educational pressure, with some citing the need for *more* pressure:

Clare: I think that I'm the opposite; I don't have enough pressure...

Interviewer: You think you need a bit more?

Clare: Yeah, I don't really get... like compared to Elly, she gets a lot more stress than me. I don't have any. My parents will pressure me and that, but not everyday and there's seems to be more pressure on what you're going to be when you get older. They are like 'where are you gonna be when you are older' and you are not gonna really know (Montesano).

The idea that more pressure might be needed did not appear at all in the focus groups at the other two schools. Nevertheless, Montesano High parents often put pressure on their children for different reasons that revolve around the potential for upward mobility. They themselves did not 'achieve', so it is logically a different kind of parental pressure than at Rydell Grammar. This is shown in the following exchange in the male group:

Danny: Some people succeed under pressure.

Stew: My Dad puts me under pressure sometimes, if I didn't pass Year 11 he was gonna pull me out and make me get a job, which I thought was pretty harsh.

Danny: It depends what kind of pressure, if it was pressure to succeed like...my parents were never really good at school or anything, so they can't really expect much of me, but that motivated me to do well. But if they were putting pressure on me and saying that I should be getting this, I would just probably get shitty with them and tell them to fuck off,

cause they went shit in their High School Certificate or whatever, so I'd probably go better without pressure.

Tim: My Mum pulled out in year 10, Dad went all the way, but only just. I learnt from his mistakes, like the things he said, like he reckons as soon as he turned 18 he lost the plot, he was drinking all the time and just being an idiot with his mates, and went away from doing school work. I'm probably lucky that my 18th is after the HSC, so I'll probably work all the way up to it. And he's got a good job, but he got it through knowing people and he said that not everyone is lucky, you have to work to get a good job and you have to apply yourself (Montesano)

Firstly, note that the pressure Stew felt included the possibility of being pulled out of school, a possibility almost unthinkable at the other two schools. Tim uses the advice and example of his Dad as both an inspiration and a warning, while acknowledging that social capital is important. Consequently, there is an intensified risk for Montesano High students in not only dropping out of school, but disappointing their parents' earnest hopes for upward social mobility. This is a class difference from Rydell Grammar, if not Sunnydale High.

Sunnydale High

At Sunnydale High, the risks and problems identified for young people were mostly about pressure, workload and stress relating to education, as the following exchange in the female group shows:

Nell: School, work, play, sleep; people say it needs to be about fifty-fifty, I want about a 98 to two percent right now...

Mel: Yeah, I get stressed seriously and even though I have nothing due now I lie in bed awake and stress about the fact that I have things due next year.

Others: Yeah...

Mel: In weeks seven, eight and nine, four hours sleep was my max.

Nell: I got five hours a night I think (Sunnydale).

The girls in this group described times throughout Years 11 and 12 when they felt like they were on the verge of some kind of breakdown:

Nell: I need to listen to music almost all the time and I went through a period where I didn't listen to it about a week and a half and I went into kind of a breakdown mode...

Mel: Yeah, she did... I was so stressed once I just started madly baking and I'm cooking cake and my whole family was like 'I don't want to approach her'... like everyone here has had a breakdown.

Nell: And I was like that in week two and mum was like 'it's O.K., if it's bothering you that much, we won't do it, just give up, it will be fine' and I was like 'oh my god I can't believe this'... (Sunnydale).

Notice that when Nell reports talking with her Mum, her Mum refers to 'we': 'we won't do it', implying a family-oriented attitude to education where the parent implies the same educational level as the child. This was very different to the descriptions at Montesano High. We might think of, for instance, the reported more confrontational relationship between Stew and his dad. Competitive educational pressures were easily the most talked-about problem at Sunnydale High, with the students maintaining that they had ever-decreasing time to relax and socialise. It seemed that there were considerable challenges in striking a balance between meeting the expectations of parents and teachers, coping with social and peer pressures and meeting study commitments. The mixed group at Sunnydale High related these stresses to the high youth suicide rate which was ranked overall as the third most serious risk in the quantitative data.

Brianna: We had a talk from a counsellor, and in this school we have a lot of stress and pressure and a lot of people have depression and, you know, mental effects because of the pressure at this school and all different factors as well, so I think that comes down to stress and pressure and what life is putting on you. Apparently in [local area], the suicide rate is really bad (Sunnydale).

As these interviews followed those at Montesano High, I was surprised that drugs had not been mentioned at this stage and asked the girls directly about this:

Mel: I think the people that use drugs and alcohol, not all of them but a small minority who use them because they have deep seated psychological issues that they are not dealing with, shouldn't use drugs.

Nell: Yeah... but I don't look at it like that; I look at it as recreation...

Interviewer: Recreation?

Nell: Well I don't think that you should ever inject heroin, just a personal opinion [laughs]. But putting aside individual drugs, it

shouldn't be an escape thing; I think it should be an experience thing, a recreation thing.

Sara: And it should be a choice thing, if you decide that that's an experience that you want to have, well then cool; if you decide that that's what you want to do then you should be able to do it.

Nell: Exactly (Sunnydale).

The above exchange supports the drug normalisation thesis (Schildrick 2002; Duff 2003), suggesting a relatively relaxed attitude towards the recreational use of drugs by the Sunnydale High girls. This implies they reflexively manage their own attitudes towards the discourse of drugs, constituting this risk using a discourse of choice and implied control. The only threat to choice is peers:

Soon-Yi: It depends on the people that you hang out with I guess... If the people you hang out with choose to be really risky then that matters...

Yet, this threat to choice is still mediated by a choice, that is, the people you choose to associate with. This reflexive discourse of choice in regard to drug risk was not apparent at Montesano High.

Rydell Grammar

At Rydell Grammar, like at Montesano High, drugs and alcohol were quite often mentioned in connection with peer pressure. It was suggested that drugs/alcohol constituted a gateway towards other risks. For example:

Tony: Peer pressure, heaps in drug use and alcohol use. I think that is the major problem... you have got to be pretty strong as an individual to resist peer pressure to a certain extent because if your group starts doing something you're outcast to that group, and you want to be in there with them...

Nat: Alcohol is definitely a massive issue for young people. Alcohol, and when you get to 18 or 19, alcohol and sex... Alcohol is a catalyst for a whole range of problems (Rydell).

We may note that Tony speaks about being strong as an individual. The male group at Rydell Grammar moved from the risk of substance abuse to wider problems including alienation, morals and peer group pressure:

Tom: I think there can be some alienation from certain parts of society and from parents throughout adolescence, because you are trying to become an individual and you are learning about yourself and all that and I think that one of the main risks for adolescence is to not keep in touch with the moral grounding that is your family.

Nat: There seems to be a huge problem with what society finds acceptable for young people, and what young people find acceptable for young people. I've been out many many nights and I've seen kids start brawls and stuff like that, and I think that young people are losing that background, they are kind of thinking in their own set of morals. Their morals have been warped (Rydell).

The notion of the moral 'individual' making responsible choices is clearly the ideal. A conservative political discourse about fading morals of youth appeared quite regularly in the Rydell Grammar focus groups, a discourse not apparent at either Sunnydale or Montesano Highs.

There was a very similar moral discourse of youth and risk in the female focus group at Rydell Grammar. They discussed and analysed the problem of drugs and its relation to values, peer pressures and the apparent normalization process from their own seemingly safe 'cocoon'. Lucy told the following story:

Lucy: A risk in general is getting in with the wrong people with the wrong values. For example I have a friend who dropped out of school and went back a year later. He's still friends with kids who have dropped out and they keep telling him to forget about it, to go out with them late on Friday and Saturday night, all weekend, and its destroying, I mean he's not bright to begin with, but it is destroying any ambition he had to finish school. I've been trying to encourage him to keep continuing but these people tell him, 'oh, why are you studying, you're stupid' and they just bring him back down.

Kath objected to this portrayal:

Kath: But you only hear about the bad stories, like none of us three have ever smoked a cigarette or touched a drug, or even alcohol. You only hear about the bad stories, you don't hear 'she stayed at home

and hasn't had a drink in her life', it's all people who die of drug overdoses and it's what we are all judged on. Well, here's me in my little bubble again, but I don't see drugs as a problem at all.

While Kath disagrees with the stereotypical images and stories of young people in the media, Kim points out that this is because she is shielded from the reality of those images:

Kim: That's because you go to a school that's really sheltering, if you went to a public school, and this is a really big generalisation as well, but there are a lot of people who have smoked and do drink relatively a lot and they have dabbled in drugs and stuff there, whereas we think there's no problem because we live in this little cocoon of safety, but if you go to a public school I think that you'll find it's very (Rydell).

Here, the girls claim not to have experienced any of these problems themselves (it is dubious that none of them have *ever* had alcohol), whilst commenting on their perception of other people's drugs/alcohol behaviour and choice. The group makes a distinction between the risky things done by less privileged youth at public schools and the relative safety of their own private school environment. This is class-related habitus in action.

After struggling to think of anything as the 'biggest risk' and nominating lack of an opportunity to travel as a problem, the Rydell Grammar mixed group spoke in a very relaxed manner about an 'underworld of drugs' at their school. This presented a completely different picture of Rydell Grammar to the morally upright cohort referenced in the single sex focus group discussions.

Gina: Drugs and alcohol at parties can be a problem.

Laura: Yeah, especially when you go to such a snobby school, you kind of feel like you have to prove yourself more to the other people so you start doing more than them to try to prove them wrong and prove you belong.

Allan: Yeah, I had a discussion with my friend at Scouts and he was like, 'oh, Allan, every school has its underworld, what's yours?' And I said, 'oh, it's drugs and alcohol', and he asked 'why is that?' and I said, 'what else do you get when you get a bunch of rich kids together, what

else are they gonna do?' [Everyone laughs] I can assure you that a couple of years ago there was almost a drug ring in this school, like among the Year 12s a couple of years ago (Rydell).

The relative freedom of choice offered by a high disposable income is seen as problematic in managing the risk of drugs, which is a further example of how choice itself can be seen as problematic for the more privileged. This is shown further in the following exchange where social and status struggles relating to consumption are identified as specific problems for Rydell Grammar students:

Allan: When you look at the playground you can very easily see that group and that group and that group, you know... You can imagine if there is a real social struggle going on at a rich kids school, you can imagine the bills they are running up... they have to buy the latest trend, they have to buy the latest this and that.

Laura: Oh yeah, the formal... all the girls were like 'oh, I spent this much on my dress, well I spent this much on my dress... oh my god did you hear, she only spent that much on her dress', that's what it all boiled down to (Rydell).

This was the only time in all of the focus groups where consumption related status came up as a major risk for young people. It can therefore be identified as a problem for wealthier youth, but the discourse also implies that less wealthy young people try to keep up.

The pressure to succeed at school was also quite prevalent as a discourse or risk at Rydell High. For example:

Tony: My sister got 99.6, my brother got 99.15, my other brother got 96 [in the UAI], then I'm the last one. So I feel much pressure at home, and I know I'm not going to achieve that, I get happiness out of other things. Although they say 'no pressure', I know there is I can feel it and I get pressure from teachers. When I got here in Year Seven they were like, 'oh, your sister would not have done that'... so I do get it a lot.

Nat: I think that there is an incredible amount of pressure put on people in this school to do well academically and I think it is fuelling that social isolation in that in this school you have to get to the top of the pile and that's what you have to do, and I think that as a teacher then what you want to do is help people achieve academically and in a school where

90 per cent of the kids want to do that, you might not see that there is more to some of the kids than that (Rydell).

The expectation of parents for their child to 'achieve' at Rydell Grammar was a commonly cited issue. The parents at Rydell Grammar want their children to be like them, to match their achievements. At Montesano High, the pressure is often on the students to outdo the achievements of their parents. The Rydell Grammar students understood where their parents were coming from, but wanted the opportunity to decide for themselves what success in life would mean:

Tom: OK, I'll quote my Dad here 'You need to achieve your potential'. I want to redefine what that potential is, whether that is solely academic potential, or happiness, or whatever.

Nat: My parents are like Tim's parents, my Dad is a doctor of pathology and my Mum has just done her Masters in Nursing, so they are both extremely intelligent people and my sister is stupidly intelligent and my brother doesn't even need to work at school and consistently gets good results. So, being the oldest, it kind of puts you in...I'm the first to go through the HSC, I'm like the 'expectation dummy' so they want me to perform well and have that expectation of me that I better perform well (Rydell).

This exchange highlights the performance pressure parents high in cultural capital put on their children to achieve at their own level or higher. Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich (1979) propose that the 'professional-managerial' class makes more of an effort than the working class and the capitalist class to reproduce their social position. In the professional-managerial class the 'son of a research scientist knows he can only hope to achieve a similar position through continuous effort' (Ehrenreich and Ehrenreich 1979: 29). Education is a central element of this 'effort', and the parents provide the example. Therefore, one's very upbringing within the professional-managerial habitus instils the importance of high performance in the field of education from a very early age.

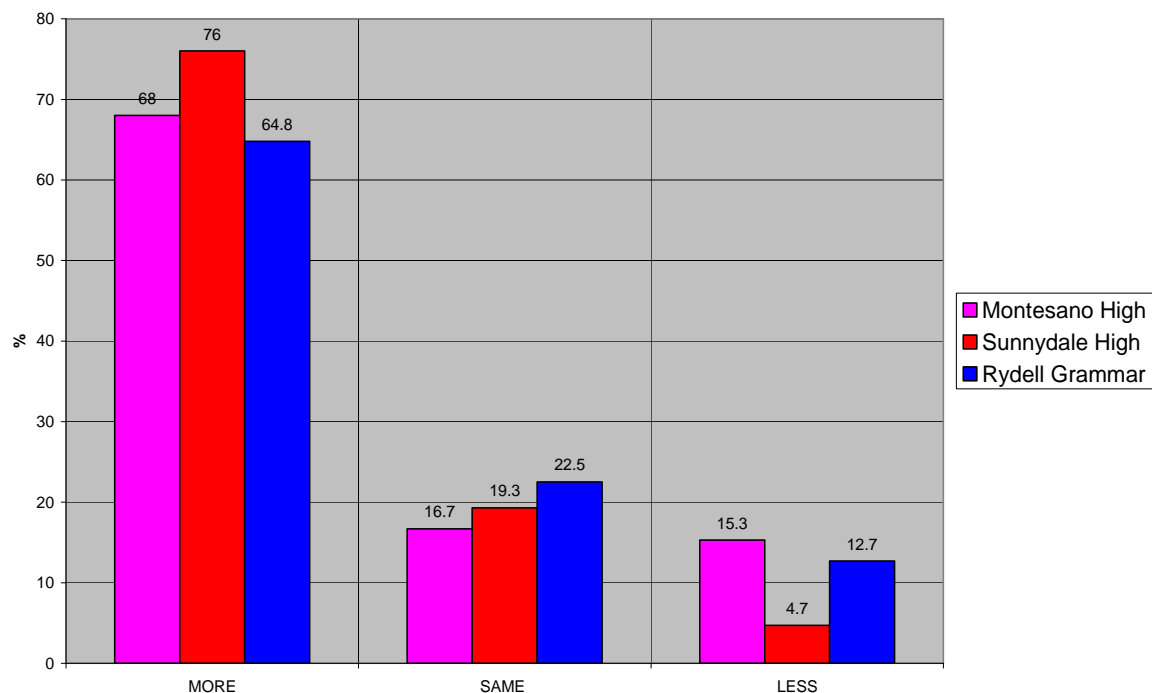
In summary, Montesano High youth nominated drugs and peer pressure as their biggest risks and problems. Sunnydale High youth were most concerned with educational pressures, workload and stress and had quite a relaxed attitude towards the drug issue. At Rydell Grammar, the relationship between drugs, peer pressure and an apparent decline in moral values was discussed. They were also concerned with the intensity of educational pressures and, like the data on ambitions and their obstacles, nominated some specific problems relating to their own privilege. In terms of drugs, which were identified as the 'biggest' problem in the quantitative data, the qualitative data drew a much more complex picture. The young people in this study overall seem to imply a continuum of drug-taking attitudes, with experimentation and recreational hedonism at one end, and a much more desperate miasma of escapist nihilism at the other. On this continuum, the Sunnydale High students seem to associate drug taking with the first polarity, while the Montesano High students seem to view drug taking in terms of the other polarity. The attitude of Rydell Grammar students is somewhere in between. It is these distinctions that show how habitus mediates the experiences and perceptions of risk.

Contemporary Levels of Risk: More or Less?

The students were asked about their perception of the levels of risk in contemporary society by comparing today's youth to when their parents were the same age (Figure 9.8). This question investigates firstly whether the concept of risk itself is present in the young people's conceptions of how they envision contemporary society. Secondly, it interrogates Beck's contention that 'risk' is itself the key organising principle in reflexive modernity. Perception of levels of risk can tell us about the vitality of this theory in that it is perception of risk, rather than risk itself that is

central to Beck's thesis. When asked the comparative question about risk and generation, the majority of respondents, regardless of sex or socio-economic status, selected 'more'.

FIGURE 9.8: Perceptions of whether Risks have Increased or Decreased



At Montesano High, the mixed focus group explained some specific contemporary dangers:

Elly: Yeah, I think that there are a lot more risks, like they [her parents] used to be able to walk around the streets at night and now all they do is worry about us. I think that we have a lot more things that we have to be careful of...a lot more drugs and spiking and things like that we have to look out for that they didn't have to. Everyone just did what they wanted to back then but now it's just got out of control.

Alice: They used to be able to leave the house and leave it unlocked and stuff; we have to lock every window and the garage and everything (Montesano).

The view that the past was safer and more innocent was quite prevalent, with some focus group participants at Montesano High mentioning increased public liability and insurance claims (Ewald 1991), implying these new risks are 'part of the human

project' (see Tulloch and Lupton 2003: 37), for which the individual should take responsibility. This supports Beck's claim that management of risk has been delegated away from institutions and family groups and now rests on the individual (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Beck 1992).

The Montesano High boys thought that today we just recognise risks now more than before:

Stew: They just probably didn't recognise the risks that long ago.

Interviewer: Can you give me an example?

Tim: I think it's we are becoming aware of things, but back then they weren't aware of what was happening. Like sun cancer, because it happens from a young age your parents are getting it now, but we are aware of it so we try not to get it, but some still do (Montesano).

This is an example of how the scientific, medical and technological progress of modernity is seen by the Montesano High boys as producing public education solutions for managing risk. This is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. Importantly for the argument in this chapter though, there was no real acknowledgement at Montesano High that it is these motors of 'progress' themselves (Beck 1992) that may be producing many of our contemporary perceived risks.

At the other schools however, this reflexive acknowledgement came up often. A participant in the Sunnydale High girls group said for example:

Mel: I don't think there's more risk, I mean the media is constantly over analysing and presenting images that our society is more dangerous than it actually is, like the whole terrorism and everything, while it is a danger I think the risk of it actually happening to us or around is very very small (Sunnydale).

The mixed group at Sunnydale High conducted a brief analysis of the difference between perceived day-to-day safety and media distortion:

Brianna: Everyone says it is not as safe now.

Interviewer: So when you say everyone, who do you mean?

Brianna: Parents, media... I mean, like, the stories where a kid is nearly snatched from his own front yard, like was that really happening many years ago?

Lee: There is a reality to it, but it is sensationalised a lot in the media.

Brianna: You have to be wary of that at the same time (Sunnydale).

In general, the students at Sunnydale High were wary in their attitude towards levels of contemporary risk and often spoke of this as a perception rather than a reality.

In the Rydell Grammar girls group, there were some very similar responses to Montesano High in terms of fear in public space:

Lucy: Well, when me and my brother were little, maybe three and four, we used to walk a couple of kilometres down the main road to our friends house and we were fine. People might stop and say hello, but they wouldn't touch us or anything. But today if someone wanted to that they would be gone, generally, within a few minutes (Rydell).

This rather extreme perception was contradicted by the boys' focus group at Rydell Grammar who developed a more complex analysis relating to urbanism and rationalisation:

Tom: I'm pretty sure that it is just a more urbanised society developing this, because I'm pretty sure in more rural situation where you have got a small town and everyone knows each other, the chances of people just beating the crap out of people because they will never meet them again and they feel cool with their mates, that can't happen cause it is just a small group of people. As more people come to cities and as they are getting bigger, then they are losing that community feel. You just become a number (Rydell).

In the mixed group at Rydell Grammar, Andy suggested a normalisation of risk:

Andy: It is getting more relaxed on what's risky, like in my parent's days it was like 'whoa, you got drunk on the weekend and have a hangover, that's risky!', but now it's like 'whoa, you got drunk and hung-over five times this week...risky!' It's just what was risky then is normal now (Rydell).

But Laura responded to this instantly with similar themes of danger to those mentioned in the other Rydell Grammar focus groups:

Laura: But it is also like a comparison between what society is now to what it was, like when my parents were younger they would just go out and come back the next morning and their parents wouldn't care, whereas now, if I did that, I'd get absolutely killed because my parents would be like 'we didn't know where you were, anything could have happened to you blah blah blah', because stuff does happen now, when it didn't back then, or not nearly as often as it does now (Rydell).

In talking about this topic, the Rydell Grammar groups used discourses of greater contemporary risk and fear - like the Montesano High students - *and* made more complex analytical responses like those at Sunnysdale High. In the Rydell Grammar mixed group, after speaking about his parents' attitude, Allen spoke about how the management of risks relates to individual responsibility and young people's comparative lack of it:

Allan: My parents don't really care much about what I do or where I go, as long as I give an explanation of what I did. They won't care if I drink underage, in fact they almost encourage it sometimes... they are like 'oh, they won't ask you for your licence here Allan, have a glass of wine'... two bottles later [laughs]. But it does come with responsibilities. But risk taking, I don't know... you kind of get that feeling of adolescence and invincibility and that's why risk taking is so easily done and you haven't worked as hard as older people, they've lived more life and they don't want to throw that away so quickly. Whereas, we have less responsibility (Rydell).

This is yet another example of how Rydell Grammar students continually used individualistic and moralistic discourses that emphasise individual responsibility, much more often than their counterparts at the other schools.

The quantitative data indicated that the young people perceive more risk in society today than when their parents were their age. But the qualitative data showed a more nuanced attitude to this, especially regarding the influence of the media and authority figures on perceptions of risk. This view was especially prevalent at Sunnysdale High, where they showed an analytical and often cynical attitude towards the relationship between the reality of risks, their representation in the media and their apparent

increased perception. As a group they were generally cautious in their discussions of a more risky contemporary society – some spoke about there being more risks while others were suspicious about whether this is actually the case. Rydell Grammar students and particularly Montesano High students were more likely to perceive that society is riskier now than when their parents were their age. Generally, the Rydell Grammar students sensed a moral decline where public safety itself is threatened. Montesano High students shared this attitude but in less moralistic terms. They also seemed to more readily accept that risks were an inherent part of day-to-day life.

The data here indicates a variety of ways in which habitus mediates attitudes towards risk and delineates different forms of reflexivity in the engagement with risk. Montesano High focus group participants were more accepting and less critical overall of the apparent ascendance of risk in the present day. The Sunnydale High students showed a considerable level of reflexive critique of risk discourses. The conservative discourse about decline of morals and values discourse of the Rydell Grammar students is also an expression of reflexive engagement with risk discourses and aligns politically with arguments of the political right. Crucially, while they might impute similar things about the levels of risk, this moralistic critique did not appear at Montesano High. The working class youth are refusing these dominant discourses through their own experiences of the juxtaposition between the rhetoric of neo-liberal ‘classlessness’ and its inherent ‘morals’ and ‘values’, and their own material experiences of the reality of inequality.

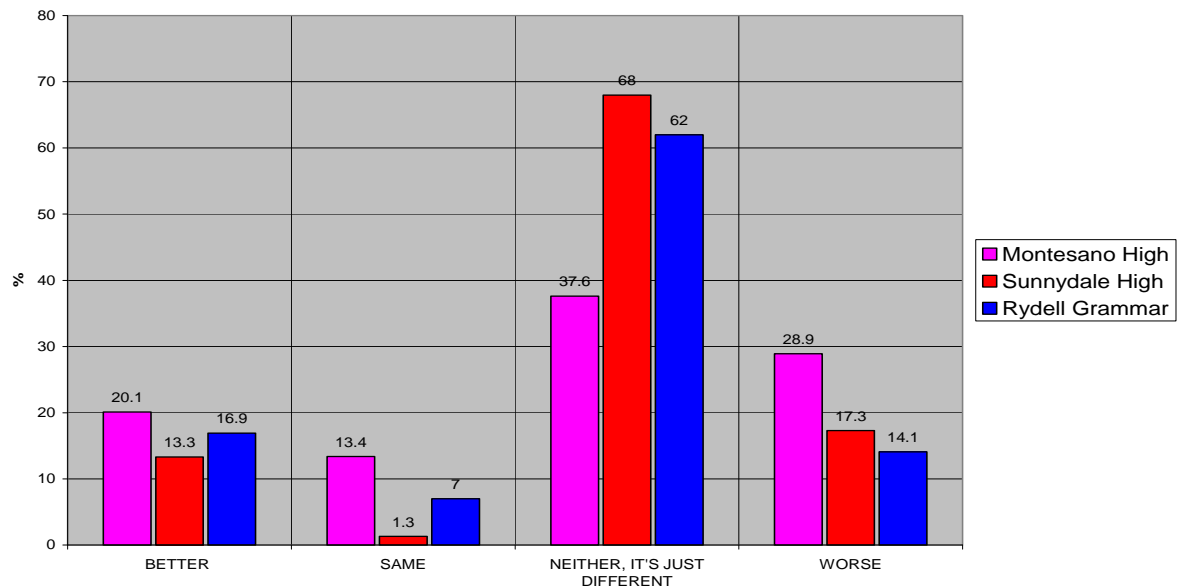
Risk and Society: Better or worse?

The survey question about levels of risk compared to the past was followed by a question that asked for agreement or otherwise with the question: ‘*Compared to when*

your parents were young, is society today in general a better or worse place to live?’

(Figure 9.9).

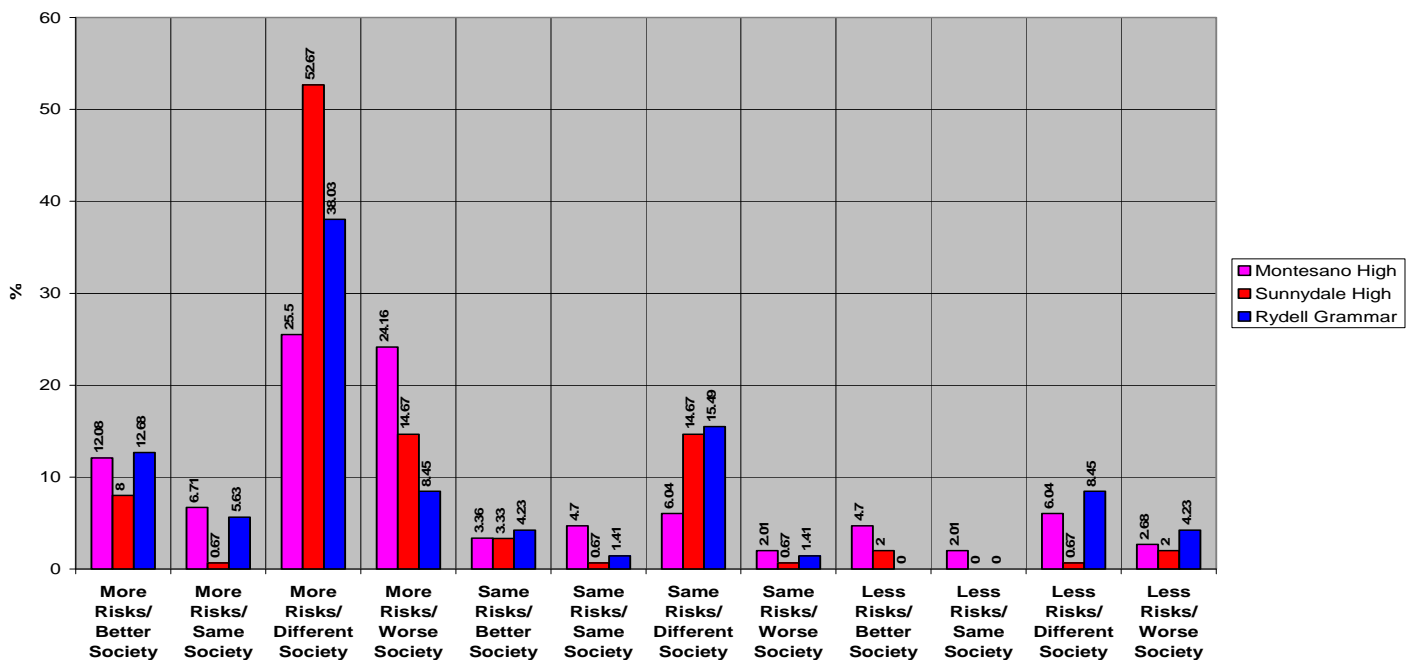
FIGURE 9.9: Perceptions about whether Society today is a better or a worse place to live.



Overall, the majority (54.6%) responded that society is neither better nor worse, just different. This seems to portray a relatively ambivalent attitude towards risk: it neither improves nor declines the state of society. Nevertheless, there were some differences between the schools with Montesano High respondents over ten per cent more likely to say that society is worse. Again, this points to the more relaxed attitude the students at Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar have towards risks, not necessarily seeing them as entirely negative.

A cross tabulation between responses to the survey question that investigated ‘levels of risk’ and responses regarding ‘attitudes towards society’ in terms of better or worse, indicated that 38.2% of all respondents considered society was riskier but not necessarily better or worse, just different (Figure 9.10).

FIGURE 9.10: Cross Tabulation between ‘Levels of Risk’ and ‘Quality of Society’



The dominant ‘more risk/different society’ trend in responses was most common at Sunnydale High (52.67%), followed by Rydell Grammar (38.03%) and Montesano High (25.5%). The next most dominant trend - ‘more risks/worse society’ - was most common at Montesano High (24.16%), followed by Sunnydale High (14.67%) and Rydell Grammar (8.45%). The variation in these trends foregrounded by the cross-tabulations paint a picture where the Sunnydale High students are the most ambivalent about risks - acknowledging that there are more of them but judging this social change to be neither positive or negative. Montesano High students were most likely to associate more risk in society as negative, with Rydell Grammar somewhere in between. These trends dovetail with the data analysis above about ‘risks and problems’ for young people and ‘levels of risk’.

Concluding Remarks

When asked about ‘risk’ in general the young people surveyed generally thought that there is more risk in today’s society than when their parents were their age, and that this didn’t necessarily mean that society is therefore ‘worse’. Furthermore, when asked about risks in the lives of young people, the large scale risks named by Beck were not nominated. Rather, it was risks involved in the negotiation of day-to-day life that were most prominent. The specifics of both what are defined as a risk, and attitudes towards how to deal with those risks are mediated by habitus. Everyday experiences and position in social space (habitus) delineates the experience and perception of ‘risk’ in a multitude of ways. This is further illustrated in the following chapter that discusses how the young people involved in the research envision the future on a more macro level through their engagement with discourses of risk relating to science, technology and the environment.

CHAPTER TEN

Risk Discourses and ‘Progress’: Technology, Science and the Environment

Introduction

This chapter follows on from the themes of the previous chapter by looking specifically at more global risk discourses surrounding the very notion of ‘progress’. Technology and science, and environmental and political concerns are central to this discussion and form a complex and rather pessimistic discourse through which the young people in the research conceive of the future. The data here exemplifies further distinctions in the reflexive engagement with notions of risk. Some of the distinctions in attitude are quite clear, but others, especially regarding environmental issues, are more subtle and bounded by different emotions.

For Beck, the progression from modernity to a new or late modernity, or from class society to risk society, is driven by a combination of globalised forces such as economics, science, industry, technology and communication. These forces produce the ‘progress’ that the concept of Modernity has been based on since the Enlightenment, but also produce all of the large scale ‘bads’ that threaten the very existence of humanity such as climate change, nuclear fallout or even the threat of terrorism. Beck maintains these risk developments have changed our concerns (even our very consciousness) from pursuing the traditional ‘roles’ prescribed for us by position in social space, to reflexively engaging with all manner of risks, from personal to global, that we have to deal with individually regardless of class, gender,

ethnicity or religion. The data in this and the previous chapter demonstrate the distinctions that class brings to these engagements.

In this study the discussion in the focus groups about the comparative levels of risk in society, or about social change in general, was almost exclusively related to ideas surrounding the burgeoning, omnipresent use of technology, and to a lesser extent, the influence of various forms of science. Huntley has argued that to ‘generation Y’, ‘technology is their natural ally, a necessity rather than a luxury, the solution to all imaginable problems’ (2006: 2). However, the data here indicates a much more complex relationship than that. If anything, the attitudes here are mostly critical and wary. In fact, they often point out that technology itself seems to be the cause of many contemporary problems. The young people’s discussions about what technology and science offer our quality of life were connected to their effects – negative and positive. In talking about these effects they covered a range of global issues, implicitly questioning the assumption that technology produces an Enlightenment-style form of progress. The attitudes expressed on this topic ranged on a continuum from optimistic to apocalyptic. Optimism was expressed in observations that discussed how technology creates ease, comfort, entertainment and in some cases safety. On the other end of the spectrum, technology was seen to be contributing to all sorts of social and environmental problems and risks.

Throughout the focus groups, the participants conflated technological, scientific, medical and communication themes discursively into one ‘force’. This was how all the groups at all the schools engaged with these themes, rarely distinguishing between them and speaking about them as one all-encompassing force. This ‘force’ was

perceived to be a threat to many aspects of life, particularly the environment. When the focus groups were speaking specifically about technology, awareness of the self-perpetuating relationship between global economic production and risk was present in the focus group discussions, exemplifying Beck's contention that people increasingly realise that it is the progress of modernity itself that produces risks.

In the more critical exchanges there were echoes of Beck's (1997) theorisations of reflexive engagement with these discourses that he hopes will produce a politicised form of scepticism. This is in contradistinction to the earlier general questions about risk which produced responses almost exclusively engaged with the uncertainty, security and dangers of everyday life. Those responses only rarely linked the concept of risk itself to global, technological or scientific discourses. 'Blame' for the negatives of science and technology's 'bads' were often placed on the side of governments, multi-national corporations and other largely 'faceless' institutions. Further, the possibility of the emancipatory risk politics that Beck hopes for is rendered unlikely by the participants' apparent feelings of helplessness and sense that future large-scale catastrophes are a virtual certainty. There were considerable distinctions between the three schools as to where students in focus groups positioned themselves along this continuum. This positioning illustrates the way habitus generates some distinctive ways that young people engage with these 'macro' discourses of risk.

Montesano High

Students at Montesano High saw technology primarily as a positive force. For example, in the boy's focus group the health system was given as an example:

Danny: Health systems are heaps better. We've got heaps more advantages now from technology compared to back in the olden days (Montesano).

But then he added:

It can be negative, it's ruining the environment.

Interviewer: In what ways is it doing that?

Danny: Pollution, ozone layer, stuff like that...

Stew: It can prevent serious illnesses and stuff like that. It's made it easier to communicate to a lot of people; emergency services are a lot more efficient like if someone injures themselves in an isolated area, 20 years ago you might not have had a helicopter come out and pick you up, stuff like that (Montesano).

Stew's response implies that science and technology improves our standards of living and health. On the other side of the ledger there are the environmental issues that Danny puts forward as negatives.

Similarly, the female focus group at Montesano High focussed primarily on the positive outcomes of science and technology, even as they noted a contradiction between comfort and laziness offered by technology:

Elly: We have some things that are better in our lives like technology and television and Playstation and computers... but they are also bad because they make us lazy. We sort of slack off with things like that... People seem to talk more on the Internet, and communication from person to person is starting to lack because of the internet.

Clare: There's less meeting face to face with people.

Elly: Yeah, because of the Internet now you don't have to go over to their house or anything (Montesano).

The prevalence of communication technology was often referred to, where the easy access and social isolation were contrasted:

Alice: Some things are making things easier...

Genevieve: Some technology is good, but some has gone way overboard... I think it stops verbal communication; they are relying on emails and SMS to communicate... I think it's a bad thing because a lot of people don't have any contact, like people don't have as many personal skills these days because they just go through the internet and email someone instead of ringing them up and talking to them.

Alice: Maybe it has made life easier (Montesano).

Overall, Montesano High students spoke about risks connected to technology and science in very general terms, did not use many specific examples and, compared to the other two schools at least, maintained a relatively positive attitude towards technology alongside some stated concerns about its negative affects.

Sunnydale High

At Sunnydale High most of the discussion revolved around information and communication technology. Attitudes in general were a lot more negative than at Montesano High with most of the discussion expressing overtly critical arguments. For instance, when asked whether technology is making the world a better place the female focus group responded as follows:

Mel: [loudly] WORSE! Particularly the Internet!

Nell: OK, I'd say it's crap, but I love my mobile phone, I need my Mp3 player and my USB drive...

Mel: Yeah, and I love my Ipod, but damn it everything else sucks [laughter]... I like the good things but we are getting so... you know.

Nell: We need to balance...

Mel: All interaction is through SMS, the second I start using my phone I don't talk to people anymore... I think that there is so much reliance on technology, like, you know, if all the computers in society failed somehow, our society would crumble and die and just be so confused. Even in our school system...

Nell: The other day, the computer crashed, I panicked, didn't know what to do...

Mel: Yeah, you see the teachers running up and down the corridors trying to remember how to teach and it's awful and you just go 'No!', just write it down and put it in a file it's always there's unless there's a fire [laughs]...I don't like computers!

Nell: Technology is good, it is, but people can't understand that there needs to be a balance and the thing with technology as a bad thing is that people don't realise that there has to be a limit and there has to be a conscious realisation that it is isolating (Sunnydale).

The girls here talk about 'crashes', an image of disaster that was prevalent throughout the discussions about communication and computer technology at both Sunnydale

High and Rydell Grammar. The image implies concern about our dependence on these technologies. We may note that Nell seems to be speaking from a position of authority ('people can't understand', 'people don't realise') about this subject, an analytical and judgmental position not apparent at Montesano High. Once again this serves as an indicator of the confidence provided by cultural capital and the status associated with attending an academically selective school. The Sunnydale High girls did acknowledge some positives:

Nell: Obviously it's easier to communicate, with your phone you can always contact whoever you need to contact... (Sunnydale).

But even these advantages were mitigated by other problems regarding the volume of information they can access:

Nell: [sarcastically] Oh yeah... the internet.

Mel: But the internet is mostly made up.

Nell: But there is like good things about it, like when I go on the internet to research I get really excited, but 2 hours later I'm going through the 14th page of Google....

Mel: And there's NOTHING! And you are just sitting there and it's like, 'Why?', and then there's the sites that are clearly made up; then there's the crazy man sitting somewhere in Kentucky writing his racist crap (Sunnydale).

Reflexively, the girls at the academically selective school associate computer technology and the internet with education, a connection not found at Montesano High.

The mixed group at Sunnydale High linked increased dependence on technology to the pressure and prevalence of materialism and consumer culture:

Soon-Yi: We have become too dependent on technology and money has become really important... because back when my parents were my age it just about earning enough to keep yourself living and just comfortable, whereas now it's gotta be the best and you need to be a success and have heaps of money so you can always have something to fall back on for life when you have retired and everything, whereas

back then it was just about necessities and now its about having enough to get everything you want.

Lee: One example is Donald Trump who is sort of being idolised because of how much money he has and that sort of thing...

Brianna: Maybe it's to do with individuals and being competitive, and being better than the other person and having everything from a better house to a better lifestyle, a better TV, going on better holidays than them

Soon-Yi: It's what separates us from upper, lower and middle class; like 'I can show you that I have more than you' (Sunnydale).

Soon-Yi, echoing Bauman's critique (1998a, 1998b), argued that technology is a driving force in constructing 'wants' as 'needs', where desire for consumer products can never be satisfied and the pursuit of these desires ensures that our relative wealth is taken for granted. For example:

Soon-Yi: Sure having an Ipod is great, but do we need it? I don't know, I mean money is going to where it shouldn't be going; we should be spending all this money on sending it to other countries, or putting it into helping the poor, instead of building up all these extra gadgets to make our life easier. We don't really appreciate what we have, because you know, you have these objects, and then as soon as another computer comes out you throw it away and upgrade to that one and then you throw it away and upgrade to the next one, because you just always want the best, but you don't really appreciate that 'hey, I had a computer and that's enough, I don't need to keep up' (Sunnydale).

This highlights a critical political discourse that was present at Sunnydale High much more so than at the other schools. When pushed on where this pressure to keep up with consumer culture comes from, the mixed group were very quick to identify another technological medium - the media:

Soon-Yi: It's everything, like people influence you because they have got something new, so then you want something new. It's a bit of peer pressure, but it's mostly the media, cause the media says that all the stars have it, you know...

Brianna: Yeah, and it's a positive to have the best stuff (Sunnydale).

These critical exchanges show traditional left thinking values, as opposed to the more moral and conservative values expressed at Rydell Grammar.

The environment and global inequality were seen as important moral issues at Sunnydale High. For instance, the Sunnydale High mixed group alluded to environmental catastrophes:

Lee: I don't know, just the whole consumer culture thing, like just how much we use as far as fuel goes and everything, I think that is pretty bad. Personally, I don't like driving that much. I have my Ps and everything, but I just try to ride my bike. I think it is unfair that one or two countries in the world use all the resources when other countries are struggling to eat.

Soon-Yi: I saw an article on the news about that country near the Himalayas, Bhutan, and they are gonna get washed away because the Himalayas are melting and just like that a whole country, a civilization is going to die within like a week or something because we choose to use so much fuel and we don't really have any consideration for other people and the world around us (Sunnydale).

However, when pushed on the possibility of positive social change to fix environmental problems, the reaction was quite pessimistic.

Soon-Yi: A lot of people want to, but they are lazy or they just don't know how to about it. Like you think that, 'yeah, that is really bad', but it will be easier to drive my car to work than catch the train...

Lee: And the whole mentality, like, 'I'm only one person so it doesn't matter if I do this'. I think the majority can't change really (Sunnydale).

When pressed on positive aspects of technology, better communication between people and cultures was again negated by recognition of the social isolation produced by relying on technological communication.

Brianna: Obviously it has helped people communicate, but then there's the whole argument that it's negative because it is taking away social interaction, so you can kind of feel it in a positive and negative way... It's like you can communicate with anyone in the world and you can communicate with the person next door using a computer but then that is a negative because you are not having that social interaction (Sunnydale).

In summary, students in the Sunnydale High focus groups expressed the most critical attitudes towards technology and its influence, and articulated these concerns by critiquing consumer culture, inequality and environmental concerns.

Rydell Grammar

The boys at Rydell Grammar tended to be more positive and frequently took a ‘good with the bad’ attitude. Often a positive point was made first. For example:

Tony: There are fewer boundaries, everything is getting quicker. It takes like seven seconds for a credit card to go up to a satellite to pay for something, whereas it used to be cash before. So this kind of technology opens up boundaries which I think is good because we save time, but I’m not sure what happens when things break down, as only computers can fix it (Rydell).

And then a subsequent speaker gave the opposite view, for example:

Nat: We lose our social interaction because we do it through... it is kind of a Catch-22. It’s good to have it but then you lose something because of it. It also makes people look crazy when they are walking down corridors talking to a headset and you just go ‘who are you talking to? Are you talking to me?’ [laughs] (Rydell)

Like the boys at Montesano High, both positives and negatives are highlighted. Speed, ease and the opening of boundaries are juxtaposed with images of ‘break down’, dependency and absurdity. The possibility of technology producing social isolation, rationalization and dehumanization was seen as a serious risk.

Nat: Well, like, in the hospital at the moment, when they used to do some basic pathology, they don’t do it anymore, a computer programme does it; it reads the slide, identifies focal points on that slide and then brings out a diagnosis. That used to be job of a few people, the registrars. So it helps some people but makes some obsolete now. So if that technology broke at [Local] Hospital and they had to do 40 reports on this disease, then they would need to have one of those doctors who had been taught it and they will be gone, that knowledge will be gone.

Tom: In a nutshell, the lower skilled jobs are being automated, and it is forcing us, which comes back to the increased pressure put on Rydell Grammar and Sunnydale students, it is forcing us to have to get into those much higher skilled or qualification workforces for us to have a future, or so it would appear (Rydell).

Nat’s knowledgeable discussion of hospital pathology uses a discourse of ‘creative destruction’ (Schumpeter 1943) and jobless growth, both key features of neo-liberalism. We may note that at Montesano by contrast, reference to new health

technology was simply to 'health systems'. Tom's subsequent observation of how global forces interact with local pressures to create pressure in the labour market is a serious moment is highly reflexive in the sense identified by Beck. It marks the only point in all of the focus groups where global discourses of risk were directly associated with the life situations of individuals. When asked if society is now better or worse because of these things, the Rydell Grammar boys replied positively for themselves but pessimistically for the future regarding environmental issues:

Tony: Better for us, but worse for younger people than us. I think it is a lot better for us, but it is gonna get worse. Like, we are already running out of oil and could run out in the next 20 years. I just think the natural stability and the global footprint... It's good for us now and we're happy to use all the resources. I think 'footprints' are only gonna get bigger because all those countries that still want to industrialise, they are going to want resources as well... We are lucky here, we have our coal and uranium and we can just sell it off to the Third World for a huge amount. Future generations are not going to be able to do it (Rydell).

Nat: It is good for us but won't be for our children. I reckon my life will be easier, but my kids will be buggered (Rydell).

The speed of change itself is seen as problematic, to the point where evolution cannot keep up:

Tom: About society being better or worse, I think in the same way that in nature some of the animals have become extinct, the reason they become extinct is because it is changing too fast. With the adaptation of society lately, the speed at which society is changing is increasing. Think about 1900s to 1930s not that much changed, but compare that to the last 5 years where society is just changing constantly and I can only see it getting faster and I see people falling behind because of it (Rydell).

Note that Tom is talking about 'people' 'falling behind', not himself. This disjunction between personal attitudes and the global future is discussed in more detail in the next section.

In keeping with the pattern above, the girls at Rydell Grammar identified some positives such as medical advances. Yet, the discussion quickly turned to the risks

created by technology (that resonate with Beck's notion of 'boomerang affect') and the possibility of social isolation posed by communication technology:

Kath: There are more cures for diseases now.

Kim: But we have created more diseases, like the Chernobyl meltdown and microwave radiation gives you cancer and watching a computer screen too much can hurt your eyes and there are just all these different affects of technology that can be detrimental. At the same time it's increased our lifestyle. But it breaks down our social skills, in the sense that instead of ringing someone up or even going to see them and going 'do you want to do something?', instead your like, 'hey, let's play an MSN game with each other' and I think when you talk to people on line you don't know them as well. You do tend to talk to people on MSN that you don't usually talk to in person... I think that it breaks down society's skills and values (Rydell).

Again, the notion of values comes up at Rydell Grammar. Yet overall the Rydell Grammar girls' focus group was *relatively* positive about whether society was better or worse today compared to when their parents were the same age:

Kim: I love the life that I'm in, but I think that in a sense we are losing a bit of our culture and I think that can be detrimental like, we don't go out on the street and play sports anymore.

Lucy: But we are not restricted. It's both better and worse. I mean, with computers and technology I can see some negatives. But I think life is so much better now, you have more time to spend with your family or to just be with someone, you have more time to do the things that you want rather than the things you have to do (Rydell).

The Rydell Grammar mixed focus group also outlined some benefits in terms of health, but noted that medical advances may increase reckless living:

Allan: You could say that now there is more cures for stuff, more treatment for stuff, people will think, 'well, I can do that now, I can jump off that balcony and I'll be fine' or it's like, 'I can ride that bike really fast', so it can make it better in that way, but it could also be lowering our threshold for risk taking (Rydell).

The conversation quickly turned to communication technology, which is clearly an issue they had discussed together before:

Andy: [to Laura] Go on, talk about mobiles; you know you want to...
[pause]

Laura: We are communicating a lot more, but because it's through a computer or a phone, we have stopped talking face to face a lot...

Andy: Yeah... it's like 'how come I haven't seen you online lately?', and I'm like, 'hello, we are talking face to face, the best you can get and you are asking me about online'. It is just so ironic (Rydell).

This reference to prior airing of views probably indicates that discussions about the good and bad effects of science and technology are a feature of classroom learning about current affairs in the curriculum at all three schools. Following the 'objective' discourse of the syllabus, their expression of views attempts to be even-handed.

The mixed Rydell Group discussed similar 'misery of consumerism' themes to some Sunnydale High groups:

Gina: It's not making our lives better because you always want more. You are always not happy cause someone has a better version and you need to be competitive and get it.

Laura: And also we are becoming a lot more anti-social because, say, on the bus instead of talking to my friends, I listen to my Ipod. So, we are becoming a lot more secluded in that sense.

Andy: What is really pathetic though is that I've actually watched two girls send messages to each other while sitting across the aisle from each other on the bus, not even two meters apart, for a whole hour. They would reach each others text messages and go, 'oh my god, how could you say that?'... it was the most pathetic thing I have ever seen [everyone laughs] (Rydell).

In relation to whether society is now better or worse because of this (compared to when their parents were their age), there was pessimism tempered by an analysis of the media's influence on our perception.

Laura: People used to be able to walk down the street at midnight and nothing happened, but now they get mugged or raped or whatever. And we used to trust police and now we hear so much about people pretending to be police and pulling women over on the Freeway or something or corrupt police or whatever.

Allan: It could be just the media portraying a bad society.

Gina: It is a bit of both.

Allan: It also depends where you live. If you live in a nice community where it's sheltered and all the corners are all edged off, then you will think is on the news. But if you are in the thick of what they are reporting, it will be different (Rydell).

Allan's final statement refers to how class and risk intersect.

Overall, the nexus of technological, scientific, medical and communication advances was seen as the central agent of social change, affecting everything from personal relationships and experiences to global inequities and environmental degradation. In the focus group discussions, Sunnydale High students were by far the most critical, followed by those at Rydell Grammar and Montesano High. Students at Montesano High tended to give straightforward simple examples of technological change in making their points, while students at Rydell Grammar, in particular, were more likely to give examples using well-informed ‘expert’ discourse obtained from their family milieu. These differences illustrate cultural capital in action. At the heart of the reflective critique presented in Sunnydale focus groups was imagery depicting global disparities, computer crashes, disasters and social isolation and alienation. It is surmised that this prevalent discourse is at least partly influenced by the current affairs syllabus to which Australian students are exposed to primary school onwards, and also by media sources. Significantly, this discourse of disaster for the planet and the general public was at odds with the trend in focus group discussion to depict their own individual ambitions and future lives in very positive terms.

It’s the End of the World As We Know It (and *I* Feel Fine): Positive Individual Futures Alongside an Apocalyptic Global Future

One of the first observations of the focus group discussions was that all the students had quite positive views about their own futures, but often expressed negative views about the future in terms of politics, global relations and the environment. This was particularly the case at both Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar, where there was an interesting juxtaposition between their positive attitudes towards their own

individual ambitions and a much more critical, bleak, even apocalyptic (Gow and Leahy 2005) view of the future of the world. At Montesano High there were environmental concerns, but they were not as extreme or gloomy in their imagery. As outlined earlier, most interviewees were reasonably confident about achieving their ambitions, even whilst listing some possible obstacles on the way. Yet, throughout the focus groups the students were quite often very concerned about what they see happening in the wider world, especially in terms of political and environmental concerns. The attitude towards the future then was expressed in discourses that tended to conflate environmental issues with geo-political issues of terrorism, poverty and hunger that almost seemed to view these issues as, echoing Huntington (2002), something of a global struggle between the West and the rest. Yet at the same time, we must not lose sight of the fact that when it comes to environmental concerns, there are distinctions in the engagement of different class cohorts (Leahy 2003; see also Layfield 2008).

Towards the end of some of the focus groups I asked directly about why they seemed to show this contradiction in outlook between the personal and the global. The following exchange in the female focus group at Sunnydale High is a typical response:

Mel: Yeah, the whole world is going to self destruct I just hope that we are not part of it when it happens [laughter].

Interviewer: [to Kate] is that what you think too?

Kate: [hesitantly]... Yeah...

Nell: If I could do something I would, but I have no money to contribute...

Mel: And we're 17 year old school students...

Nell: No one's going to listen to us...

Mel: And if we protest it's like, 'oh, those crazy teenagers' [laughs].

Nell: Protesting doesn't work, it doesn't do anything (Sunnydale).

Some may interpret these comments in terms of the popular stereotype that young people are apparently apathetic and apolitical in nature. This could not be further from the truth. Young people are in fact concerned about the whole gambit of political issues and they tend to sum up their feelings towards the 'official' field of politics as 'boring, bludgers, bullshit and bitch' (Threadgold and Nilan 2004). Furthermore, they feel that politics is largely corrupted, self-interested, not interested in what they have to say and uses them as scapegoats (Vromen 2003; Davis 1999). In response, young people perform their politics in a number of non-traditional ways, that relate to Melucci's understanding of social movements as 'submerged networks' (1989: 208) and Maffesoli's (1995) theorising of the 'underground centrality' of youthful urban neo-tribes that create a kind of 'empathetic sociality' (Maffesoli 1996: 11). These social movements often incorporate communication technology, consumption practices and popular culture (Ward 2008; Vromen 2008, 2007; Autio and Heinonen 2004).

The Sunnydale High cohort were particularly passionate about some political issues, but also expressed their feelings of 'powerlessness' (see Ellis 2004). This is shown to good example in the following exchange about global poverty. Despite their somewhat confused interpretation of the problem, it is the sheer scale of the matter that is daunting for them:

Mel: It's not possible for the whole world to be out of poverty.

Nell: Yeah, and I think there are too many people; the more the population grows the extremes of poverty and the extremes of evil just stretch wider and wider and wider. If you go to Africa and the small communities there, they don't have crime, they don't have all this stuff, so the more you become reliant on technology and science and all that it just gets stretched... 6 billion is too many, we are taking up too much habitat that other creatures use...

Nell: If we wanted to cure poverty for example, that would mean that everyone in the Western world would have to reduce their living

standards like twenty per cent for example, people would just not do that so that is why it's a problem.

Sara: And there's the problems too, like sure people that are very high socio-economic, they could reduce their income by twenty per cent and they wouldn't even notice, but the people in the very low bracket are reduced to the poverty that we are trying to stop, cause society isn't balanced, that's how it is and by trying to solve that imbalance you're just going to create more problems, like you are still undermining...

Mel: There are too many people; you can't solve anything (Sunnydale)

The girls here are critically and discursively engaged with this topic, a position very far from apathy and ignorance. As pointed out in previous chapters, their display of analytical skills in discussing this topic stands as testament to their cultural capital, and to the generation of critique as an aspect of their academically-oriented middle class habitus.

The Rydell Grammar boys made a similar point about feeling powerlessness in terms of environmental problems

Nat: I don't like the way the world is going at the moment. I think we are going down hill pretty quickly. It seems we have got so much fracturing, people hating each other and are just bitter. It just seems stupid that they are getting angry with each other. For me, it looks like a waste of time. With the environment, it's kinda crap, we do a lot of shit to it and we've messed it up pretty bad.

Further, when asked whether anything will be done about the environmental problems in time, there was a critically engaged pessimism. Like the Sunnydale High girls, they hope that the end happens after they are gone:

Nat: I don't think the world will go 'there's a problem' before the problem actually hits them, then they put the strategies in that they should have put in years ago to stop it. That is the main problem with the world.

Tom: Asian countries are just industrialising and the African countries are still yet to industrialise, and I think that people are too concerned with 'now' to worry about something like the environment in the long term and I think what they are gonna try and do is give huge sums of money at the very last minute to try to save the Earth. But I think that it is going to be too late. It is human nature not to be interested in something that long term.

Interviewer: How far away do you think that point is?

Tony: Hopefully after my lifetime [everyone laughs] (Rydell).

The mixed group at Rydell Grammar expressed very similar themes, especially in regard to the apparent lack of a quick fix solution. The problem of vested interests came up:

Interviewer: So let's talk about the environment specifically, what is going to happen with it?

Laura: [makes an explosion sound] It's going to go down hill and we are going to be living in little bubble bio-spheres!

Allan: It will get to the point where it is so bad that they will finally do something drastic or they will just give up.

Andy: The annoying thing is that we have the technology and ability to make everything green; it's just not economically [sarcastically, making quote marks sign] 'efficient'.

Laura: Or it's not the popular vote.

Andy: It will cost too much.

Allan: It will ruin too many fixed industries. Like, cars pollute, get rid of cars... that is a huge industry to try to conquer!

Laura: It's not really getting rid of cars; it's just making cars more environmentally friendly. Like, we have the technology to adapt the things we have to make them more environmentally friendly or whatever, but we just won't do it. I think that is why we have such a negative view: we know we can do it; it is just that nobody wants to.

Here, corporations and governments are to blame for the problems. Subsequently, when asked whether the problem will find a solution there was pessimism and cynicism, despite the students obviously wanting social change:

Andy: Everything you need to do to fix the environment is either going to cost you billions and take you all your life to get there and by the time you get there you will find out that somebody else has a patent on it and you can't do it anyway (Rydell).

When asked specifically about the future of the planet, the mixed Rydell Grammar group were pessimistic:

Allan: I can see two things happening. It can stay like this for many generations or sometime into the future it is all gonna fall apart and we are going to turn into slum lords and gangs in cities... I can really see it. Because human nature is like a big cylinder. It goes Caveman, then we go Medieval, Renaissance, Enlightenment, Industrial, Modern and then we will go back to Caveman (Rydell).

These responses portray a perception that large scale disasters are inevitable, which was common throughout Rydell Grammar focus groups. These responses reflect a mixture of helplessness, ambivalence, irony, scepticism and cynicism (with a healthy dose of realism).

In the Rydell Grammar female group, three of the girls expressed similar attitudes to those above, with Kim predicting a coming Ice Age and the increase of events similar to the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina. Yet Lucy argued against the apocalyptic view via her religious beliefs (much to the chagrin of the other girls). She was the only person at all of the schools to argue against these apocalyptic images. Other than some comments *vis a vis* the 'war on terror', this was the only time in all of the focus groups at all of the school that religion was mentioned personally.

Lucy: Am I allowed to say my religion?

Interviewer: Sure, you can say whatever you want.

Lucy: I'm Seventh Day Adventist, have you heard of them?

Interviewer: Yeah.

Lucy: So I don't believe that an Ice Age or whatever will occur because it says in the Bible that there will be more earthquakes, more disasters that will happen at the end of the age.

Kim: But an Ice Age already has occurred, so what's your story for that one?

Lucy: Yeah, statistically we have looked at it; there are ten more times earthquakes now than a hundred years ago, but I don't think that it [another Ice Age] is ever gonna happen because that's when Jesus will come. [The others laugh hysterically]. Well that's what I think; I don't think that it ever will completely destroy the Earth... [The others laugh even more]... Don't laugh at me Kate! I could laugh at your funny things [Everyone laughs including Lucy].

Kim: I just find it funny that 'Jesus will come'... sorry.

Kath: But at least we are acknowledging the problem. The first step is acknowledging the problem; the next step is to actually do something (Rydell).

There was no malice in this exchange, the girls did accept each others' viewpoints and the ribbing was good-natured. The last statement by Kath is the most positive thing said about the environmental problem in all of the focus groups. These exchanges in

the focus groups at Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar highlighted political and corporate interests, and selfish, short-sighted attitudes, as the main problem in terms of addressing environmental risks. Not once was there a connection made between these concerns and their own individual future, behaviour and consumption practices.

Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar students' responses to environmental issues were very similar in content. But there were quite marked differences in the way these discourses were expressed. There was an earnest passion in Sunnydale High student's attitudes to the environment, and disappointment in expressing the thought that nothing can be done. At Rydell Grammar these same thoughts seemed to be expressed in a much more cynical, ironic (Szerszynski 2007; Turner 1999) or even fatalistic way where it was simply assumed that nothing can or will be done.

At Montesano High, environment concerns were raised a lot less frequently, in a lot less detail and certainly with a lot less critique or passion. This seems to correspond to other research that maintains that the environment is a largely middle class concern (Inglehart 1997), although the tide does seem to be changing recently. When asked about individual positive attitudes versus the fatalistic framing of environmental issues, the most meaningful exchange at Montesano High was:

Clare: I don't think young people really worry about stuff like that. There is some, but the majority of young people don't really look at politics, they just think it's for their parents to worry about and for politicians. But as you get older you probably start thinking more about the environment and stuff.

Elly: I've sort of had environmental issues drummed into my head because my Mum is like a total Greenie and she used to be a hippie and all that other stuff, so she drums into my head things about the environment and stuff, but when you really think about it there is so much.... [long pause] You start to realise all the risks and impacts we have on the environment, and the bad impacts it has on the environment... It's frustrating because you watch the news and stuff

and you think, ‘well why don’t you do that?’, and we don’t really have very much say over it because we are not in a political position (Montesano).

Clare sees this as an issue for older people to worry about, probably because she and her peers have more material concerns. Elly expresses very similar sentiments to those that appeared at Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar and is obviously influenced by her ‘greenie’ Mum, whom she refers to in a playful and slightly pejorative manner. Nevertheless, this is an indication of how there can be subtle differences of habitus *within* social classes. Elly also expresses the sense of relative powerlessness. Overall though, there was much less overt environmental concern at Montesano High compared to the two other schools.

Concluding Remarks

Scandinavian research has shown how cultural capital itself is of strong importance in developing environmental concerns (Strandbu and Skogen 2000). In this way:

Knowledge of the environmental situation and a ‘correct’ perception of nature could be considered as cultural capital ... summarized in the term ‘romantic gaze’... We suggest that notions of nature *are* embedded in different forms of social life — and are subject to cultural and social domination as are any other cultural forms (Strandbu and Skogen 2000: 203).

They also found that regardless of political position – from conservative to radical – the environment was a concern for young people, but when it came to taking action the middle class ‘radicals’ were most likely to be engaged and politically organised. The environment was found to be a key identified risk for the young people at all three schools in this research. The fact that this major risk was mentioned regardless of social class highlights how ‘environmental awareness has “trickled down” from the upper middle class to all social strata’ (Jarvikoski 1995: 86). In this way, like the Australian research of Gow and Leahy (2005), the focus group discussions here seem

to confirm that it has ‘become a given in contemporary consciousness that species are dying out, that oceans are becoming contaminated, that climatic catastrophe is looming’ (Beck 1995: 1). But there were gradients in terms of the intensity and passion of engagement. Further, some of the more fatalistic responses we see may be what Baudrillard refers to as ‘fatal strategies’ (1990): where ‘apathy and withdrawal may represent, as Baudrillard argues, an unconscious desire to see catastrophic change’ (Gow and Leahy 2005: 140). This response is itself a form of resistance, where one’s own feeling of powerlessness to cause emancipatory social change and a realisation that the ‘system cannot be rescued’ is transformed into an almost celebratory consumerism that actually *wants* to see the spectacle; to see what happens when it all comes down. The irony and fatalism present in some attitudes, particularly at Rydell Grammar, seem to reflect this form of passive response, a knowing nudge and wink that says ‘what am I meant to do?’ Considering the denial and obfuscating that has surrounded these issues in recent Australian politics (see Hamilton 2007; Pearse 2007; Leggett 2005), these responses are not surprising.

The connections between global worries and individual well-being have been researched in several contexts that focus on psycho-social aspects (for example Ojala 2005). The complexity of these connections tends to make Giddens’ (1990, 1991) association of global risks with existential anxieties that threaten individual ontological security, seem simplistic. In these studies, it is concluded that worrying about an issue, particularly environmental concerns, does not necessarily threaten individual well-being but may create a sense of responsibility, discussion and even action (Ojala 2005: 334). Furthermore, environmental worrying has been positively associated with optimistic and coherent conceptions of personal futures. In research

on girls in Finland, even those who display intense environmental worries maintain optimistic perceptions of their own futures and see it as quite manageable (Anttila *et al* 2000). The discourses used by the participants in the focus group discussions for this research strongly reflect these findings.

When the students were asked specifically about technological and scientific discourses, the realisation that it is modernity itself producing risks did emerge. This was expressed mostly in environmental concerns, but also in other issues such as information technology isolation, consumerism and dehumanisation. There was a surprising suspicion of the social vitality of technology at all three schools that largely contradicts the typical stereotypes of an 'iPod' or 'Internet' Generation. Unfortunately for Beck's promotion of the emancipatory potential of risk politics, there was found to be a general feeling of helplessness, hopelessness and cynicism towards the possibility of environmental problems being averted before it is 'too late'.

In terms of the overall concerns of this thesis – class, habitus, risk and reflexivity – some obvious distinctions between the three schools was found. There was a great deal of idealism at Sunnydale High shown in particularly passionate and angry responses to how the environmental issues are being dealt with. Rydell Grammar students expressed similar thematic concerns but in a much more distant, cynical, even fatalistic manner. Montesano High students did express some environmental worries, but a lot less than the other two schools and with a great deal less confidence, and less expert knowledge. As Strandbu and Skogen (2000: 206) point out:

A relatively high amount of cultural capital (compared to economic capital) is probably frequently accompanied by alternative values and alternative interpretations of 'the good life'. Such orientations appear to converge with the ideological basis of the environmental movement and other new social movements.

In short, while environmental concerns were considered a key contemporary risk at all three schools, cultural capital mediated the level of engagement and in the emotional ways this engagement was expressed.

When it comes to dealing with the omnipresence of global risks in our day-to-day lives, Beck (1997) proposes three possible reactions: denial, apathy or transformation. Denial is what is happening now (or at least until very recently). He sees apathy as being inscribed in the nihilism at the heart of the post-modernists. To deal effectively with these risks through the formation of viable social movements, he recommends transformation to a global 'cosmopolitanism' (for example Beck 1998; 2001; 2002; Boyne 2001). In Australia, the team of Kendall, Skrbis and Woodward (2008) has taken up this argument in studying globalisation and cultural diversity in contemporary social life (see Skrbis and Woodward 2007; Skrbis, Kendall and Woodward 2004; Woodward, Skrbis and Bean 2008). The attitudes expressed by the young people here do not necessarily fit neatly into any of Beck's three categories of reaction: denial, apathy or transformation. Nevertheless, their responses do demonstrate scepticism and doubt, elements that Beck sees as essential for the transformation to a cosmopolitan politics.

The introduction of insecurity into our thought and deeds may help to achieve the reduction of objectives, slowness, revisability and ability to learn, the care, consideration, tolerance and irony that are necessary for the change to a new modernity. In other words, the *contradiction* between the system's promises of security (technical, social and political), on which the megalomania of the industrial era and its institutions is based, and the amount of elemental loss of security, produced by reflexive modernization, pushed through against the continually updated defensive armour and now becoming obvious, is what shakes the institutions and people currently and in the future. The political programme of radicalized modernity is skepticism! Doubt and error are the gravediggers of the old and the standards of the new modernity to be achieved' (Beck, 1997: 168, emphasis author's own).

The inherent suspicion evidenced in student attitudes towards technology and environmental issues at the two more privileged schools is an expression of doubt and scepticism. However, as this finding implies, the problem for Beck's analysis is that such expressions are deeply mediated by class, both in terms of expert knowledges, and the perceptions and expressions of scepticism, and the will and resources to actually do anything in practice.

Furthermore, the possibility of this politics of doubt transforming into a form of political practice is negligible because the young people feel that any effort they make will be ignored, marginalised or ridiculed. Ellis (2004) has found that when it comes to young people's perceptions of the barriers to positive social change, there tend to be three themes: 'It's not my problem – it does not affect me or those around me'; 'It's not my responsibility – it's the job of authorities such as governments and human rights organisations' and 'Powerlessness – nothing I could do could make a difference'. 'It's not my problem' does seem apparent in the seeming failure of focus group participants here to connect personal futures to global problems. 'It's not my responsibility' was apparent in the tendency to focus blame on governments and multi-national corporations.

However, as analytical categories, Ellis' first two themes fail to capture the complexity of attitudes and feelings I found towards environmental and technological discourses. This was especially so when there were examples of personal responsibility in terms of minimising consumption and expressed deep concern for those in poverty. Ellis' third theme – powerlessness – was by far the dominant feeling in the responses of participants in this research towards the possibility of finding

solutions to current global social and environmental dilemmas. This should not be surprising. Powerlessness is expressed by young people in all manner of ways: high suicide rates, depression and drug taking; violence, vandalism or graffiti; in everyday consumption practices and risks; or in hedonistic, ironic and cynical attitudes that may be the formation of fatal strategies. Further, this highlights that at the heart of contemporary reflexivity is a heightened awareness that mastery, in terms of both self-actualisation and over nature, is impossible (Latour 2003: 36). This sense of powerlessness seems likely to continue whilst young people's rights are continually abused, they are treated as scapegoats and blamed for all manner of things in the omnipresent media moral panics about them, and they are constantly talked *about* rather than *to* or *with*.

The final chapter in this thesis pulls together the main themes of this chapter and the previous three chapters. It examines the limitations of the study and looks towards further research that can give a voice to young people.

PART 4

CONCLUSIONS

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Conclusions and Implications

Findings

The writing of this thesis has been a long road. One of the reasons I wrote this thesis was because I was concerned with the apparent marginalisation of class as a sociological concept in the realm of macro social theory. As set out in the Reflexive Preface, this concern was formulated by my own experiences and observations. I set out at the start of the project to find some incontrovertible truths, but found that my expectations were sometimes different from my findings. In the research itself, there emerged considerable class distinctions between the cohorts, alongside some striking similarities. There were several surprises that emanated from the data, but many expectations were also confirmed.

I expected to find significant class differences in terms of attitude to inequality, which did appear, but I was surprised by the Montesano High students' implicit and sometimes explicit 'denial' of class as a mediator of opportunity. Following Bourdieu's proposition that habitus instils a 'sense of one's place' and realistic expectations, I expected the Montesano High cohort to sense that they had less chance of achieving their ambitions, but I did not find this to be the case. They were generally optimistic, expressing aspirations for upward mobility. This finding made me reflect that the dominant neo-liberal discourse may be affecting how young Australians think about the world and their place in it, even those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. The optimism and upwardly mobile aspirations of the Montesano High

youth may well be an expression of the workings of neo-liberal governmentality at the level of subjectivity. In any case, I do not interpret this finding as an indication of passivity or false consciousness. It is better understood as a measure of resilience against their disadvantaged position. Further, when it came to nominating risks and problems, there were class differences between the three cohorts in what was perceived or nominated, but these distinctions were not as marked as I had expected. Nevertheless, there were both clear and subtle variations in the way the three different cohorts discussed or engaged with these questions that in themselves were forms of distinction.

Overall I found that class definitely still matters. As each of the data chapters illustrate, there were clear distinctions in how each cohort spoke about their ambitions and perceived obstacles, and about the risks and problems in the lives of young people in general. The Rydell Grammar students seemed to have had little experience with any structural disadvantages. They were quite forthcoming about their own privileged positions. When they did talk about it, they analysed inequality from a distance as something that others have to deal with, rather than engaging with the main ideas of social justice. They also experienced some social stigma attached to attending a prestigious and expensive school. In contrast, the Sunnydale High students were very energetic on the topic of social justice. They virtually scoffed at the possibility of everyone having an equal chance. They also drew attention to their own 'intelligence' and analysed class differences from a distance, but they did express some personally-driven concern over public/private and metropolitan/country inequities in educational resources. Montesano High students largely denied class as a mediator of opportunity, but spoke of class in terms of the pejorative status labels that they felt were aimed at

them. Yet they nominated largely material and economic obstacles to their stated life ambitions. Notably, nearly all of the research participants, regardless of what school they were at, saw the data from Montesano High about the apparent ‘denial’ of class as a measure of hope, of how they would like things to be, not how they really are.

When it came to attitudes towards risk there were some similarities between the cohorts, but also some very clear distinctions. When asked about risk in general, day-to-day risks were mostly nominated, and these were far more personal and local at Montesano High. The issue of larger scale global or macro risks elicited strong engagement at Sunnydale High and Rydell Grammar, but much less interest at Montesano High. ‘Drugs’ was the most commonly mentioned risk in the quantitative data, and was discussed at length in the focus groups, but there were quite different attitudes between the three cohorts towards how drugs were defined as a problem, if they were seen as a problem at all. Furthermore, there were some marked class distinctions in what was actually perceived as a risk, with educational pressure from parents and school implied as a risk most intensely at the academically selective school, followed by the private school. Some at the working class youth actually claimed they probably needed more pressure if they were to succeed academically.

When asked about technology and science, there were also similarities and distinctions. All participants tended to talk about issues surrounding technology, science, communication, consumerism and the environment as constituting one all-encompassing discursive force. But they spoke about this force in different ways. The Sunnydale High students were critical about the ‘progress’ that technology and science is providing and were passionate and frustrated about environmental

problems. The Rydell Grammar students pointed out some positives, but were also critical. When it came to environmental issues they were very knowledgeable and quite engaged, but seemed more cynical, sarcastic or fatalistic than those at Sunnydale High. The Montesano High group were the most positive about this issue but were still wary. They too were worried about the environment, but their responses were brief and relatively simple. They did not display as much expert knowledge, passion, or engagement as the other cohorts. These differences are understood to constitute subtle forms of distinction mediated by habitus. These distinctions foster differing ways of engaging with expert knowledge discourses and the formation of different governmental subjectivities.

Despite the findings on class distinctions between the three cohorts, I found that reflexivity seems to be present regardless of position in social space. I had begun by thinking that the theories of Beck and Giddens seemed like a very good description of the middle classes, so I expected there to be reflexivity ‘winners and losers’. That is, those in the more privileged cohorts would be much more reflexive than those in the least privileged cohort at the working class school. This was not the case, since all the students were found to demonstrate levels of reflexivity. However, this reflexivity was firmly rooted in, and distinguished by, different kinds of habitus. It was identified that some of the reflexive realisations at Montesano High were in fact in relation to their own disadvantaged position, despite their explicit denial of class as a distributor of opportunity. Reflexive awareness of class as signifying problematic status was also common at all three schools. For the upper middle class students there was often acknowledgement of privilege to the point of embarrassment. At the working class end there was a denial of class status related stigma and labels that they perceived

were being placed on them from *outside* their habitus. Therefore, the functioning of reflexivity itself in practice is mediated by class – it is a form of cultural capital that all of the young people use, but some can put it into better self-bolstering practice than others.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study serve to identify the large gap between the grand theorising of Beck, Giddens and Bauman about the de-traditionalised, individualised ‘self’ in late modernity, and the conclusions drawn by those doing hands-on research into the day-to-day lives of young people. While the work of the reflexive modernists has been extensively used in youth research, it is somewhat difficult to find specific empirical examples that clearly back up those grand theoretical claims without reservation. While the theorists mentioned above use selected examples of phenomena in their writing, their own empirical examples (if they have them) certainly do not appear in their work. While necessarily engaging with these theories about the self in late modernity, most sociological youth research findings like mine here serve to maintain a strong defence of how class, gender, geography, religion and ethnicity maintain the traditional fissures of inequality for young people.

It is here that Bourdieu’s theoretical paradigm maintains vitality. Where the reflexive modernists tend to engage in theorising at a macro level, the work of Bourdieu and those that use him usually favour empirical investigations of everyday experience. Like the postmodern theorists who challenged ‘truth’ and ‘progress’, the very notions that ‘modernity’ was grounded upon, recent theorising about the apparent decline of the legitimacy of class – zombie categories, methodological nationalism, liquid and

reflexive modernity, individualization, and the ‘death’ of class – all offer some valid insights of how the key sociological concepts need to evolve and develop to remain prescient. But as Atkinson (2007a; 2007b; Beck 2007a) has pointed out in his lively debate with Beck, there is no need to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater just because the concept has a long pedigree.

In short, if we agree that inequality still exists in many forms, then class, with its social, political, cultural and emotional ingredients, is an essential analytical tool for uncovering, interpreting, criticising and emancipating the experiences and life expectations of contemporary youth. Moreover, as the preceding chapters of data interpretation show, there is no need to see the range of theoretical works considered in this thesis as representing antithesis on either side of the structure and agency debate (see Woodman 2007). Reflexively speaking, in some cases that is what this research has done, but overall the findings presented here add weight to arguments for a more productive synthesis between theory and research practice in the field of youth studies. Identifying theoretical resonances can provide a springboard for the formations of exciting and vital new ways of theorising uncertainty and choice in the lives of young people.

In this research, the youth in the two more privileged cohorts do appear to experience their lives as more cushioned against structural risk – in how they experience the present, in how they articulate their ambitions, and also in how they envision their futures – compared to the working class youth cohort. In their identification of ambitions and obstacles this is revealed in a pre-occupation with personal qualities and self-surveillance that seems to connote an embodied cultural capital that includes

reflexivity. The implied cultural capacity for flexibility and reinvention of the ‘self’, along with their family economic and educational assets, will likely assist towards success and prosperity in the competitive middle-class labour market. In contrast, the working class youth identified ambitions like just ‘getting a job’, rather than having ‘a career’ – with all that that implies about privilege and opportunity. While they sometimes envisaged success or failure as something they could negotiate through self-improvement, hard work and critical reflection, their obstacles were almost always lack of money and family capital, and social prejudice against them.

So while the Montesano High students rarely mentioned ‘class’ overtly, and sometimes denied it as a mode of opportunity, their socio-economic disadvantage emerged very strongly in responses about obstacles and risk, far more so than (reflexive) personal capacities. They seemed most anxious about achieving educational qualifications, an issue largely seen as a given by the other two cohorts. Giddens points out that when it comes to ‘tribulations of the self’, those that cope best are those ‘who draw strength from being at home in a variety of contexts’ (1991: 190). Notions of habitus and cultural capital are the best schemas for understanding who manages to be comfortable and who doesn’t. In the contemporary global economic climate, those who can say that uncertainty ‘*is for the likes of me*’ stay ahead of the game. It is here that reflexivity can be seen as a form of embodied cultural capital – an advantageous attribution. As an embodied cultural capital, it is an affinity or acceptance of uncertainty and risk, and ability to feel knowledgeable and at home in all manner of contexts, which maintains a more stable ontological security and greater post-reflexive choice.

One of the intentions that this research project began with was to show the usefulness of Bourdieu's paradigm for conducting research into conditions of reflexive modernity and the way people experience them. But the data often presented problems in terms of how to interpret some of the perceptions and expressions of the participants. For instance, the seemingly contradictory attitude of the Montesano High students towards class had to be explained. I concluded (with some of the focus groups) that it was probably best understood as a form of denial that encoded resistance, resilience and hope. Yet at the same time their denial of class was clearly also a result of the socialisation of their habitus, and of their engagement with various dominant discourses of access and opportunity, which brings in the notion of governmentality. But it proved difficult to elucidate this nexus without making judgements that came close to rendering the Montesano High students as cultural dupes or as possessing false consciousness. We need to be sensitive and careful when we tackle the ways in which young people exercise or do not exercise reflexive self-discipline that we do not unwittingly portray them as passive totalised subjects. We need to emphasise the different ways different young people adopt and adapt the self-identification and monitoring processes of neo-liberal governmentality without descending into class determinism.

This project has examined young people's engagement with the future. A major finding was that those lower in cultural capital reported apparently contradictory experiences of inequality. For example, their statements denied class as a mediator of opportunity, even though their expressed concerns were with material disadvantage. It is concluded that these experiences and perceptions are shaped by habitus in which stigma is associated with lower class position, and also by engagement with a specific

form of governmentality that invites the idea that anybody should be able to do anything if only they put their mind to it. For youth lacking the crucial resources essential for this trajectory, and regardless of their many reflexive decisions, remaking themselves in the image of what is 'normal' within the neo-liberal state is an inherently difficult and frustrating task. For example, as a working class 'bloke' in the decidedly middle class world of academia, it is something I personally still struggle with: residual feelings of being an imposter and that I shouldn't really be here - that this *isn't* for the likes of *me*.

These findings resonate with those who argue that cultural dimensions of class are expressed as emotions and perceptions, where class manifests in 'thinkings and feelings' (Reay 2005). This is an important development in sociological thought, especially since emotions and feelings are often individualised in psychiatric analysis, compartmentalised into psychological studies, and rarely connected to inequality and other sociological concepts. This tends to marginalise wider social implications that may actually inform and even develop the emotions and feelings in the first place. The findings of this thesis support Reay's (2005) argument that expressions of ambivalence, superiority, inferiority, inadequacies, certainty and uncertainty, comfort and aversions, stigmas, judgements and tastes are all produced from within a psychic landscape or economy of class that contributes to the very ways we think about our own and others' place in the social world.

Further appreciation of how position in social space stimulates specific kinds of thinking and feeling is essential for a number of interconnecting reasons. Firstly, as this thesis demonstrates, we need to comprehend young people's experience of

inequality and its expression and/or repression, if social policy is to effectively address key aspects of structural inequality. Secondly, to drive forward the main research agendas in contemporary youth studies we need to form an empathetic understanding of how these feelings affect young people's ontological security and youth transitions in general. Thirdly, to investigate how reflexive decisions themselves are often based on emotions, especially where expert knowledge discourses present contradictory information (Holmes 2007). Fourthly, to better conceive how class affects the lived reality of young social actors in a society where the dominant discourses deny class itself, we need ongoing investigation of the 'epistemological fallacy' that Furlong and Cartmel (1997) describe where fate is reconstructed as choice (Evans *et al* 2001). This is where young people experience a disjuncture between the 'false reality' (France 2007) of what dominant discourses rhetorically tell them, and what they experience in *actual* reality of their day-to-day lives.

The key to understanding contemporary youth subjectivities lies in a productive view of the relationships between habitus, governmental discourses and reflexivity. We need to uncover the economic and symbolic power issues embedded within these emotional relationships. Achieving success in educational systems and in the labour market is still fundamentally affected by social class and other 'traditional' structures of inequality – despite strong claims for 'detraditionalisation'. Life chances are still mediated by class elements that give those youth with more resources more post-reflexive choice – as the data in this study has amply demonstrated. These advantages provide a higher chance of the elements of habitus 'crystallising' towards success and prosperity in a variety of fields. Those without these advantageous attributions may be

left with what Bourdieu (2000) has described as a tormented habitus. The ‘torment’ is best described as young people lacking ontological security as they deal with the discord of a lived experience of inequality *and* governmental discourses. In this situation young people struggle to find legitimate fields in which to express themselves and in which they can feel at ease and comfortable. These contradictions engender ‘double binds’ that create a ‘destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division, generating suffering’ (Bourdieu 2000: 160). In the context of this study, it is the crossroads between the reflexivity of young people’s decision-making, their engagement with neo-liberal governmental discourses of the entrepreneurial self, and different habitus that provides fertile ground (or does not) for a future ‘good life’ as adult citizens.

Limitations of the Study

Overall, the multi-method approach to data collection taken in the project was successful. Nevertheless, there are always weaknesses, absences and problems. When one gets to the end of a project, there are questions that were not asked that should have been asked. This was the case for quantitative data on environmental issues that later became so prominent in the focus group sessions. Furthermore, the timeframe and complexity of this project did not permit extensive analysis of gender differences or other key structural inequalities. It is intended that this will be done in the near future – given that the data is there to be re-analysed. One of the surprising things about the existing analysis of the quantitative data was how small the gender differences were in many of the categories. This appeared to indicate that position in social space (class) created more communality of experiences and perceptions than

gender on some issues. However, there is no doubt that gender issues complicate class issues, and this will be an appealing and interesting area to pursue.

One obvious limitation of the research is whether the participant's visions of the future have any relation to what actually happens, or will happen, in reality. While the perceptions of the students at the time of the research do provide a valuable snapshot of habitus in action, tracing the individual's actual trajectory through social space over time would provide an interesting picture of how one's perceptions may actually shape one's actual future in practice, whilst also allowing a deeper analysis of the influence of habitus.

With this in mind, I can briefly sketch the immediate future of one of the Montesano High boys, Danny, whose future reality turned out somewhat differently to his perception at the time of data collection. In the years following the focus group interviews I got to know Danny quite well.¹⁰ In the focus groups, Danny had said that he wanted to move out of home as quickly as possible. He envisioned he would get a trade and would probably have to get two jobs to pursue his dream of playing cricket overseas. In reality, things turned out very differently. Through his deep involvement in sport, Danny developed an interest in sports science and physiotherapy. He did well enough in the HSC (final year examination) to be accepted for a university professional degree programme in physiotherapy. As for sport, recently he has moved to a metropolitan grade competition in an attempt to further his cricketing career. His

¹⁰ At the time of data collection he was a promising junior cricketer. He then moved into the senior ranks and made it into the local senior representative training squad (which I have been in for about a decade) that does intensive pre-season fitness regimes followed by practice once a week, all outside and on top of club training. This group spends a lot of time together and socialises regularly (often with heavy drinking sessions). Danny made it into the senior team and we played quite a few games together before, through my own combination of injury and becoming 'past it', he actually took my spot permanently in the representative side when I retired.

sporting success, including playing state-level junior cricket and state-level country cricket, has seen him become an attractive player for England County premier league teams who pursue Australian players to 'import'. He is about to defer his physiotherapy study to spend an off season in the UK playing cricket. This will be an all-expenses-paid trip where he will be given a free place to live and earn a modest weekly wage playing the sport he loves. Therefore, Danny's transition narrative is somewhat more 'upwardly mobile' than he originally imagined it might be. He has successfully moved out of home; he is pursuing a profession, not a trade; he is currently living in a cricket club subsidised rental property in a high status metropolitan suburb; and he has gained a free trip overseas, rather than having to get two jobs to pay for it.

Danny's trajectory is different because he was much more successful at his sport than he thought he would be. This success in itself can become a form of capital to be parlayed into other fields. He also did much better in his final year exams than he thought he would. Assuming Danny completes his degree, the combination of his physiotherapy qualification and sporting prowess will hold him in good stead for lucrative future employment prospects - for example, working with professional sporting organizations or in private practice. Here, sporting prowess has scaffolded into professional advantage. Danny might not 'make it' as a professional cricketer or play cricket for Australia. But he is well on his way to establishing a solid and secure niche in his chosen fields. So, his reality has surpassed his perception of his immediate future after school. In some ways, he has also proved his own denial of class inequality. When discussing class issues in the focus group he had maintained that where you live and grow up is not as important as whether 'you have got a

good head on your shoulders'; if you work hard and are 'doing everything right, you can still go places'. I'm sure Danny would look back at this comment and say that it is what he has done.

However, the other two boys in the same Montesano High focus group, Tim and Stew, have not shared Danny's upward life trajectory. Neither has progressed above the local level in their chosen sports. Neither is attending university. Both are under-employed, working casually in low skilled labour and service jobs, and have spent periods of time on mandatory government unemployment schemes. In the original focus group discussion, Stew's perception of inequality was similar to Danny's, while Tim was more likely to point how examples of cultural and social capital may enforce limitations. All three highlighted money issues as a possible obstacle to achieving their ambitions. It is difficult to tell how much these perceptions actually contributed to their life trajectories so far, and how much other factors played a role. But it does look a lot like habitus in action.

Implications for Further Study

The findings from this thesis reveal many implications for further research. I will focus on three here. Firstly, there is a need to investigate how non-academic selective public schooling – especially sport - affects students' futures. The two other areas are interconnected by the need to explore the contours and connections between habitus, reflexivity and governmentality: the need for longitudinal studies and the need for deeper understandings of the emotional aspects of class and position in social space.

The Utility of Non-Academic Selective Schooling

Data collected at Montesano High revealed some interesting information about the Targeted Sports Programme (TSP). There seemed to be the development of a class system *within* the school distinguished by a contrast between those in the TSP and ordinary pupils from the surrounding area of the school. One student told me about school assemblies that end with the announcement that TSP students needed to stay back for more information, which has drawn eye-rolling and even ‘boos’ from the non-TSP students. There were also stories of favouritism shown towards those in the TSP that sounded like stereotypical representations of favoured treatment for sports ‘jocks’ in American teen movies. For instance, the mixed group at Montesano contained both TSP and non-TSP students: Jye was not part of the TSP, while the girls in the group were in the Basketball TSP programme. This group identified as a problem the apparent favouritism given to those in the prestigious rugby league group:

Jye: I see it from a non-sporting thing, the school puts sports kind of up top and if don't do their homework, I know this sounds stupid, they get off a little bit more than the people who don't do sport because the sport people have training and all that, but still the people that aren't doing sport might be doing outside sport and just can't get into this school for sport itself. So sport here makes people think different, and a lot of other people too.

Interviewer: What do you guys think of that, being part of the sports programme?

Kylie: If we don't do our homework we don't get let off...

Jye: It's not all sports, the footballers get off heaps.

Kylie / Alice /Genevieve: YEAH!

Genevieve: Like, the footballers barely attend class; you see them out in the quad all the time

Jye: And they still don't get in trouble.

Genevieve: They don't get an 'N Award' they don't get told they're not allowed to go to sport, but if we don't do our homework and stuff, we get told we are not allowed to play basketball.

Interviewer: N Awards?

Genevieve: They're a warning that you get, you can only get so many in each subject (Montesano).

This is an interesting point that warrants further investigation. The TSP has provided Montesano High with extra funding and has increased the school's status and attractiveness to students outside the local area. Nevertheless, in terms of the individual futures of those participating in the sports programmes, it is difficult to see an unequivocally positive affect. Many of the TSP students focus solely on their sport training to the detriment of their studies, particularly in the 'masculine' sports. So, far from breaking the cycle of class reproduction, the TSP may end up reinforcing it. Very few individuals can possibly 'make it' at the professional level in their chosen sport. The majority who do not make the grade may then be left with relatively few educational or career options once their schooling is complete. This could be a fruitful area for further study.

Longitudinal Studies

To fully comprehend how class distinctions in feeling and thinking affects the future of young people in secondary school, there is a strong need for longitudinal studies that capture these perceptions at early stages and track whether they become crystallised in reality and/or change over time. Projects of this kind are logistically difficult and expensive; need high commitment and stability; and need to begin with large cohort to ensure retention of appropriate numbers due to possible high attrition rates. There are some studies like this being done at present, including the sequential phases of the *Social Futures, Orientations and Identities of Young People* project by Zlatko Skrbis, Mark Western, Bruce Trantner and David Hogan in Queensland. There is also the *Pathways Then and Now* project being undertaken at the University of Melbourne's Youth Research Centre.

In Australia, recent conferences of The Australian Sociological Association have seen themes overtly concerned with the future of sociology, its 'public' function and its future directions. This focus sees debate about the very role sociology should play in an information-saturated society where universities are increasingly bureaucratic, standardised and censorial, and where despite the 'publish or perish' imperative much peer-reviewed material is only read by those involved in the field itself. The fact that sections of Bourdieu and colleague's *The Weight of the World* were turned into plays in France or the ongoing popularity of Michael Apted's *The 'Up' Series* may indicate that these kind of life trajectory studies may allow sociologists to fulfil their 'public' role by using narrative formats to engage the public with stories and articles in the mainstream media. At the very least, more sociological studies of youth need to be written up in accessible ways so that they reach the public.

The Emotions of Class

As Svasek and Skrbis (2007) point out, there is a need to understand how processes of globalisation affect the emotions of individuals and how these connections can be theorised. There has been much written about 'mobility' in an increasingly interconnected world that stimulates new perceptions and possibilities. However, as Bauman's work poetically points out, the more the rhetoric of flexibility and movement dominates popular understandings of globalisation, the more reality sees many people without the necessary resources and connections with nowhere to go, and not much with which to understand their situation. It is this immobility in the face of a push for mobility that needs to be better understood in terms of how it affects emotions, perceptions and ontological security. The real possibility of pursuing

mobility and the possession of necessary flexibility to feel at home in a variety of contexts are dependent on concrete material and cultural resources. In regard to individual emotions, the possession (or not) of post-reflexive choice must have implications for the psychic landscape of class (Reay 2005). It is these classed emotions that enable the success and failure of various governmental tactics, whether it be forms of 'wedge' politics, the scapegoating and labelling of various 'threats' (boatpeople, single mums, dole bludgers, Islamaphobia, young people) and other forms of direct and subtle manipulation. This kind of understanding could benefit emancipatory political projects, including those, like Beck, that implore the need for greater cosmopolitanism.

There is a growing literature on the important interconnection between globalisation and emotions that focus on notions of ethnicity, race, migration and diaspora (see special issue of *Identities* Vol. 14, No. 4). Significantly, such a focus points to subjectivity constituted in relation to social and cultural ties with the very emotions that help formulate our identities. The significance of class identities for youth must be counted also. This is especially important when some forms of emotions and feelings are seen as more important or legitimate than others. Neo-liberal governmentality celebrates the reflexive, entrepreneurial subject of late modernity, capable of flexible work choices, confident, mobile and adaptable. In terms of future research based on the data findings from this project, it is imperative to understand how the *lack* of material possibility for movement or mobility experienced by working class youth interacts with the mediated consumption of images and messages, and how these associations affect perceptions of the world and individual emotions. Emotional dynamics are central to how individuals perceive the world and

their knowledge of it (Svasek and Skrbis 2007: 370). It is here that there is an important nexus between habitus, reflexivity and governmentality which must gain our attention.

It is my hope that this thesis can stimulate the kind of research and rethinking that will be needed for youth studies (and sociology). As the current global economic recession deepens, the persisting vitality of class based analysis and evidence based policies and programmes should increase in importance. Youth studies is a prime field for developing research that fosters an enhanced and deepened understanding of the relation between structure and agency. Furthermore, as the economic downturn further intensifies uncertainty in the lives of young people who have known nothing else but an era of relative economic stability and prosperity, it is essential that it is their voices that are heard, that their opinions, perceptions and emotions are expressed, and that the systems and schemes put in place to promote opportunities and cultivate skills are done so with the contours of class distinctions at their front and centre.

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