



Rethinking youth transitions in Australia: A historical and multidimensional approach

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INTRODUCTION

Patterns of transition through youth have changed dramatically in Australia over the last 50 years. This report provides a description and analysis of these changes and identifies some of the implications for policy formation. The analysis draws on policy documents, data produced by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia data base (HILDA) and the Life Patterns longitudinal study of Australian youth. The first two data sets provide a national profile of the broad patterns in terms of a limited but important range of transitions (such as education). The Life Patterns data provides both depth and breadth of data about young people's transition processes during the 1990s and 2000s. The depth is provided through the longitudinal element, tracking young people in real time over a period of eighteen years, recording their hopes, outcomes, attitudes and actions. The data set includes both survey and interview data. The breadth is provided by the inclusion of a wide focus, including the usual areas of education and employment, but extending to include health and wellbeing, personal relationships and leisure pursuits.

We acknowledge that many of the assumptions that dominate research and policy in Australia derive from understandings about normative patterns that existed in the 1950s and 1960s. Compared with the transitions to adulthood of this post World War II era, subsequent youth transition patterns have often been viewed as 'faulty' – as too extended, drawn out and less structured than those of the preceding generation. Indeed, it was only in the 1980s that the idea of youth transitions became

a focus for research and an area of concern in government policies.

It is important to gain a perspective on the nature of youth transitions during the first two decades that followed the Second World War, because they became regarded as normative, creating a standard against which subsequent youth transitions have been seen as wanting. A historical overview of the years from 1950 through to the 1980s covers two significant moments in Australian youth transitions. The first is the establishment of mass secondary education in the 1950s. Secondary education was free and compulsory to the age of 15, and was designed to prepare young people to take their place in society. A majority of young people left secondary school at the compulsory age, with young people entering a range of occupations in the industrial economy. Young men entered trades, worked in primary industry and in manufacturing. Young women took up clerical and office jobs until they married and became mothers. Schools had a mandate to prepare young people for their roles in workplaces, in families and in civic society. In Australia, as the pioneering study of youth undertaken by W. F. Connell and colleagues in the early 1950s shows, there was a heightened sense of the significance of young people's role in the establishment of the young colony against a backdrop of social and economic change (Connell et al. 1957).

The first section identifies the circumstances of young Australians' lives in the 1950s, and 1960s, and traces the decline in the youth labour market starting with the late 1970s and into the 1980s.

This period marked a shift away from Australia's traditional economic base embedded in a strong primary industry sector that included wheat, sheep and cattle farming, and a manufacturing sector based mainly in regional and urban centres. The economy shifted towards a service sector and new industries, mainly based in urban and metropolitan areas, in which knowledge and educational credentials became essential had a significant and direct impact on young people. It precipitated a collapse in the labour market of full-time jobs for young people. Many part-time jobs were created at this time, but they were not jobs that would lead to careers or provide an adequate livelihood. By the early 1990s, this economic shift was reflected in a raft of new education, training and labour market policies that aimed to have all young people complete their secondary education. The new mass education sector – post-secondary education – emerged in the early 1990s to accommodate the increasing demand for education. Faced with the urgent need to restructure (and realign) education and the labour market, government policies at this time focused on ensuring that young Australians had the kinds of skills and credentials that would enable Australia to compete in global markets. It is notable that even in the 1950s, the landmark study of Australian youth transitions by Connell et al. (1957) focused on urban, not rural youth.

During the 1980s the option of entering the adult labour market at age 15 effectively became closed; young people were forced to make do with part-time jobs and many opted to complete their secondary education. One of the effects of this change was that young people became more dependent on their families for longer. Instead of being able to establish their independence, they were increasingly dependent on living in the family home while they spent their late teens and early twenties completing their education. Even with income from part-time jobs, a majority of young people did not have the resources to live independently.

Section two concludes the macro analysis of youth transitions. It discusses the impact of the transformation of Australia's economy on the options and opportunities for young people. Economic conditions and policy responses to the uncertainty of the 1990s changed the transition patterns of young Australia. The restructuring of the Australian economy in the 1990s involved a

range of changes in the management of workplaces and in the relationship between government and industry. The deregulation and decentralisation of the industrial relations system in the 1990s reduced the power of unions to represent occupations and placed the onus for negotiating key aspects of working conditions to individual workers. There was also a reduction in public sector jobs as public utilities and functions were privatised. These changes impacted dramatically on young people, because they entered working life on the cusp of these changes. Industrial relations policies that aimed to create greater flexibility for employers also created more precarious working conditions for young people, involving longer working hours for fewer benefits, on short-term contracts and largely part-time. Youth unemployment peaked just after 1991, and remained relatively high during the 1990s.

Government policies during the 1980s and 1990s were designed to primarily develop the kind of human capital that would support Australia's economic growth and prosperity. Young people were viewed as a resource for Australia's future. Policies aimed to keep young people in education as long as possible. The participation rate in secondary and post-secondary education increased dramatically in the early 1990s, as a direct result of both the collapse of the youth labour market and the introduction of welfare policies that penalised those who did not complete secondary schooling. At the same time, education was positioned by government policies as an individual 'good' – a personal investment that would enable individuals to benefit through increased opportunities and better conditions of work. From the 1990s onwards, young people and their families were required to pay fees to contribute towards the costs of education.

A further implication of the focus on youth as human capital was the centrality of the idea of 'the' transition from school to work and the notion of 'pathways' within educational and youth policies. We provide a critique of these policy approaches, on the basis that they fail to fully grasp the changing reality of young people's lives. In the following sections, this is illustrated through a consideration of new gendered patterns, and the issue of rurality. Section six also takes up the issue of transitions through a detailed discussion and analysis of the ways that different life domains intersect to create complexity.

The remaining section of the report draw on the Youth Research Centre's Life-Patterns longitudinal research program to provide a detailed analysis of Australian youth transitions during the 1990s up to the present. Section three provides an overview of the main trends in youth transitions in this era. It is characterises the new patterns of transition as a 'new adulthood' because in the 1990s young Australians responded to the new realities of life for all Australians: precarious work, mixing study and work for an extended period, learning how to be flexible in the face of uncertainty and building meaning in life through lifestyle and personal relationships. These new approaches and priorities heralded changes in the nature of adulthood - they were not simply age effects. Section three identifies several broad themes, including the new adulthood, that characterise Australian youth transitions over this period. Other themes are the idea of a social generation, the development of new meanings of career and the emergence of diverse patterns of transition to adulthood. The study found that in addition, one of the most significant themes to emerge was the quest to gain a balance in life. Throughout the study, the young people drew attention to the struggle they faced to establish a balance between conflicting demands on their time and energy. A significant minority found that the stress of managing in uncertain times and the pressures created by engaging in study and work for an extended period of their lives had a negative impact on their mental and physical health.

Section four explores the change in gendered patterns of transition for Australian youth. It identifies the early 1990s as significant because of the establishment of gender equality in educational participation and outcomes. For the first time in Australian history, equal proportions of young men and women completed secondary school and entered post-secondary education. Based on detailed data from the Life Patterns study, this section describes what this change represented for the young people, and documents their progress through the 1990s and into the 2000s. The data reveals that although youth transition patterns indicated gender equality had been achieved in education, and despite the expectation by young women that this equality would continue in workplaces and in their personal lives, the story of their next transitions is one of a return to more traditional gender patterns. Our interpretation

corresponds with Esping-Andersen's analysis of similar patterns that have emerged in the United States and in many European countries (Esping-Andersen 2009). He argues that the gains forged by educational policies in the 1990s have not been matched by policies that enable men and women to participate equally in the workplace. He calls this an 'incomplete revolution'. The Life Patterns study reveals that women who undertook tertiary education are the most likely to go part-time or leave the workforce by the age of 37. The research also reveals that young men who did not undertake post-secondary education were the most disadvantaged. For them, the transition point from secondary school into the workforce tended to be one that closed options for them.

Section five explores in detail another dimension of inequality that has emerged in the patterns of youth transitions for young Australians. It highlights the multiplicity of transitions for rural young people and the structural barriers they encounter in their communities. A lack of post-school educational and employment opportunities often place young people with the need to migrate to regional and metropolitan centres. For those that decide to stay in rural areas, they face a declining and precarious labour market, mainly composed of casual and temporary work and low wages that hinder the possibility of making an independent livelihood. Moreover, the data from the Life Patterns study confirms that the service sector has replaced the primary and secondary sectors as the main employer in rural communities. Nonetheless, to access any type of employment, rural young people have to rely on their own personal social network rather than in traditional channels of employment; thus highlighting the precarious state of the rural labour market.

The analysis of the lives of the Life Patterns participants has reinforced the importance of understanding the links between different domains of life. It is common to approach the topic of youth transitions taking an uncritical policy perspective that places the emphasis on the transition from school to work. While this is a relevant approach within the constraints of economic policy parameters, it is too narrow to provide a sound understanding of young people's trajectories through life. Section six explores 'intersections' of life, revealing the impact education and work have on young people's family life and personal relationships, and on their

mental and physical health. Further, we examine the gap between young people's hopes and goals and the realities in their lives; which have been deeply affected by educational and employment policies in the 1990s and 2000s; particularly by the destabilising effect of the labour market deregulation policies in Australia. The data reveal starkly the impact of uncertainty, precarious work and long working hours on young Australians' rates of marriage and childbearing and on their wellbeing and health. Finally, we draw this report together by providing policy reflections in section seven.

CHAPTER 1:

YOUTH TRANSITIONS IN AN INDUSTRIALISED SOCIETY

Introduction

This section analyses the social, educational and economic changes occurring in Australia between post-World War II and the late 1980s and the impacts these changes had on the lives of young people. At the core of these changes is the transformation from Australia's incipient industrialised economy of the 1950s to the emergence of a post-industrial society that affected the way young people viewed and experienced education, employment and other aspects of their social life. This was a period of profound social change that impacted significantly on the nature of young people's transitions to adulthood.

This section explores the three historical periods that have marked the great social and economic transformation of Australian society and of young people's lives. The first period analyses education and employment for young people in the post-World War II until the mid-1960s. This is an epoch in which youth transitions into adulthood were expected to take a linear path: from school and into work. It was marked by full-time employment for men and the emergence of mass secondary education. The second period, taking as a historical point the mid-1960s, looks into the transformation of the Australian labour market including changes in the occupational structure of the labour force and the collapse of the full-time work for young people. During this period,

particularly in the 1970s, educational policies focused on providing disadvantaged groups (e.g. girls, rural youth, Aboriginal young people) equal educational opportunities to gain the sufficient educational qualifications to gain access to a more fragmented and complex labour market.

In the third period, we analyse the replacement of the social engineering policy ethos of the 1970s with the need for economic restructuring to make the Australian economy globally competitive in the next decade. This had profound implications for the lives of young people. It marked the emergence of powerful changing patterns in household arrangements and family life, the relevance of credentialism in education to enter the labour market, and structural shifts in the labour sector marked by more flexible and precarious employment, especially for young people. These implied that the capacity to gain economic independence become out of reach for many young people and thus failing in policy-terms to enter adulthood.

Mass secondary schooling and early transition to work

The post-World War II saw the advent of the mass secondary education system. It responded to the need to construct a workforce for the new industrially-based economy, equipping the young workforce to

fill jobs in the areas of manufacturing, business, finance, and in the public sector. This new mass secondary education system also focused on issues of social inclusion and equality, especially with the massive arrival of new immigrants and the rapid population growth – where population grew at an average 2% per year between 1945 and 1975 (Welch 2007).

The expansion of secondary schooling

In the mid-1950s, compulsory education ended at 14, and the majority of young people left school at the age of 15 years. School was the predominant institution – even before family – in preparing young people for the future. It had a prominent role in educating the young in the spheres of life, work and civic engagement (Wyn 2009a).

Studies of that period emphasized the relevance of schools as the place to prepare young people for ‘a highly complex world’, to fit individuals to their roles in a changing society (Cunningham 1951: 10). In an analysis that could be easily extrapolated to today’s epoch, Connell and colleagues (1957) signaled the necessity for young people in the 1950s to be prepared to ‘cope with the insecurity of the present and with the problematic future’ and the need for education to provide the knowledge and skills to succeed in their future career; developing the necessary social skills to successfully insert in society; acquiring the competence to become productive and becoming critical and intelligent citizens by having a full understanding of their cultural and social context. Moreover, the goal of education was, at that time, to support young people to be autonomous and self-reliant in order to successfully navigate the social and economic changes brought by industrialization.

Despite the challenges and tensions expressed by these studies about the uncertain period for the youth of 1950s, Wyn (2009a) alerts us to some issues for the education of young people. In first instance, in spite of the educational aim to educate for work (mostly for men) and for social roles (for young women), the secondary school failed to support these goals:

Learning was structured by age-based groupings, normative expectations of young people at each age level, a deficit notion of ‘student’ and the strict separation of school and learning from the

community, families and workplaces. The treatment of young people was based on an approach that focused on institutional control and normative behavioural expectations, supported by the rise of expert knowledge and the emerging discipline of developmental psychology.

(Wyn 2009a: 5)

This notion of homogeneous mass schooling is consistent with the strong adherence to categorizing young people by age, overlooking diversity¹. Further, being an 18 year old seemed to be more relevant than being a law student in an elite university, an unemployed young woman in a country town or a new arrival migrant (Wilson & Wyn 1987). They point out that gender, social class and ethnicity had a far greater impact on the challenges and opportunities encountered by young people than their age category.

Economic prosperity and full-time employment

The 1950s was a period of full-employment, of substantial economic growth and an improvement in the standards of living of the majority of the Australian population. Open access to employment was readily available to young people after leaving school and to the wider population. The 1961 Census recorded the rapid growth of the manufacturing industry, commerce, finance and property, and community and business services (ABS 1964).

This growth of the manufacturing industry provided new employment opportunities, especially for working class young males. Throughout the decade of the 1950s, youth unemployment was rarely above 2% (Brown 1998). Further, young people left school early (i.e. at the age of 15) and were able to have a range of jobs – although many initial jobs were unskilled - before settling in a company and a position where they could make a good living and establish their own family (Jamrozik 1998, Wilson 1989). For young men, once they had arrived to their preferred employment, there the unchallenged expectation was of upward mobility in the workplace.

This wide availability of full-time work provided a steady transition into the world of adults, which included the opportunity to construct an identity as a worker, and responsible and mature citizen (Connell et al. 1975, Wilson 1989, Wilson & Wyn 1987). Gaining access to a full-time job provided an important opportunity to show their skills, knowledge and maturity meant becoming an adult. It was also an opportunity to learn about themselves, shape their own identity or sense of being and established themselves as an adult member of society and gaining some control over their lives. Remunerated work also allowed young people to expand their social network beyond their family group and their school friends.

Bessant and colleagues (1998: 163) claim that employment has ‘an historical dimension’ in Australia, particularly among men where paid work was very important to their identities. The relationship between employment and the construction of one person’s identity was significantly important in a society like Australia that placed a priority on the work ethic, whereas some researchers stated that unemployment stigmatised a person as lazy, careless or incompetent (Wilson 1989: 15). It structured people’s lives and allowed young people to be consider an adult when leaving school and getting a job (this was typically around 16 years of age up until the 1970s). Further, work provided young people with the possibility of planning into the future and the opportunity to be free from the social constraints of schooling into the independence of work (Connell et al. 1957).

However, it is important to highlight the extent of gender differentiation, where the image of youth, ‘implicitly and often explicitly, was male, searching for independence’ (Brown 1998: 65). For young women, youth was a stage before getting married and taking on household duties; that is, employment in their immediate post-school years was viewed as a temporary stage, and even a time of ‘greater danger of exceeding her psychological resources or transgressing her social role’ (Brown 1998: 65). Young women took on employment until they could form their own family (Wyn 2009a) or they simply did unpaid work; that is, housework which was often seen as not ‘real work’ (Bessant & Cook 1998). The 1961 Census, for instance, reveals the fluctuation of women’s participation according to their age and marriage status, with large percentage of women entering

the workforce in their late teens, declining sharply their participation in their twenties (due to marriage and childbearing) and rising again in their mid to late thirties (ABS 1964).

The decline of the full-time labour market and social inclusion in education

From the mid-1960s the labour market experienced significant transformations including the occupational structure of the labour force with the demise of industries like manufacturing – which provided so far the bulk of employment – and in the public administration employment. Full-time employment for young people declined while unemployment and full-time education increased among young people aged 15-19 year olds.

The collapse of youth full-time employment

Bessant & Cook (1998) assert that higher levels of general and youth unemployment are often attributed to non-convincing causes, such as failure of the school system to prepare young people for work or even certain deficits with youth. With the collapse of full-time employment for young people, schools came under closer scrutiny and policies began to focus on the role of schools in preparing young people for work. Youth unemployment in the 1970s was perceived as a problem mostly affecting those from ‘socially disadvantaged groups’; that is, those that have left school early, migrants, economically disadvantaged and minority groups. The solution to unequal employment outcomes became a matter of providing equal education opportunities for the disadvantaged (Jamrozik 1998: 78). Rather than blaming schools, Bessant and Cook attribute the collapse of the youth full-time work to changes occurring in the economy and the workplace, to structural changes in the labour market, the loss of tariff protection barriers for some industries and global events (e.g. the oil crisis in the 1970s). Further, there was a demise of unskilled labour in declining industries (e.g. manufacturing) and an increase of more professionalized jobs (in the area of finance, community services). Table 1 illustrates the decline of full-time employment and the rise of part-time work and unemployment over the next 20 years period.

Table 1. *Proportion of Australians 15-19 years old in full-time work, part-time work, unemployed and in full-time education in 1966, 1975 and 1984, (%)*

	1966	1975	1984	Growth +/-
Full-time employment	59	43	33	- 26
Unemployment*	2	6	10	+ 8
Total full-time labour force	61	50	42	- 19
Part-time employment	4	8	13	+ 9
Full-time education	30	43	51	+ 21

*Seeking full-time work

Source: Sweet (1987)

According to Wilson (1989), young women experienced a steady decline in full-time jobs opportunities from the late 1960s while young men confronted three specific periods of sharp decline: the late sixties, the mid seventies and, especially, in the mid eighties. Data available from the Australian Bureau of Statistics confirms this decline with full-time employment decreasing by an average of 20% for both young males and females in their 15 to 19 years of age between mid-1960s to the late 1970s (ABS 1987). Full-time employment declined in the period from 1966 to 1978 from 61% to 42% for young males and from 57% to 36% for young females. Figure 1 illustrates these fluctuations on full-time employment for young males and females.

Decline in full-time employment was experienced more sharply among those aged 15 and 16 years old during the sixties and seventies but it leveled across the different ages during the eighties (Sweet 1987). Figure 1 shows that full-time employment for young females always remained below the average percentage for the whole 15-19 years old cohort. Ethnicity and race also showed important distinctions in the employability of young people with young migrants whose background was non-English speaking experiencing higher rates of unemployment than those born in Australia.

Most importantly, this period saw a rapid increase in the casualisation of employment, which had a gender bias with part-time work growing faster for young women than for young men. Table 2 illustrates this trend.

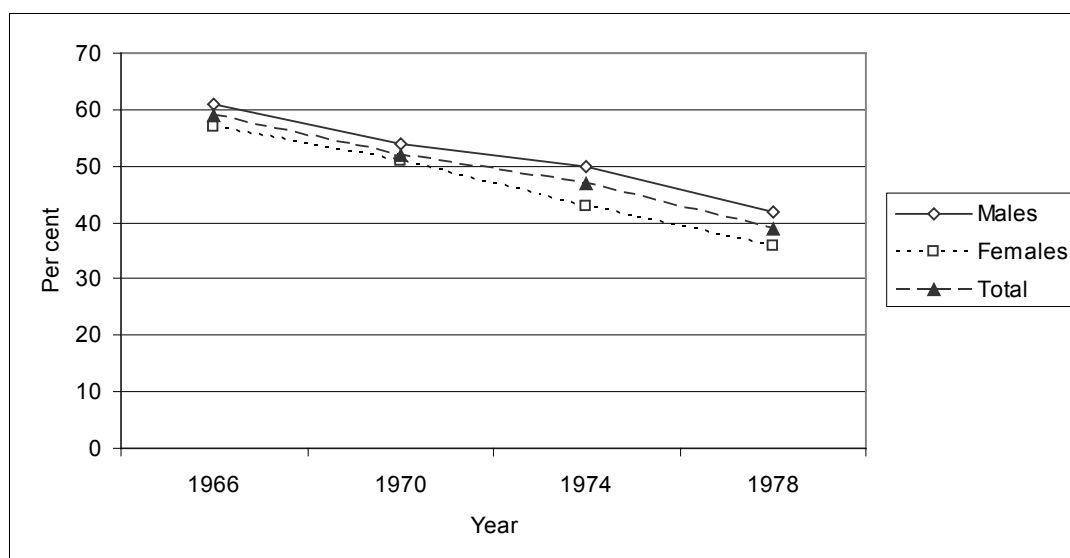
Table 2. *Part-time employment of persons aged 15-19, by gender, 1966-1978, (%)*

	1966	1970	1974	1978	Growth +/-
Males	6	9	9	17	+ 11
Females	7	8	15	24	+ 17
Persons	7	9	12	20	+ 13

Source: ABS (1987)

Coupled with the decline of full-time employment opportunities, there was a higher participation by young people in secondary and tertiary education (in part due to the limited work opportunities and to improve their work prospects) but also the beginning of the shift to part-time and casual work (usually overlapping with full-time education), which became the main feature of young people's

Figure 1. *Full-time employment of persons aged 15-19, by gender, 1966-1978, (%)*



Source: ABS (1987)

employment for the next four decades (Jamrozik 1998).

Young people – and particularly females – began to make the transition from full-time to part-time employment, accompanied by their increasing involvement in education, both often overlapping. In other words, during the 1970s, the transition to adulthood became more complex, involving overlapping study and work. It would be many decades before policies recognized that a linear trajectory from school to work was a thing of the past.

Social inclusion in education policy

Despite the dramatic increase in secondary school participation post-World War II, some social groups were still lagging behind in educational participation. In the 1970s Australian educational policies explicitly addressed the issue of equity and equal educational opportunity to promote the inclusion and development of disadvantaged groups. This included strategies to widen the access to higher education to disadvantaged social groups through the abolition of student fees and student allowances (Beazley 1980). These strategies attempted to provide every young person with an opportunity to fully participate in society (i.e. in its social, cultural, economic and political spheres), and mostly to counteract the rising unemployment and precariousness of the labour market – particularly for socially disadvantaged groups.

The 1970s marked an epoch of social engineering with a strong emphasis on social justice. The Australian Schools Commission in 1973 began the policy commitment of the federal government with the idea of equality of educational opportunity through the Karmel Report, which was followed by compensatory education programs (Haynes 2002, Welch 2007). Policies on disadvantaged schools, migrant education, the education of girls, rural and remote students' education, curriculum, literacy and numeracy programs, schools' funding formulas, and participation and equity programs; all focused on equality of educational opportunity as their goal (Haynes 2002, Welch 2007), promoting the rights of minority groups and the shift from 'assimilationist to cultural pluralist notions of Australian society' (Henry et al. 1988: 117).

The shift from social engineering to economic restructuring

The Labor government of the 1980s brought a set of social and economic changes from the social democratic experience in the 1970s. These changes represented a tighter relationship between education and the labour market. It characterised the introduction of neoliberal or economic rationalist policies, the restructuring of the economy and social change had a profound impact in youth transitions to adulthood. It marked the transition from 'social engineering to economic restructuring' (Haynes 2002: 118).

This included the creation of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training, with diminishing powers for the Schools Council and a clear focus towards employment and economic matters (Haynes 2002). The policy Strengthening Australia's Schools, for example, provided the argument for the need to restructure Australian's economy to make it competitive in the international market and for this purpose the efforts of Australian schooling were re-directed to the contribution to the production of a more flexible and multi-skilled workforce (Dawkins 1988, Lingard & Porter 1997). A year later, The Hobart Declaration on Schooling in 1989 included the 'Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia', which stated once more the new 'economic' outcome goal of education.

The increasing relevance of education for work

Amid these dramatic social, political and economic changes, Dwyer (1989a: 2) and colleagues set to investigate 'what do youth need to establish an independent adult identity for themselves?' in the 1980s. In answering the question they identified the link between school completion, employment and housing.

Against the social and economic background of labour market restructuring and the need for a more highly trained and flexible workforce, public policies aimed to improve retention rates in the final years of schooling to provide students with skills and a recognized qualification (through school or other form of training) to become more competitive in the labour market. Public policy, such as the Kirby Report (see Kirby 1985), called

for closer links between the secondary school curriculum and the job market. The Kirby Report, for instance, recommended the introduction of a Traineeship System through which young people would learn a broader range of occupations than in the apprenticeship system; thus, supplying the market with specific types of labour. However, this initiative failed to identify the processes and mechanism of how young people –especially those unemployed– would access a job that could provide a decent standard of living (Wilson & Wyn 1987).

Dwyer and colleagues (1989a: 3) identified distinctive problems regarding these policies: a) a lack of evidence for the increasing school retention rates and the strength of the school curriculum and employment link; whereas they suggested that this increase might well have been the product of the withdrawal of the youth unemployment benefits for 15 to 16 year olds (implemented by the Hawke government); and, b) a lack of attention by federal programs for young people's views and needs of employment in terms of 'participation, initiative and rewarding careers' rather than as the construction of 'human capital' for the nation².

Further, some studies in the early 1980s began to identify a growing public awareness of the connection between more years of schooling and better employment possibilities (see Ainley 1984, CTEC 1982). This included the notion of the 'shelter effect' through which a higher school retention rate was attributed to a lack of available youth jobs, prompting students to stay in school (CTEC 1982). Nonetheless, the link between staying longer at school and gaining a foothold in the job market grew stronger in the second half of the 1980s.

For instance, the Australian National Opinion Polls survey found strong support by students and parents for the need for more schooling years, with a shift from 69% in 1984 to 82% in 1988 (ANOP 1988). Even more, 88% of those surveyed who were under 25 years of age agreed that the main benefit from continuing with further and higher education was related to better employment opportunities and 56% believed that they would need re-training during their working lives (ANOP 1988: 57). Other studies, such as Braithwaite's (1988) confirmed this increasing

interest of parents and students in the value of education, particularly from students and parents from independent (private) schools and metropolitan areas.

The increasing relevance of educational qualifications revealed some social inequalities, with socioeconomic status, gender and ethnicity playing an important role. Wilson & Wyn (1987: 50) showed that the retention rate for students attending independent schools (85-90%) was higher than those attending Catholic schools (45-50%) and government schools (30-35%). Gender was also linked with unequal outcomes. While girls showed higher retention rates than boys (a product of the policy focus on the former in the 1970s), they had a lower participation in post-school training and/or their training had 'less value in the labour market than that undertaken by boys'. Finally, young people from rural areas and from Aboriginal backgrounds left school earlier and working class migrant groups showed lower levels of participation in higher institutions.

Nonetheless, the push by federal and state governments for all young people to complete secondary school meant that schools had to find additional levels of funding to cater for a greater school population and services. This additional funding was usually met by individuals' contribution. That is, schools began passing on a significant proportion of their costs onto families, shifting the responsibility and burden to the individual (Sheen 1988, Wilson & Wyn 1987). Parents would go to remarkable length to ensure that their offsprings 'get a good education' but that the educational activities that young people could enjoy were relying more in their capacity to pay (Wilson & Wyn 1987: 14). As a result, low-income families felt increasingly the burden to provide their children with the relevant opportunities and quality of education that will guarantee them a place in the labour market.

Employment in an environment of transformation and interdependence

The restructuring of the Australian economy in the early 1980s deepened the changes in the labour market and, especially, the experience of young people at work. Youth employment rose by 15% between 1983 and 1988 (compared to 17% for all persons) and general unemployment

was cut by half (in part due to the abolition of the youth unemployment benefit in the mid-1980s) (Dwyer et al. 1989a). However, a closer analysis provides a less buoyant scenario, where full-time employment for young people felt dramatically – a trend that had already begun in the mid-1960s. For instance, in the last two decades, full-time employment for young females aged 15-19 years fell from 58% to 26% and for young males 59% to 34% (Dwyer et al. 1989b).

The increase in youth part-time jobs from one in fifteen people in 1966 to one in three by 1986 was even more dramatic. As Sweet (1987) explains, employers drew part-time workers largely from school students rather than unemployed people. By 1986, 60% of all youth in part-time work were school students, a sharp increase from the approximately 30% in 1971. In the eighties, the majority of these new part-time jobs only consisted of a few hours of work per week and were concentrated in retail and service sector while there was a significant decline from the early seventies in white collar and clerical employment – that is, the occupational distribution of these part-time jobs differ from those held by adults; thus making it possible for school students to work part-time. Moreover, changes in work production, such as automation, a more specialized division of labour and self-service techniques also accounted for the rise of part-time employment.

Another relevant feature was the development of high levels of labour mobility amongst young people aged 15-24 years in comparison to those of 25-34 years and a greater experience of vulnerability and exploitation due to their age and lack of experience in the job market (Dwyer et al. 1989b). During this time industries were limiting recruitment and/or going through retrenchment, and these developments impacted especially heavily on youth employment opportunities. This included the capacity to be competitive in a job market facing structural change with jobs requiring new skills, and the completion of at least secondary school and/or some form of post-school qualification (thus, advantaging those aged 20-24 years than 15-19 years) (Wilson 1989). The implication is that vulnerability in the youth labour market was not of their own making but was due to structural changes in the labour market and in society at large.

In other words, the transition from school to full-time employment enjoyed by the previous generation could not be taken for granted by the 1980s. These new patterns suggest that the 1980s marked the beginning of a profound transformation in the way young people learn and how they access employment.

Implications of the changing youth labour market

Beyond the significance of figures and trends, it is important to unearth why the youth labour market changed and to identify the implications of these changes for youth transition. Sweet (1987) presents a series of explanations, many of which are partial and do not completely account for the demise of youth full-time jobs. These explanations include the rise of unemployment, excessive youth wages and competition from adults. For Sweet, while these factors hold some relevance, it was due to industrial relations, technological and structural changes. He explains:

... full-time employment among teenagers has declined over a twenty year period for a number of reasons, of which economic recession is only one. Others include an increased sophistication of employers in matching labour supply to labour demand; the growth of subcontracting; technological innovation; a finer division of labour; higher entry qualifications... unregulated competition from more experienced and better educated labour force entrants; and the dynamics of a labour market which gives preference to skill and experience in both firing and hiring decisions.

(Sweet 1987: 17)

In other words, structural change with an emphasis on greater efficiency and productivity and policies aiming to increase school retention rates to produce a more qualified workforce, including parental perception that educational credentials (school and/or tertiary) lead to a higher income and a full-time job, have effected the traditional transition from school to full-time work (at 15/16 years) enjoyed in the fifties and sixties.

These perceptions were reflected in various national surveys on young people's attitudes and beliefs that identified that their highest concern

was the difficulty of obtaining a full-time and satisfying job, while their greatest source of insecurity was the prospect of unemployment (ANOP 1988). Given the collapse of the youth full-time employment market, it is not surprising that in 1988 two thirds of young people stated that it would be very or fairly difficult to obtain a full-time job, while a 92% asserted as fairly or very difficult to find an 'ideal' job (ANOP 1988). Most importantly, this high priority on attaining employment not seen as an end in itself, but as a means to independence and adulthood. Firstly, searching for a job encompassed hope and optimism but was also a source of doubt and fear. Secondly, the idea, desire and pressure for independence was contradicted by the need for credentials (in a restructured labour market) and the collapse of full-time employment, which put at risk the possibility of gaining independence, a sustainable livelihood and the achievement of adult status.

Despite the recognition by parents and young people of the relevance of formal qualifications in achieving full-time employment and despite the structural changes in the labour market, many studies concluded that the great majority of young people wanted to achieve full-time jobs as soon as they could, albeit that many of these full-time jobs were available in the primary labour market (see ABS 1988, Dwyer et al. 1989b, Wilson & Wyn 1987). These studies reflected the emergence of a widespread belief by parents and students of the economic relevance of education in accessing secure employment; including entry to the job market via an apprenticeship, which was regarded as a stepping stone to a better and economically secure future. Most importantly, the link between the need for more education and access to meaningful employment and higher income revealed an emerging sense of anxiety about an uncertain future by parents and young people.

The collapse of full-time jobs for young people meant that they had to look for other sources to sustain an independent life. Drawing from Hartley (1989: 24), Dwyer and colleagues identified a link between youth increasingly having to rely on part-time work and the need for financial support from their families and the State (through welfare benefits). The need for parental and State support was exacerbated by inadequate levels of remuneration through the youth wage. A

significant proportion of 15-17 year old workers and approximately a quarter of 18-26 year old had incomes below the poverty line; which mirrors the increasing concern for economic survival for young people (Dwyer et al. 1989a).

New living arrangements

The third issue identified in the concept of transition to adult life by Dwyer and colleagues in the 1980s was concerned to the issue of independent living arrangements. Their study provides important considerations that resonate with today's youth scenario. They pointed out to a significant pattern in the construction of family and in youth transition to adulthood, with an increasing number of young people leaving their family home in the 1980s, although this was not undertaken in order to marry or start a traditional nuclear family. That is, the role of marriage in leaving the parental home was declining – although it continued to be the main reason for leaving home (31% males, 45% females) (Young 1987: 7).

Young (1987: 3) identified two reasons for this pattern: 1) increasing proportion of young adults who leave home for reasons of either independence or conflict with parents; and, 2) a steady decline in the proportion of under 25 year olds who are married (for females it shifted from 21 years of age in 1971 to 23 in 1983) and a delayed in the first birth (from 23 years of age in 1971 to 26 years of age in 1983 for females). Young (1987: 141-145) noticed that those that leave their family home for the 'independence' reason do it 2 years (males) and 1 year (females) younger than those who leave for marriage. At least half of them move out with friends, while most other live alone or with relatives. Interestingly, Young found that many of those who left home for independence reason return home (59% males, 54% females) –mostly because of difficulties to financially make a living independently– and subsequently many leave it for a second time.

Some important policy implications of this new emerging pattern in family types and youth independence were that on low wages, young people were unable to meet the costs of housing. The Burdekin Report (Burdekin 1989) identified a policy failure to support the housing needs of young people and a disconnection between young people's income reality and housing/rent prices. The report stated:

The needs of young people who do not live at home at least in terms of physical sustenance and shelter are identical to those of single adults without dependants. As many witnesses stressed to the Burdekin Inquiry, there are no 'junior' rents, no 'junior' utilities charges and no 'junior' food bills. Therefore, it is neither equitable nor sensible to have 'junior' income support payments (p.148-9)³.

Material and non-material aspects restricting young people's ability to make an independent living meant that 'adulthood offered a future of foreclosed options rather than one of opportunity and promise' (Dwyer et al. 1989a: 14). Further, the costs associated with independent living and the lack of full-time jobs (including the need to continue with further education while working part-time) signified that participating as adults in the social, cultural and political life of the society was reliant on each young people's socio-economic background.

Most importantly, these household arrangements of young people depicted youth policies as outmoded and failing to meet the needs and demands of those who had left their parental homes. A significant failure of these policies was the assumption that young people were living in a transitional stage before arriving to adulthood; thus justifying structural disadvantages such as inadequate wages or a lack of available meaningful and full-time employment, which denied youth with economic security and a decent standard of living, placing them at risk of a life in poverty (Hartley 1989).

In sum, as Dwyer and colleagues (1989b: 15) put it, in this supposedly "transition" period there were 'no junior rental rates'. While some young people could rely on their families to sustain a decent standard of living, others could hardly afford it, and were at high risk of living in poverty. This new patterns of household arrangement implied that traditional youth policy frameworks constructed in post-World War II were now becoming obsolete and inadequate to support young people's needs. In other words, youth policies were not matching the profound social and economic changes experienced by young people in the 1980s.

Conclusion

The linear transition to adulthood enjoyed by young people in the aftermath of post-World War II was broken a quarter of a century later. The impact of the social and economic transformations of the 1980s signified that the markers of adult status established since post-World War II were becoming blurred, if not obsolete. Categorical approaches to the concepts of youth and adulthood were becoming increasingly ambiguous. Amidst these changes, youth policy frameworks established in the 1950s and 1960s have become outmoded and the suggestion that young people were "in transition" to adulthood, were, at least, a misrepresentation of the challenges faced by youth to make an independent living.

The introduction of free-market oriented policies with a subsequently weakening of welfare policies and an emphasis for all young Australians to complete 12 years of schooling to adapt to a transforming labour market evidenced the beginning of a profound social and economic change in Australian society. Assumptions of the possibility to leave school without completing it and gaining a full-time job did not match the reality for young people in the 1980s.



CHAPTER 2:

CONTEMPORARY PATTERNS OF YOUTH TRANSITION

Introduction

In this section we examine the profound social and economic changes that impacted young Australians in the last two decades. We look at the broad patterns related to the transformation of education policies and their alignment with the economic and labour market needs. These policy frameworks affected the way young people view and experience education, work and their social world at-large.

Firstly, however, we examine the dramatic changes to the labour market and the implications it had for young people. These complex changes entailed the transformation of the manufacturing economy into the service economy and the final shift from full-time employment into a casual and precarious labour market. Secondly, we look out closely the alignment between education policy with the needs of the economy marked by federal and state policies in the last two decades. This alignment is consistent with the idea or metaphor of ‘pathways’ to adulthood, which mark the increasing and dominant relevance of post-compulsory education – particularly the notion of gaining tertiary education qualifications to secure a place in the precarious labour market. We assert that this idea of pathways has tended to overlook the great proportion of young people for whom higher education was not their post-school option.

Finally, we provide a conceptual approach that contributes to better understand the opportunities and challenges faced by young people in the 1990s and 2000s.

The new (precarious) youth labour market

The structural changes enforced on the labour market by the Hawke government of the 1980s where deepened in the 1990s by a process of structural reform which goal was ‘maximising economic efficiency and productivity’ (Pusey 2003: 47). As explained by Pusey, these labour market reforms were followed by the economic recession of the early 1990s and a period of economic structural adjustment that definitively altered the social contract of Australians workers and their working life.

These reforms were signified, at the beginning of this new century, by a deregulation and decentralisation of the industrial relations system, impacting on arbitration, protection and compulsory unionism. This development put pressure on lowering the cost of labour and increasing workers’ flexibility and lead to a wave of privatisation of public companies and goods, the reduction of jobs in the public sector and an increase in contracting out work. In the 15 years

leading up to the year 2000, full-time employment declined by 9%, the male labour force by 3%, employment in the manufacturing sector by 4% and union membership by 21%; while there were increases in the casualisation of work by 11%, the female labour force by 9%, the average weekly hours worked from 40 hours to 43 hours and the share of employment by the private sector by 11% (Pusey 2003).

The above economic and labour changes depict the transformation lived by all Australians. Young people, however, were amongst those to suffer the most from these dramatic changes. As stated by Andres and Wyn (2010), the post-1970 generation entered their post-school life with a complete new set of labour market rules like no other generation had experienced since post-World War II. For instance, in terms of youth employment the post-World War II generation enjoyed a wide availability of full-time employment, while the post-1970 generation faced rising unemployment and underemployment, a predominance of part-time or casual work and extensive alternatives of employment ‘in the form of various education options’ (mostly vocational options) (Lewis & Mclean 1998: 1).

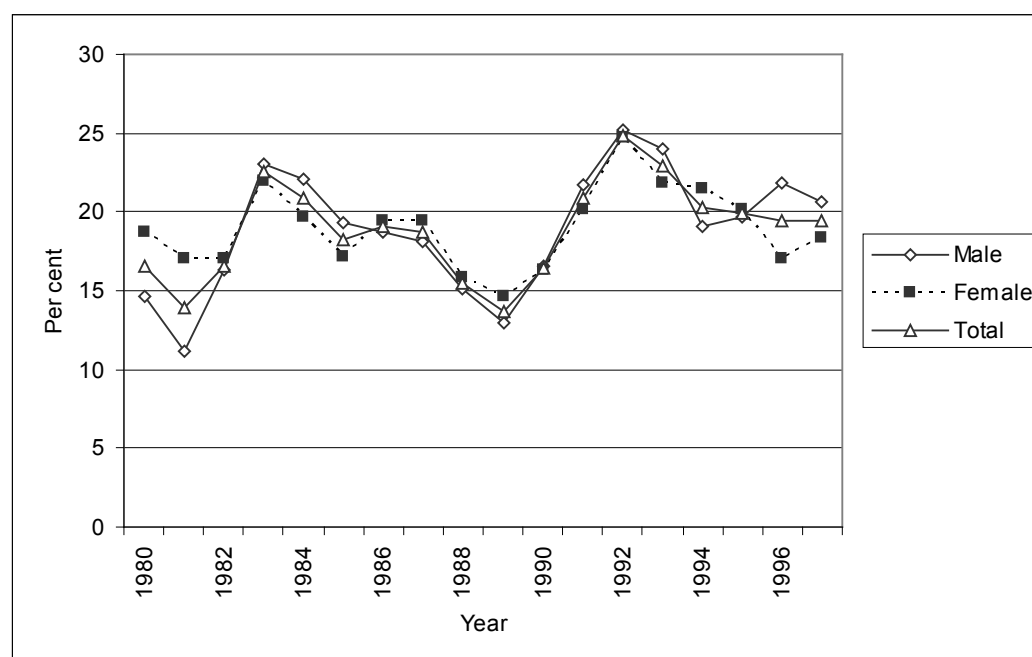
In the last two decades the youth labour market deteriorated with unemployment rates increasing from 16.6% in 1980 to almost 20% by 1998. Youth unemployment had its peak in 1990-1991, at 25%, just when the post-1970 generation finished school, which was a higher rate compared to the

general population. Figure 2 illustrates this pattern.

These figures are supported by the decrease in total employment as a proportion of the youth population from 49% in 1978 to 44% in 1998 (Lewis & Mclean 1998). The explanation for the decline of full-time employment among young people is found in the lack of full-time jobs – particularly with the decline of the manufacturing sector, which provided a great proportion of the full-time jobs to previous generations of young people - rather than in the trend for young people to complete secondary school (Gregory 1995). This weaker labour market produced a generational change in culture with young people becoming aware that without a secondary or tertiary qualification they had minimal chances to gain access to meaningful and/or rewarding employment.

Another strong feature of the restructuring of the economy and the labour market was the dramatic shift from wide availability of youth full-time jobs to part-time jobs. The greatest shift occurred between the beginning of the labour market restructuring and the years after the economic recession. That is, in 1988 young people in full-time work nearly doubled those in part-time work. Ten years later this trend was reversed, mostly by the shift from an industrial economy to a sector service economy and its reliance of part-time and casual jobs. Full-time work fell by 46% and part-time rose by 77% during that period. In the next following years, based on a labour market that reflected 17 years of continued and unprecedented economic growth

Figure 2. *Unemployment rates for 15 to 19 year olds in Australia, by gender, 1980 - 1997, (%)*



Source: ABS (2010)

(OECD 2009), the employment patterns showed a greater stability. This shift had a strong gender differentiation, with young females experiencing a dramatic decline from full-time to part-time work in the last two decades. Table 3 highlights these patterns.

The post-1970 generation was the first generation to experience the expansion of precarious work, the complete demise of full-time work and several years of high youth unemployment. Different labour policies – such as The Industrial Relations Reform Act in 1993 and The Workplace Relations Act in 1997 – had an important impact in the increase of casual, precarious work and de-standardisation of working-time conditions (Campbell & Brosnan 1999).

In Australia, casual employment grew from 19% in 1990 to 26% in 2004 (ABS 2006), outpacing the growth in ongoing, full-time jobs (Pocock et al. 2004). In the last two decades, Australia has been one of the three leading OECD countries in terms of casual employment growth (Pocock et al. 2004, Campbell & Burgess 2001, OECD 2002). Further, in the last 15 years there has been a steady growth of casual employment in the youth sector. In 2005, 66 per cent of employed 15-19 year-olds were casual employees, up from 54 per cent in 1992 (AIHW 2007).

The large statistical databases of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) enable a closer examination to the characteristics of casual employment. Their data identify that casual workers are more likely to be young females, who are either still in full-time study or have left school without completing a post-school qualification and working on part-time jobs in retail trade and hospitality sectors and other occupations at the low end of the skills jobs (see Wooden & Warren 2003). In their analysis of the HILDA data of 2001, Wooden and Warren state that as many casual workers hold jobs of short duration and, thus, having to look for a new job, it results that casual work ‘is more likely to be accompanied by exposure to unemployment’ (p. 10).

This complex and precarious labour market was understood in policy terms as signalling the need for workers, particularly young workers, to be

Table 3. Full-time and part-time work for 15 to 19 year olds, 1988 - 1998, (%)				
Gender	Employment	1988	1998	2008
Male	Full-time	70	44	45
	Part-time	30	56	55
	Total	100	100	100
Female	Full-time	55	24	22
	Part-time	45	76	79
	Total	100	100	100
Total	Full-time	63	34	34
	Part-time	37	66	67
	Total	100	100	100

Source: ABS (2010)

multi-skilled, better trained, flexible and capable to adapt to a new economy that shifted from a manufacturing to a service type. In the next section, we turn our attention to this point: the close alignment of educational policies with the needs of the economy.

Education policies and post-school transitions

The structural reforms in the economy and the labour market and the economic recession in the early 1990s augmented the pressure on young people to gain skills and post-school qualifications to avoid unemployment. The government answered to these changes and the recession by focusing on increasing the school retention rate and promoting the development of further and higher education to combat unemployment and build a ‘stronger’ and ‘smarter’ workforce. Haynes (2002: 113-114) summarises this trend:

The deregulation of financial dealings, the partial deregulation of the workplace, the reduction of tariffs, the partial privatization of government enterprises and services, the efforts to shift government expenditure from social welfare and education to training (human capital investment)... are all intended by governments (federal, state and local) to restructure the Australian economy in order to stimulate economic growth. In all this, the politically sensitive indicator is jobs.

Thus, the central idea became an alignment of education policies with the economy to make the economy competitive in a hostile commercial world dominated by self-interested trading giants' by changing social and economic conditions during the 1990s (Haynes 2002, Lingard & Porter 1997, Marginson 1997).

The need to restructure the Australian economy and build a more highly trained and qualified workforce redefined the agenda for education and youth policy. This included establishing a target for as many as 95% of 19 year olds to have completed secondary school by the beginning of the twenty-first century. Moreover, some studies identified that this policy goal of increasing Year 12 outcomes with a single post-school option: that is, accessing university; while options such as vocational studies and training were viewed as 'the other option' (see Dwyer et al. 1998, DEET 1993A, 1994). Thus, youth policy became synonymous with education and training policy, with an emphasis on the promotion of the nation's human capital, with the creation of higher skills from its workers. Further, Bessant and colleagues (1998) argue that youth policy in Australia has generally viewed young people as 'the future' and as a 'national resource'. These conceptualisations have usually represented young people as an object of government policies rather than active members of the society capable of shaping their own lives. Moreover, they relate to traditional conceptualisations of youth transitions to adulthood portraying young people as 'becoming', and in a stage of development (socially, psychologically and emotionally).

Thus, a review of major federal and state education policies in the last two decades reflects a profound and irreversible change in the relationship of education to the labour market for young people. For instance, the first National Report on Australian Schooling in 1991 depicted the new dominant educational vision guided by economic needs, where the Commonwealth was given a 'national role of considering schooling more broadly, in the context of a nation undergoing significant social and economic adjustment and dependent upon a well-educated workforce' (Lingard & Porter 1997).

The need to create a new 'productive workforce', based on the idea of dealing with a more

competitive international economy, the increasing precariousness of the youth labour market and an emphasis on the transition from school to work, was supported by government policies and inquiries, such as, Young People's Participation in Post-Compulsory Education and Training (Finn 1991), Putting general education to work: the key competencies report (Mayer 1992) and The Australian Vocational Certificate Training System (Carmichael 1992). These policies were also a response to the high youth unemployment and the collapse of the youth full-time labour market. They aimed to increase the participation rate of young people in post-compulsory education, construct a universal system of education with a 'set of key work-related competencies to provide skilled and flexible workforce for the future' (Dwyer 1995: 95).

Despite, or perhaps because of the recovery of the economy, education policies continued to be aligned to the goals of the economy throughout the first decade of the new century. The report developed by the Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (2000) Learning for the Knowledge Society supported the dominant vision of building a skilled workforce to service the needs of the economy. In its 'action areas', the report claim that professional development for teachers and advancing telecommunications and information technology infrastructure are key to provide and help the private sector to promote an active and productive content and services delivery market and to compete in the international market.

In Victoria, both blueprints for government schools of the years 2003 and 2008 subscribed to the current education dominant vision of supporting the economic competitiveness of the country. For instance:

The demands of our increasingly sophisticated economy and a more complex and rapidly changing society require us to address these poor outcomes and, indeed, to improve educational outcomes for all students. Education and training underpin the development of a highly skilled, innovative workforce as a critical enabling factor for social, cultural and economic growth in Australia.
(DET 2003a: 1)

Another Victorian government policy, Maintaining

the Advantage: Skilled Victorians, also promote the idea of renewing the workforce to confront an innovative and more competitive economic environment (DET 2003b). Further, the latest initiative by the federal government to align education with the needs of the national economy, Learning or Earning, augments the pressure for young people to finish secondary school and continue to post-compulsory education or employment at least until the age of 20 as a condition of receipt of income support (COAG 2009). Finally, the view of the tertiary education as the new ‘compulsory’ level of education for the new generations was, once more, sustained by the Bradley Report on the higher education sector (see Australian Government 2008). This report set a target of 40% of Australians 25 to 34 year olds to attain at least a bachelor-level qualification by 2020 (the current attainment is 29% — a significant leap from 16% in 1996).

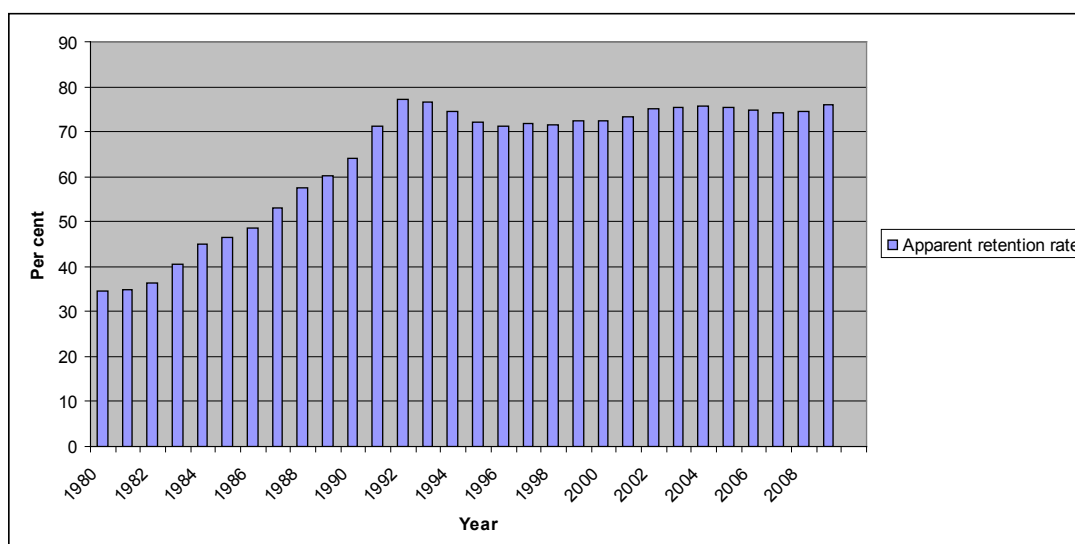
Despite the attempts by the federal and state governments policies to radically overhaul education in Australia, Wyn (2004, 2007) alerts us to a series of continuities and changes in youth transition in education during the 1990s and 2000s in comparison with the past. In terms of continuities, there were still a significant proportion of 15 -19 year olds (30%) that were not in full-time education and students from low socio-economic backgrounds were less likely to complete secondary school. In terms of changes, however, there was a high increase in school retention rates and Year 12 completion in the last 20 years and a quarter of 20 to 24 year olds were

in full-time education by 2006. Figure 3 illustrates the increase in school retention rates to Year 12 from 1980 to 2009.

In other words, these changes reflected the increasing relevance of educational qualifications for young people, and their families, but the continuities still show relevant social inequalities and the marginalisation of some social groups. Nonetheless, within this general increase in school retention rates there were significant social differences, particularly related to school sectors. Figures 3 and 4 show the gap in school retention rates in the last decade and a half between the private and public sector. From 1995 to 2009, the retention rates in the private sector are consistently 15% higher than those in the public sector and, eve, 10% higher above those in the national average. These figures reveal the increasing relevance of education and the persistent social inequality gap between families that can afford paying for their children’s education and those who cannot afford it. Figure 4 highlights this gap.

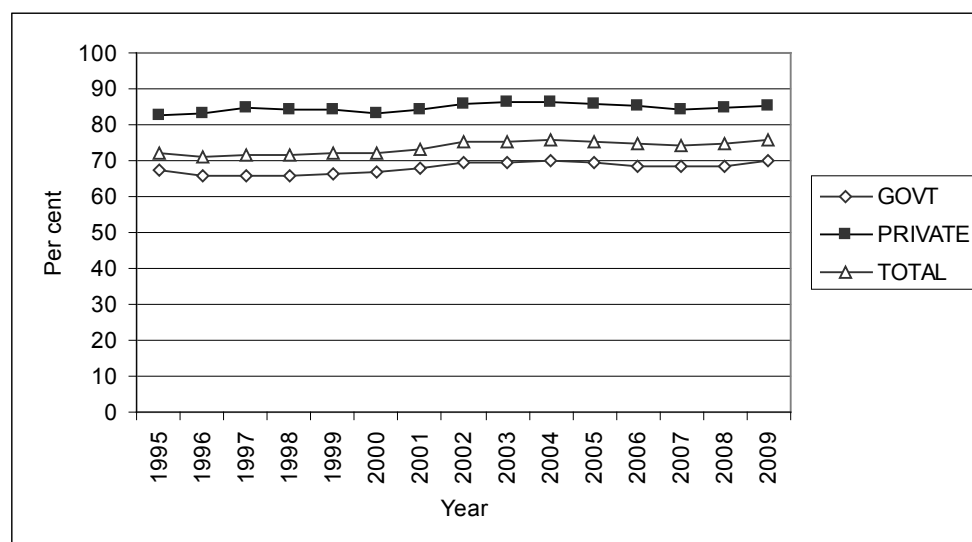
In sum, these educational policies and figures described the significant expansion of school completion rates and the further and higher education sector, and the relevance that post-compulsory qualifications gained for the last couple of generations. As Andres & Wyn (2010) explain, these policies signified that post-secondary education would become the norm for the post-1970 generation and the generations to follow, and that education would provide the necessary knowledge and skills for young people

Figure 3. School retention rates to Year 12, 1980 - 2009, (%)



Source: Estimated data from ABS, various catalogues.

Figure 4. Apparent retention rates for government (public) and private schools, 1995 - 2009, (%)



Source: Estimated data from ABS, various catalogues.

to navigate the new post-industrial economy and a more precarious labour market. Most importantly, the alignment between education and youth policies has framed what means to be young in the last two decades for young Australians. Thus, in the last two decades, in a labour market marked by uncertainty and risk, education (compulsory and tertiary education and lifelong learning) has become crucial for equipping young people to make something of their life and 'become somebody' (Wyn 2004).

In the next section, we turn our attention to post-school options for young Australians in the last two decades. This includes a close examination to the metaphor of pathways as a route to adulthood.

The metaphor of pathways

Against this backdrop of economic recession, economic and labour restructuring and increasing youth precarious work and unemployment, the transition to adulthood seemingly offered three routes for the post-1970 generation in the early 1990s. These were usually represented through the idea of 'pathways' (Dwyer et al. 2001). These pathways were the focus of education policy-makers of the time. They consisted, firstly, of the traditional route of the transition from school to work, which was in the 1990s mostly taken by early school leavers but that even for these young people it offered no guarantee of success due to the high labour market precariousness and youth unemployment. Secondly, there was a route to

vocational education and training that offered a more certain outcome through the establishment of working careers and an adult life. Finally, 'the super-highway' route through the university, which promised access to 'the knowledge society' (Dwyer et al. 2001: 5).

A central problem with this idea of pathways was that there were no multiple educational destinations but a strong policy push to make university the first choice for as many young Australians as possible (Dwyer et al. 1998). In other words, the desired pathway promoted by education, youth and labour policies was through the university sector. University was promoted as the sector most capable of offering the information, skills and knowledge required by the new post-industrial economy.

However, the majority of those completing secondary school did not attend universities (as stated above, by 1996 only 16% of those 24 years old or younger had gained a university qualification). Moreover, research conducted by the Youth Research Centre revealed that in the first part of the 1990s approximately a quarter of young people aged 19 left school before completing Year 12 and where unable to gain any post-school qualification (see Dwyer 1995, Wyn & Lamb 1996). Some of the reasons why these young people left school were their dissatisfaction with the institution or in order to enter the labour market. This group became marginalised because the labour market penalised those who did not have tertiary education qualifications by offering jobs that did not provide a real living wage. They were also identified by policy frameworks as failing to achieve a 'successful'

transition. In addition, some of these early school leavers could not access further education and it was extremely difficult to go back to secondary school to complete it (Dwyer 1995).

Therefore, these policy frameworks overlooked a great proportion of young Australians, particularly the educational needs of socially disadvantaged groups. In addition, at the core of this critique of the narrow economic view of education is what Dwyer (1995) and other researchers (see Haynes 2002, Taylor et al. 1997, Wyn 2009a) in the past two decades have described as a managerialist approach to education, which defined education as a product and knowledge as skills and competencies and in terms of economic and productivity grounds.

What was at stake with this dominant policy framework that view post-compulsory education and training as the single pathway for all young people was a view of young people in the last two decades that assumed that failure to take that route will assume a failure to achieve another step towards adulthood. These policies overlooked the reality of many young people's post-school lives, where they were trying diverse situations for themselves, changing direction, turned back from previous decisions or overlapped different responsibilities and interests (see Dwyer et al. 1998). These policies assumed a narrow vocationalist response to the structural changes in the Australian labour market in the 1980s and 1990s and to the social and economic processes of globalization. They reduced the concept of youth and the transition to adulthood and collapsed the different dimensions of young people's lives (e.g. social, labour, personal) into the dynamics of the general labour market.

In addition, the close relationship between education and work meant that traditional 'normative' and 'linear' youth transitions enjoyed by previous generations were replaced in the 1990s and 2000s by complex youth trajectories. These involved unpredictable links between education and work and the reality that the majority of young people could not be categorise as students or workers but that these represented different dimensions of one self (Stokes & Wyn 2007). Further, changes in the labour market with its increasing precariousness and uncertainty means that current generations of young Australians are

required to be life-long learners, flexible workers and to individually negotiate the different risks (Furlong & Cartmel 2007, Wyn 2009a). Wyn (2004, 2007) also claims that young people augmented their participation in part-time work, which implied that they took longer to complete their studies by becoming part-time students and part-time workers during their last two years of compulsory schooling or by leaving school early and returning at a later age to complete it.

Thus, linear transition to adulthood enjoyed by previous decades where young people progress through a series of 'stages' towards a secure adulthood, from dependence to independence and from school to work cannot be taken for granted in this post-industrial society. The linear transition masks the overlap between, for instance, full-time study and part-time work – including social and family life, which for many young people is in the forefront of their experience (Dwyer et al. 2001). Moreover, as explained by Wyn and White (1997) the notion of youth and the idea of a transition to adulthood should not be conceptualised as a category by age, as a stage of life that is 'lacking' or as 'not yet arriving' to adulthood, but as a process, where the different dimensions of young people's lives are shaped and negotiated in relation to social institutions such as families, labour market, schools and the state. This offers a more realistic and multidimensional approach to understand how young people shape their own future. This approach reveals the simplicity and linearity of youth policies that assume there is a mainstream that follows the prescribed and institutionally organised pathways and that there is a minority that does not –and is at-risk- and, therefore needs remedial attention.

Constructing a new identity: towards individual responsibility

So far we have examined economic and social changes that have impacted in young people's lives at a macro level. In this section, we start to analyse in greater detail what these changes mean for Australian youth and how they affect the way young people negotiate the different aspects of their lives. Thus, as a final point we present some conceptual ideas that enable a better understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by young people in the post-industrial society.

As mentioned above, new transitions from youth to adulthood in Australia cannot be understood as simple linear transition between education and employment. The predictability enjoyed by previous generations is now being questioned (Dwyer et al. 2005, Leccardi & Ruspini 2006). Young people are faced with the erosion of traditional social structures (e.g. family, work, welfare state) and a 'loosening of the links between education and employment' combined with the uncertainty and precariousness of the labour market (Wyn 2007: 37-39). The dismantling of the welfare state in much of the developed world, and particularly in Australia, meant that traditional institutions have become less relevant for young people and nation states transferred the responsibility to their subjects; that is, a shift from social to individual responsibility.

Young people comprehend that to navigate the complex post-industrial society they have had to become the managers of their own biographies (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). Successful transitions into adulthood are in great part dependent of young people's capacity to continuously construct one's self as choice-maker, resourceful and a reflexive subject with a clear ability to plan their progress of becoming an adult (Kelly 2006, McLeod & Yates 2006, Wyn 2009a).

Thus, Dwyer and colleagues (2005: 36) point out that there has been a change from a 'collective identity' to a 'personal autonomy' with an increasing pressure for young people to construct their 'own portfolios for living' and draw upon their individual resources. Further, this discourse of individual responsibility over social responsibility in the choices that lead to young people's outcomes in life has been described as a process

of 'individualization' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002). In this process of individualization 'there are no historical models for the conduct of life' and what is required of an individual is to be 'active, inventive and resourceful, not just on one occasion, but constantly, day after day' (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002: 23-26). Even more, this process of individualisation in actions of daily life has the capacity to weaken links with collective causes (Dwyer et al. 2003). As Wyn (2009a: 9) explains

... while there has always been some degree of responsibility on individuals to make school-work connections and to determine what they should learn in order to live well, the scale of the shift towards dependence on individual resources in late modernity has made this responsibility a defining feature of young people's transitions.

The notions of individual responsibility and choice, and resourceful subjects also involve developing new priorities that entail flexibility (in education, work and social relations) and making young people view their own crises as individual failures or problems rather than the outcomes due to the erosion of structural processes (e.g. cuts in education spending, closure of government programs, precariousness of labour market) (Dwyer & Wyn 2001). Young people make themselves responsible for not achieving a successful transition from youth to adulthood (e.g. buying a house, holding a full-time job in the career of their preference, holding on-going relationships) (Furlong & Cartmel 2007). As asserted by Furlong and Cartmel (2007), structural conditions and barriers to obtain desired educational and employment outcomes have been obscured in favour of individual analysis. This is reinforced by approaches that compartmentalised young people into isolated and abstract boxes which often deny the importance of economic, social and political structures (Wyn & White 1997). Most importantly, what seems to be missing is a balance between structural elements and individual's agency.

In sum, in the next sections of the report we emphasise the need to overcome a false opposition between structure and agency. We should take into account these two important aspects of young people's experiences; thus looking into an idea of "balance" between traditional patterns and elements of self-reliance and choice in response to complexity and uncertainty in the social world (Dwyer et al. 2001, 2005).

Conclusion

This second section of the report concludes our macro-analysis of youth transitions into adulthood. In this section we examined the radical changes to the labour market and education sector and its impact to young people's lives. We revealed the close alignment between education policies and the needs of the economy by emphasising a limited and economistic view of what learning means – mostly related to the need to provide new skills and knowledge to the workforce.

These educational policies had a limited outlook and were out of touch with the real needs of young people. They were based on a false supposition about the nature of growing up, the possibilities of young people to make an adequate livelihood and neglects the multidimensional aspect of young people lives, which includes other spheres beyond education and work (e.g. wellbeing, social relationships, spirituality). Moreover, the metaphor of pathways to adulthood primarily concerned with the access to higher education have framed a great proportion of young Australians as failing to make a successful transition.

In the next section we turn our attention to our two-decade old longitudinal study, the Life Patterns project. We utilise our study as a tool to gain a finer understanding of the significant social changes that have affected young Australians in the last two decades. Through it, we examine how young people view and experience their different spheres of life, such as education, work, social relations and wellbeing.

CHAPTER 3: THE LIFE PATTERNS PROJECT

Introduction

This section draws on the Youth Research Centre's Life Patterns longitudinal research project. The findings of the project offer substantial evidence that young people born after 1970 are the most educated generation of Australians and the first generation to enter a labour market in which employment cannot be taken for granted (see Dwyer & Wyn 2001). That is, they have had to travel their journey to adulthood and construct their identities in a radical new social world than that of their parents and grandparents.

In the previous two sections we have established some of the broad patterns of this new social world; such as the increasing relevance of post-compulsory education to gain access to a precarious labour market, making education a continuous process, a life-long experience. We marked the profound changes to the workplace and its practices, defined by the increasing dominance of casual work and insecure employment. However, statistical studies that illustrate outcomes across broad populations often only measure one dimension, for instance, young people's primary status as student or worker rather than recording the full extent of their life commitments or the interrelationships between these. In this section, we aim to provide a finer grain, a closer look at the diversity of young people's commitments; that is, an examination of the tensions and interconnections between education, work and other areas of young people's lives (e.g. leisure, social and family relationships, wellbeing and health). Our analysis shows how these different areas are experienced and shaped by young people.

We begin this section with a description of the Life Patterns project and continue with an analysis of the methodology used in it⁴. We follow then with the most important conceptual themes that have arisen from the project and that have enabled us to challenge established notions of youth transitions to adulthood.

The Life Patterns project

Over the past two decades the Youth Research Centre has been documenting the lives of young Australians. The Life Patterns project is a longitudinal panel study that began in 1991. The original database consisted of 29,155 participants who were leaving secondary school that year. The following year they were surveyed to follow-up their progress after leaving school. In 1995, a representative sample of 10,985 from the original set was contacted for an update on their progress since 1991. The next year the sample was reduced to 2,000 participants. Nonetheless, while reducing the research sample to a more manageable size, we kept a socio-economic background, geographic location and gender consistency. From that point until the year 2000, we conducted an annual survey, as well as individual in-depth interviews with a sub-sample of 100 people; while in the 2000s we conducted bi-annual surveys. After two decades, we currently have a cohort of approximately 400 young people.

The Life Patterns project has the unique feature of tracking two generations of Australians. From 2005 the project has added a second cohort of young

Australians (characterised in the popular media as Generation Y), who left secondary school in 2006. Although the main focus of our discussion in this report is the above mentioned cohort (characterised in the popular media as Generation X) it is relevant to point out some important patterns of commonality and difference between both cohorts. In 2005 the first survey of cohort 2 collected data from 1,954 young people who were in Year 11 of secondary school. These participants were in New South Wales and Victoria. A second survey was conducted in 2005 consisting of 2,023 young people from the ACT and Tasmania to include a wider geographic representation. Both groups were blended and then surveyed in 2007 and 2008. We conducted in-depth interviews with 30 and 50 participants in 2007 and 2008 respectively. After attrition, we currently have a cohort of approximately 1,400 young people.

A note on methodology

The Life Patterns project has substantially benefited from its mixed method approach. Combining both quantitative and qualitative methods has allowed us to avoid over-simplifications and researchers' tendency to amplify unusual patterns as a finding of research importance. By having both types of data we have been able to understand in a more sophisticated way young people's lives rather than falling into over-simplifications that portray youth as a homogenous subject. Moreover, the longitudinal character of the project puts the research at the forefront of analysis and enhances the capacity to examine issues of conceptual significance over time that are not possible through 'snapshot' studies.

A significant advantage of using a mix-method approach has been that it allows us to fill the gaps that are usually created by adopting only one approach. Thus, the in-depth interviews enabled us to look closer to specific topics that usually came out from the survey data and pursue personal priorities in greater detail. It contributed to unearth hidden or unexpected motivations for our participants' choices and actions. The surveys also provided with common patterns and concerns that reinforced or changed the stories conveyed in the interviews. Further, the data from both techniques fed one another, creating an iterative process that constructed a more detailed picture of the lives of our participants.

In these two decades we have constructed a strong participatory approach in the research. In other words, our participants have been given an 'active voice' in the shaping, conduct or the evaluation of our research. Contrary to a plethora of research and policies in Australian education and employment studies which produce data of a general kind, we have continuously tested policy assumptions about the lives of young people against their actual experiences. For instance, the metaphor of pathways stated in many policy documents needed to be examined against the actual aspirations and choices of the participants. To test the policy discourse against real life experiences we utilised quantitative and qualitative techniques, looking at issues such as, living arrangements, study and work involvement, their wellbeing and health and questions about their expectations about their immediate and long-term future.

Conceptual themes

Over the two decades of the Life Patterns project we have developed a variety of conceptual themes and approaches that have helped us to understand the profound impact of societal changes for young people in their trajectories to adulthood. In the previous section, we have already touched upon some conceptual themes to understand the way young people made their transition to adulthood: the metaphor of 'pathways' and the shift from social responsibility to 'personal autonomy'. In what follows, we address some important conceptual themes that contribute to a more nuanced understanding of contemporary youth transitions to adulthood in Australia.

Social generation

Each generation of young people faces a specific set of life circumstances that influences the way they make their transition to adulthood. The distinctive social and economic circumstances confronted by the post-1970 generation when they left school have shaped their meaning and use to education, work and life. Reflecting on a decade of the Life Patterns project, Dwyer and Wyn (2001: 205) commented on 'a genuine issue of generational change at stake'. In view of the dramatic societal changes in Western countries since the 1980s, they pointed out to the need to

construct ‘new research frameworks of analysis and inquiry’ that help us avoid measuring younger generations through the experiences of older generations; and thus, viewing young people as manufacturers of their lives.

Drawing on Wyn and Woodman’s (2006, 2007) work, we argue that the concept of ‘social generation’ provides a better understanding of the new patterns of living, as well as the continuities with the past. Wyn and Woodman point to a lack of clarity of the term (generation) which has been exacerbated by a plethora of academic, policy and popular media use of it (e.g. Generation X and Generation Y, Baby Boomers, Digital Generation, Millennials, Green Generation, among others). Nonetheless, this popular use of the term has contributed to an interruption of ‘the traditional view of youth as a universally experienced transition to adulthood’, where, for instance, the notions of Generation X or Generation Y acknowledges that these groups of young people are experiencing distinctive social conditions that shape their priorities and life patterns (Wyn et al. 2008: 14). It is true, however, that the use of labels tends to mask the diversity within a generational group, producing a false picture of homogeneity. In the Life Patterns project we have continually highlighted the differences that issues of gender, socio-economic background and geographic location make to the possibilities young people have and the choices they make in their lives.

Further, Wyn and Woodman (2006, 2007) alert us to the idea that a social generation approach does not refer only about specific changing trends in education, work and family life but, most importantly, it enables us to comprehend the distinctive subjectivities that mark different groups and the possibilities for young people to shape their lives. Moreover, as Wyn and Woodman (2007: 375) argue,

The concept of social generation invites us to explore the altered, complex markers of adult status, to question what contemporary youth and adulthood means and to consider the social effects of changing conditions for people’s sense of self and belonging.

That is, a social generation approach views social conditions – such as the changes to the labour market in the 1990s with the increasing

casualisation of employment – as a framework which shapes and constrains the possibilities that people deal with (Wyn et al. 2008). It also asserts that youth are the most affected group by these social conditions because they create an enduring form of consciousness about the social world. For instance, Wyn and Woodman (2007: 377) explain that,

... young people now readily accept something different from the traditional nuclear family is a possibility in their own lives, and different forms of living are far more an option for them at this point in their lives than it appeared to the vast majority of their parents. This does not mean that many, or even a majority, will no longer hope for a fairly conventional coupling with two biological children, but it does mean that this seems much more like a choice that has to be made and actively worked for, rather than a relatively straight forward progression that simply unfolds. This recognition shifts the meaning of relationships.

Nonetheless, as mentioned above, sharing a generational context or consciousness does not guarantee that all individuals enjoy the same opportunities and challenges (Wyn et al. 2008). As noted by our research project and other studies, issues of gender, ethnicity and class play a significant role in young people’s possibilities and outcomes (see Cuervo 2009, McLeod & Yates 2006, Stokes & Wyn 2007). In sum, the approach taken to the data collection and analysis has been specifically designed to avoid using taken for granted stereotypes and labels in favour of recognising social and economic circumstances shared by young people in the same generation.

Diversity in transition to adulthood

As we mentioned in the previous section, the idea of pathways is an attractive metaphor for young people’s transitions, especially within education policy. However, it has attracted criticism in recent years because it privileges linear progress between predetermined ‘stages’ in time, thus failing to offer a flexible framework for post-compulsory education (Abrahamsson 1994, Cohen & Ainley 2000, te Riele 2005). In addition, a focus on education and work tends to marginalise other important dimensions of youth transitions (e.g. wellbeing, family life).

Further, drawing on the ‘successful’ to frame ‘what works’ denies the need for diversity. It offers a ‘one size fits all’ approach. On the contrary, our focus has been to understand a variety of pathways. In our project, we have worked to fully acknowledge and research subjectivities; that is, how young people themselves make sense of their world, make options into choices, and how different social groups draw on their available resources.

The longitudinal character of our project has made possible to recognise the different and changing options that young people pursued in their post-school years. For example, the post-1970 generation (our cohort 1), showed a non-linear pattern where education and employment were combined and where family and social relationships had great importance (Dwyer et al. 2005, 2003). Five years after leaving secondary school, in 1996, 80% of those participants who did not continue with further or higher education immediately after school, had returned to study. Furthermore, of the 90% of our sample that has undertaken some form of study only one-third followed a linear pathway through post-compulsory study. Thus, youth pathways displayed a variety of routes, including interrupting and changing their studies or entering the workforce after school and returning to study after some years (at least 50% of our participants made one or some of these changes). In their early post-school years, our Cohort 2 also shows that a ‘standard’ linear trajectory is already difficult to achieve, especially for those from low socio-economic background and non-metropolitan areas. Most importantly, the qualitative data from cohort 2 points out to the difficulties of balancing their different life commitments.

New Adulthood

A lack of linearity in youth transitions has been comprehended by policy frameworks as a defective transition because they did not occur within the expected timelines. However, the findings from the Life Patterns project dispute the policy assumption of linear transition, as well as a notion of youth transitions as extended or, to put it simple, as youth ‘on hold’ or extending the period of ‘adolescence’. On the contrary, we have argued that young people are entering at an early stage, a ‘new’ adulthood. For example, at the age of 16-17 year olds, almost 60% of participants in our Cohort 2 asserted that they were working while at school. Moreover, 80% stated that they

were planning to work during their last year of secondary school.

Different studies accord with the findings from the Life Patterns project that young people are entering the workforce while they are completing their schooling years. For instance, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2007, 77% of Australian youth aged 15 to 19 years were enrolled in education and 52% were employed in a job with the most common combination being full-time study and part-time work (for almost 30%) (ABS 2007). Research about young people in the workplace also provides evidence that young people are employed as early as 13 years in metropolitan areas and 6 years in rural areas (see Stokes & Cuervo 2009). This early employment confronts young people with many of the experiences that are supposedly only part of adult life, from occupational health and safety issues to legal and monetary issues.

Moreover, the possibility of combining study and work is valued by young people as an opportunity to learn to manage tensions and responsibilities in different situations than the traditional ones at school. However, students’ role as workers is usually overlooked in schools (Stokes & Cuervo 2009). Transitions that characterised an extended transition from youth to adulthood tend to neglect the ‘out-of-school learning experiences’ that young people have, particularly in workplaces (Wyn 2009a: 18). Furthermore, this non-recognition of students as workers reflects that policy frameworks are lagging behind young people’s experiences. These experiences require a broader conception of youth within policy (Martin 2009, Wyn 2009a). Policies about young people’s transition processes into adulthood should be marked by ‘early’ engagement with adult practices, in a scenario of transitions that are ‘incremental, uneven and unpredictable’ that shape this ‘new adulthood’; and, as a result, we must view youth and adulthood as overlapping stages (Wyn 2004: 12).

The meaning of work and career

Another salient theme developed throughout our research project was the new meaning of career for the post-1970 generation. Our research findings show that some of the work patterns taken for granted by previous generations are not possible for the current generation of young people. The

increasing flexibility and precariousness of the labour market has changed the solid assumptions made by previous generations about the prospect of full-time work or uninterrupted career paths until retirement age (Dwyer et al. 2005). For example, during their twenties, only 18% of our participants in cohort 1 held one job, 61% held between two and four jobs and 21% held five or more jobs.

Younger generations of Australians place a high value on flexibility and personal autonomy as the basis for security in an unstable labour market. Moreover, the traditional ambitions of 'upward mobility' in the workplace have been replaced by a 'horizontal mobility' thus rejecting previous generations conceptualisations 'that career equates with full-time employment in one occupation' (Wyn 2004: 10-11). The data from our interviews and surveys in the mid-1990s reveal the growing uncertainty in young people's minds about their career prospects. Dwyer and colleagues (2005: 16) assert that they realised that within the precarious and deregulated labour market, outcomes from post-compulsory education were 'less straightforward and took longer to achieve'.

Even more, young people offered a different notion about the idea of a 'career' than their parents' and grandparents' generation; by constructing a subjective conceptualisation of it as a 'state of mind' rather than objective and evident trajectory (Dwyer et al. 2003, Wyn 2004). At the age of 27-28 years old, at least a third of our participants believed that you did not need to have a job to have a career and two thirds asserted that having a single career for life was a thing of the past. Table

4 shows the responses to different statements about the idea of 'career' made by our participants.

As mentioned above, the longitudinal characteristic of the Life Patterns project allows for an examination over time about several aspects of young people's lives. In this case, we are able to track down their work situation in terms of careers from 1996 (aged 23 years old) to 2004 (aged 31 years old). Table 5 shows the relationship between their current job at one point in time and the idea of career.

Table 5 shows that in their early thirties, at least a quarter of them were not working in a preferred career area. Further, half of our post-1970 generation did not find themselves in a job that directly related to their careers until they were well into their twenties. This is a significant difference to the previous generations.

These representations of the idea of career reflect the uncertainty of the labour market. This uncertainty, and complexity, meant that young people had to negotiate their way through 'personal choices' and risks (Furlong & Cartmel 2007, Wyn 2004). Contrary to previous generations, this group of young people stressed the importance of 'holding your options open' to be able to successfully navigate the changing labour market. They view work and career as 'a journey' to be managed rather than a certain destination where one had to arrive.

Further, the pressure to obtain skills and post-school qualifications to navigate a tight labour market forced young people to create new narratives of life that allow them to make sense of this changing world. Thus in our project we identified

Table 4. <i>The following statement comes very much close to my idea about 'career', (%)</i>	
Statement about 'career'	Agree
My job is one thing, career is something else	35
A career is a permanent full-time job	48
To be a career your job must involve commitment	88
A career job is one that offers scope for advancement	91
You don't have to have a job to have a career	33
Career is any on-going role that gives personal fulfilment	81
Your on-going source of income - that's your career	29
A career job is one directly related to your area of expertise	59
Having a single career for life is a thing of the past	67
I wonder whether career jobs really exist these days	25

Table 5. Relationship between job and career, 1996-2004, (%)*

	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2002	2004
I have a job in my preferred career area	32	49	54	65	68	65	73
My job is a 'stepping stone' related to that career	20	20	22	21	16	15	12
My job is not directly related to a career	18	19	13	8	8	10	9
I have a job, without a career in mind for myself	8	N/A	11	N/A	8	10	6

* In some years the question included an extra category or a slightly different category. Thus, some years the data does not add up to 100% or the data is missing. (N/A = not available.)

an increasing relevance of other areas of life than education and work that shape youth identities. These include social relationships, family life, wellbeing and leisure, among others. In the next section, we focus on the increasing significance of these other life areas for young people.

Finding the balance in life

Findings from the *Life Patterns* project provide evidence that amidst the economic and social changes of the last two decades younger generations of Australians have negotiated new approaches to life. Throughout the project we have highlighted the emergence of significant elements to young people's lives, such as wellbeing, social relationships and family life.

Health and wellbeing

Health and wellbeing have become increasingly important in a social world where uncertainties predominate due to the collapse of traditional social institutions (e.g. school, work and family) (Wyn 2009b). There has been a shift from a social to a personal quest and responsibility in keeping healthy and balanced in life from previous generations to current generation of young people. White and Wyn (2008: 207) assert that as a result of the decline of traditional social structures, individuals are placed in the centre of the stage:

In today's society, the body itself is an outcome of choices and actions. This means that responsibility for good health is seen not only as a good thing, but a necessary thing and a moral obligation. Failure to reach the standards of health, fitness, well-being, and optimisation that are individual's responsibility is accompanied by guilt.

Participants in both cohorts have placed a great importance to managing a balance between educational and employment commitments and their personal relationships, health and wellbeing. For instance, looking back to their twenties as young adults in their early thirties, participants in our cohort 1 ranked as the most dissatisfying aspect in their lives their health and fitness (with approximately 30%) – even beyond work and career issues (with 15% of people dissatisfied). This was pointed out by at least a quarter of the men and a third of the women. In their early twenties, a significant minority of our participants in our cohort 2 also signal health issues – especially issues related to stress due to lack of balance in life – as a main worry in their lives. This relevance for their health and wellbeing shows continuity rather than a contrast between our cohorts, which demystifies popular media conceptualisations of both generations (Generation X and Generation Y) as different from each other.

Moreover, this concern by our participants for keeping a balance in life resembles national figures in Australia. A recent research by the Australian Institute of Family Studies asserts that while a majority of young people are coping well with their different commitments, a significant minority are struggling to cope with life. That is, one fifth had a long term health condition; one quarter was experiencing high levels of anxiety or depression. The study also reported that there were 'high rates' of substance use. Finally, the study shows that between a third and a half of them are experiencing 'serious adjustments problems' (Smart & Sanson 2005: 12). Another study, by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, states that a quarter of young Australians suffer a mental health disorder (AIHW 2007). Further, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare points to some significant social inequalities product of

education and work. For instance, it claims that those young people that leave school early have higher rates of mental health (35%) than those who complete secondary school (25%) and that those in unemployment are more at risk of suffering a mental health disorder than those that have a job.

The above mentioned patterns illustrate the narrow interpretation of viewing young people's transitions that focus on the school-to-work nexus and neglect other significant dimensions of young people's lives. They point out to a need of rethinking the goals of education beyond the requirements of the labour market moving towards a need to include issues of health and wellbeing.

We will discuss more in detail this significant aspect of young people's lives in section 6 of this report. We now focus on another important theme highlighted by the Life Patterns project, the increasing relevance of social and family relationships in the lives of young people.

Social and family relationships

In some of our research reports on the project we have asserted that the need to find a balance between the different commitments in life force young people to reflect on the options available to them, on the choices they have made and on the priorities in life (see Dwyer et al. 2003, 2005). In the almost two decades that we have surveyed and interviewed our participants from cohort 1, their responses have indicated that their main priorities in life were their families and developing personal relationships.

For instance, in 1998, at the age of 24 years old, our participants responded that the most satisfying aspect of their lives was their family life (91%), followed by their personal relationships (86%). Moreover, reflecting on their time commitments throughout their twenties and early thirties, our participants asserted that they would like to spend more time with their family and friends rather than pursuing their career – this pattern increased as the participants grew older. Interestingly, health was mentioned as the third aspect of their life where they would like to spend more time on.

The participants in our cohort 2, in their early twenties, have already assigned a high importance to their personal relationships in their life. In 2008, aged 20 years old, they ranked first as the most positive aspect of their life 'the support

from family', and second, the 'support from closest friends. These aspects of their lives are followed in importance by their social life and 'what they have learnt about themselves'; while their career attracted relative importance from them and participating in political activities ranked the lowest aspect.

As we stated above, the interests shared by both generations suggest continuity rather than change. They show a significant consistency on the importance of their personal lives and relationships and rebut popular conceptualisations of young people as merely driven by monetary ambitions. Further, participants in both cohorts did point out in their early twenties that have a 'secure job' and 'financial security' was important in their lives but the idea of 'making a lot of money' was ranked among the lowest priorities. On the contrary, young people were interested in 'developing their abilities' and in 'finding self-fulfilment' in their lives – goals that match their views of what a career consist of.

Finally, the longitudinal nature of our project enabled us to analyse over time how young people were able to draw upon resources from their families. Our findings point out to an inter-generational solidarity rather than conflict. That is, we found that young people have been able to mediate the external structural factors imposed on them (e.g. casualisation of labour market, unemployment, low wages) through the support of their families. However, within this support we have found important social differences and inequalities, where some social groups have been able to draw upon resources more than others.

We will come back to the discussion of the relevance of family and social relationships and issue of inter-generational transfer of resources later, in section 6 of the report.

Conclusion

In this section we have touched upon the more important conceptual themes developed by the Life Patterns project. The findings of the project highlight the particular experiences of young people in their social, economic and personal context. Most importantly, they acknowledge the holistic self of individuals by encompassing different spheres of life beyond education and work. The subjective assessment of young people's lives show that the latest generations of Australians have been forging a new identity, which prioritise other issues than their professional life; such as wellbeing, health and their social and family relationships.

Moreover, the evidence from the Life Patterns project shows that young people place a greater emphasis in balancing and managing their commitments, on leaving their options open and in the capacity to be reflexive. This suggest the emergence of new approaches to life as these generations of young people have had to negotiated profound changes to in relation to their social and economic world.

Nonetheless, there are stark differences between social groups in their approaches to life and in the options and choices they have. In the following sections, we will focus on these social differences through the lenses of gender and geographic locality. We will also deepen our examination of the importance social and personal relationships and the notion of wellbeing.

CHAPTER 4: GENDER & AUSTRALIAN YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Introduction

One of the most significant aspects of change in the transitions of young Australians in the last 50 years is the emergence of new patterns of life, expectations and priorities for young men and women. However, changing social and economic conditions have not lessened the relevance of gender as a form of social division in Australia. Instead, gender patterns have become re-configured to create greater complexity across gender and socio-economic status.

The move in the 1990s towards universal post-secondary education and the expectation that the majority of young Australians would gain at least some form of post-secondary education had implications for two groups in particular. Young women, especially those from higher socio-economic backgrounds, embraced the opportunity of education and the promise of employment in the emerging new urban economies in the knowledge and service sectors. For those groups that had traditionally sought to enter the labour market early, without educational qualifications (especially young men from lower socio-economic backgrounds), opportunities were becoming fewer. The trajectories of two groups in particular illustrate the nature of changing gender transitions in Australia in the 1990s.

The previous sections trace the economic and political developments that have brought about changes in youth transitions over the last 50 years. The analysis of changing gendered patterns and

outcomes provides an insight into the unintended consequences of government policies over time. As people respond to new opportunities and conditions, they shape different social realities. An example is the rapid expansion, in the 1990s, of women working in professional careers. However, these new realities can create a gap between people's expectations and the taken-for-granted practices that exist within institutions, such as workplaces and families.

This section explores the emergence of such a gap in Australia over the last 20 years, drawing on some of the ideas presented by the Swedish economist Gøsta Esping-Andersen. His thesis of an 'incomplete revolution' (Esping-Andersen 2009) resonates with the experiences of the Life Patterns participants, illustrated by employment and family outcomes for women who undertook post-secondary tertiary education in the 1990s. This group pioneered dramatic changes through their engagement in post-secondary education and in workplaces on an unprecedented scale. Other aspects of society have not changed as much. Workplaces still presume that the worker is a male breadwinner whose family responsibilities do not ever need to be factored into working conditions. Men and women still assume that the daily practical responsibility for domestic labour and childbearing is the women's domain.

The first section describes the hopes and dreams of the Life-Pattern participants in their early twenties, when many were completing their post-secondary education and seeking to establish

careers, marrying or developing longstanding partnerships and buying their own homes. The analysis highlights the similarities between men and women at this stage of their lives, particularly within socio-economic groups. Next, the section describes their trajectories through the following decade, from their late twenties and into their mid thirties. At this stage, the analysis highlights the beginning of diverging pathways between men and women, and the entrenchment of inequalities based on level of education.

We highlight the importance of understanding youth transitions as an ongoing process. There has been a tendency within policy-oriented youth research to place too much emphasis on particular points of transition and to ignore the dynamic nature of the life course in the 21st Century. Our analysis reveals that, in addition to the 'traditional' transition points from secondary school to post-secondary school (further study or work) and from study to full-time employment, there are other very significant transition points. The only point of transition that offers approximately equal outcomes for men and women is the entry into post-secondary education. Our analysis shows that after this point, other transitions (consolidation of a career, marriage or entering a long-term partnership and parenthood) have been accompanied by an increasing divergence in patterns of life and opportunities for men and women.

The changing significance of points of transition for men and women have significant policy implications. Following Esping-Andersen, we suggest that the education revolution of the 1990s has left unfinished business for the Australian government, for workplaces and for individual men and women. The evidence shows that education has not delivered the transformation of transition pathways for women that it appeared to in the early 1990s. Despite their hopes of using their educational qualifications, the risks associated with the incompatible demands on time and energy of work and family life have largely been absorbed by women. Our analysis also shows that although investing in education does not provide certainty in terms of workforce participation, those groups that have not achieved post-secondary education, and in particular, young men, are seriously disadvantaged.

New gender transitions in education and work

Compared with the levels of educational participation for the previous generation, the expansion in numbers of young Australians entering post-secondary education in the early 1990s was nothing short of a revolution. In 1976, only 12% of young people in their twenties were attending an educational institution. By the year 2001, this figure had risen to 23%. The gendered nature of this change is especially significant. In 1976, only 9% of women in their twenties were attending an educational institution, compared with 16% of men. In 2001, women had caught up, with 24% of women and 23% of men in their twenties attending an educational institution (ABS 2005).

As stated in previous sections, in the 1990s, the Australian government sought to increase the post-secondary educational participation of all groups of Australians (Department of Employment Education and Training & National Board of Employment, Education and Training 1990). Those who were identified as disadvantaged in gaining access to higher education included women (particularly in non-traditional areas) as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, people from non-English speaking backgrounds, people with disabilities and those from rural and isolated areas. However, by 1991, more young women (77%) than young men (66%) had completed secondary education, graduating from Year 12 (DEET 1993B). It is important to emphasise that in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the Australian government placed a policy priority on ensuring that educational reforms would ensure 'equal access to the range of services and opportunities that can enhance their lives' for all Australians (Department of Employment Education and Training & National Board of Employment Education and Training 1990: 6). The goal was to ensure that the composition of the student population more closely reflected the diversity within the Australian population.

The Life Patterns data reveals that young women heard this call. In 1992, when they were aged 18-19, 88% of young women and 86% of young men who were participants in the study were engaged in post-secondary education. The extent of the transformation that this represented in Australia

is illustrated by the fact that 58% of the parents of the participants in the Life Patterns study had not completed any form of post-secondary education. This compares with the Canadian figures for the Paths on Life's Way longitudinal study by Andres (Andres & Wyn 2010). In the Canadian study, well over half of the parents of participants in the study had completed some form of post-secondary education: 20% of mothers and 27% of fathers had completed a bachelor's degree or equivalent. Only 15% of Life Patterns participants' mothers and 21% of fathers had a bachelors' degree or (Andres & Wyn 2010: 98).

By 2001, across Australia, the gender gap in post-secondary educational participation had closed and by the mid 2000s, men and women were equally engaged in study and work (Andres & Wyn 2010). They placed a high priority on using their educational credentials to gain secure employment. Data from Cohort 2 of the Life Patterns project reveals that this trend continues. In their first year after leaving secondary school, in 2007, only 28% of the participants did not undertake further study. This group had a higher representation of young people from low socio-economic backgrounds and non-metropolitan areas than the group undertaking further study but there were no significant gender differences. The following year, the overwhelming majority of non-studiers (83%) took up study. Thus, by 2008 (aged 19-20) almost all our participants were involved in some further or higher education with the non-participation rate at an extremely low 8%.

In 1998, when they were aged 24, we interviewed 48 Life Patterns participants (from Cohort 1) about their hopes and dreams for the future. Half expressed modest hopes for their futures, based on a desire to have personal and employment security and to be comfortable. However, 28% explicitly focused on employment as their central goal for the future: this group included slightly more young women than young men. This is confirmed in the survey data from 1998.

Table 6 shows that at age 24 there were already clear differences emerging amongst the cohort with young women focusing on employment as a source of security⁵. Young women who had earned a university degree or greater placed the greatest emphasis on their involvement in work as a career than any other group. Thirty-five percent of this

group said that they placed a high priority on their career compared with 27% of all males, regardless of their educational achievements. The least likely to place a high priority on involvement in work as a career were young women who had less than a university degree. Interestingly, both groups of women placed a higher priority on having children than their male peers – with university educated women only slightly less likely than non-university women to place a high priority on becoming parents (23% compared with 25%). University educated women were slightly more likely to place a high priority on getting married or living with a partner (38%) than non-university educated women (36%) and both placed a higher priority on this than their male peers (27% for university-educated males and 30 % for non-university-educated males).

When they were aged 22, all participants were surveyed about their priorities in life. Forty-four percent said that they would be unhappy if they never married (39% of males and 46% of females). At this time, 30% of the women thought that it was 'very likely' that they would be married in five years' time and a further 23% thought that it was 'likely' that they would be. In fact, it took 13 years for a third of the cohort of women to become married. In 1996 we also asked them about their hopes for parenthood. Forty-eight percent of women and 44% of men said that they would be 'very disappointed' if they never had children.

In 2006, we surveyed our participants in Cohort 2 (aged 18) about their priorities in life. Seven out of ten participants asserted that they would be unhappy if they never married or never had children, with females slightly more likely to feel unhappy about these issues. Further, approximately half of the participants stated that they would be happy or very happy if they were married by the age of 25 (52% of males and 58% of females). Four years later, only 1% of our participants have married or are in a parenting role.

We explored the high priority that both groups, from Cohort 1, placed on work in further detail through interviews undertaken in 1998, when they were aged 25-26. Rachel said:

My main priority would be my career and job, not really sure I want to be doing this for a long time...can see myself moving on in a year or so... I would like to continue

Table 6. *Identifying areas of personal importance by gender and education qualifications, aged 24 in 1998, (%)*

	Women's Priorities		Men's Priorities	
	Low	High	Low	High
<i>Less than university degree</i>				
Having a steady job	3	61	4	55
Involvement in work as a career	4	23	5	27
Earning a lot of money	3	16	4	26
Owning your own home	14	44	8	45
Marriage or living with a partner	16	36	14	30
Having children	32	25	36	12
Family relationships	3	62	1	43
<i>University degree or greater</i>				
Having a steady job	1	65	1	51
Involvement in work as a career	2	35	2	27
Earning a lot of money	8	12	9	21
Owning your own home	12	40	14	38
Marriage or living with a partner	10	38	16	27
Having children	26	23	30	15
Family relationships	1	65	0	51

improving my work situation and when I think I can go no further in my current employment, then I think I would be able to move into a new career path pretty easily... by the sounds of it most people are doing that...would like to settle down sooner or later but we will have to see about that, I think I have already achieved a lot for my age, I have a mortgage and I have a car and I'm successfully working in a career...

Katrina, who had not initially entered a study pathway after leaving secondary school in 1991 saw education as her ticket to a better life. In 1998 she said:

I have started studying again, doing an adult education course to help me get into a TAFE course...not sure what I want to do yet, thinking about a business course or some sort of social work course...it's kind of hard because I haven't done study for a long time and I was never good at it... you really need to have an education these days to be able to get a job...I have been doing all sorts of odd jobs and volunteer work for the community but now I want to

get back into the workforce if I can. I want to do well in this course. I think that this is my chance to get into some productive work instead of unemployment. I have been unemployed for such a long time and I'm getting worried that I will be stuck as unemployed. I would also like to move out of home in the future and be more independent so my family don't always have to care for me. To succeed in my study...yes it's a means for me to get out of unemployment.... get good employment and good pay.

The views of their male peers were not significantly different. The following examples are also from interviews undertaken in 1998 when we asked them how things were going. Matt was working as a shipping clerk and Cameron was working long hours as a maintenance person.

Matt: I work as a shipping clerk and storeman for my company, also taking on accounting duties - fairly large company based in [a northern suburb of Melbourne]. It's okay, it's a matter of working my way up through the ranks - and getting some

good experience. I really don't see this as a long term job, they don't treat the employees here the best, in fact their work practices would make a great work safety ad. I had a couple of forklift "accidents" already. I want to save up for a house or a better car. I think my career is the most important thing. I really want to get out of working here, and the only way to do that is through getting promotions and by moving on.

Cameron: Nothing much happening, working hard, keeping my head down and saving money so I can buy property. Currently looking at investing in some development properties with friends but I'm not too certain about this. I'm still at home, I like it, I save rent money - I just help out with groceries and bills and if there's anything that needs to be done around the house I'm more than happy to help. The hours where I work [in maintenance] are strange and I can't get used to them. Sometimes I'm working 20 hours straight and I then get three days off. It's really affecting my sleep, but because the overtime's so good I can't complain. My main priority is to make money, whether it be in my work or in something else.

The evidence from the Life Patterns project reveals the extent to which old gender patterns were broken down and new opportunities were opened up – for the educated. Young women were especially responsive to these opportunities, participating in education and seeking to establish careers that would enable them to live secure lives in modest

comfort. Indeed, the educational qualifications earned by this generation show remarkable equality across gender lines. Table 7 shows that by 2002, when they were aged 28, a significant proportion of participants from across the range of backgrounds had achieved a post-graduate diploma or more.

Table 7 reveals the strength of educational participation by women, regardless of the level of education of their parents, compared with their male peers. The group that is most likely to have achieved high educational credentials is young women from families where one or both parents had a university degree. This shows the persistence of patterns of class-based educational achievement, but the pattern is not strong.

Diverging pathways

The equality that women and men achieved in their educational qualifications in the 1990s was initially translated into equality in patterns of employment. In 1998, when they were aged 24, there was relatively little difference between men and women in the patterns of employment, as table 8 shows. Despite the relative similarities, differences were beginning to emerge. Young men with no post-secondary or university credentials were the most likely to be unemployed, and women were more likely to list family/home commitments as their primary occupation than men and were more likely to be working part-time than their male counterparts.

What happened next is a significant development for our understanding of young people's transitions. It highlights the importance of understanding young people's trajectories as an ongoing process

Table 7. *Highest credential earned by 2002, by gender and parental educational attainment, aged 28, (%)*

	Neither parent with university		One or both parents with university	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Trade qualification	1	9	2	6
Some TAFE	5	4	6	0
Undergraduate diploma	6	8	4	14
Bachelor degree	13	12	12	17
Post-graduate diploma	42	36	53	34
Masters degree	3	4	7	6
Doctoral degree	2	1	2	3

with multiple points of transition over time. There is a tendency within youth studies research to focus on ‘the’ transition from school to work, and to assume a correspondence between the school-to-work transition and the transition from youth to adulthood (see Wyn & Woodman 2006 for a discussion of this trend within youth studies). The Life Patterns data reveals that what happens once young people are in workplaces is possibly more significant in terms of their trajectories, pathways and adult life patterns than those that occur earlier.

The educational equality achieved in the early 1990s did not translate into equality in the workplace. The analysis reveals that although women who had invested in post-secondary education placed a high priority on achieving careers, they found it difficult. Indeed, when we asked them in 2002, aged 28, about their work experience, women from high socio-economic backgrounds were the most likely to say ‘it has been very difficult’. The group next most likely to find it ‘very difficult’ were young men from low socio-economic backgrounds. Despite this, women from high socio-economic backgrounds were the most satisfied with what they had achieved in their work. Nonetheless, nearly half (40%) of the young women with a university education, at age 24 (in 1998) said that the career plans that they had on graduating from secondary school were still in place. By comparison, only 31% of young women with no post-secondary education said that their career plans were still intact. Young men with a university education were the most likely to have their career plans intact at age 24 (45%).

Gender differences become apparent when

we begin to explore their experiences in the workplace. In 1999, when they were aged 25, we surveyed the participants on their views about work. As figure 5 illustrates, some differences began to emerge between males and females based on educational qualifications achieved.

Only 40% of men with no post-secondary education agreed that their job security was good, compared with 70 % of men with a university education. The pattern for women was completely different. By age 25, 68% of women with no post-secondary had a job with good security, compared with 60% of women with a university education, reflecting the time spent in education and the longer time taken to establish careers. Men with no post-secondary education were the least likely to say that their job was interesting, reflecting the low-skill jobs in which they were employed. The figures for both men and women with a post-secondary qualification other than a university degree reflect the fact that they have achieved a vocational qualification that has enabled them to work within an occupation for which they are trained. University educated participants took longer to find jobs that they were satisfied with.

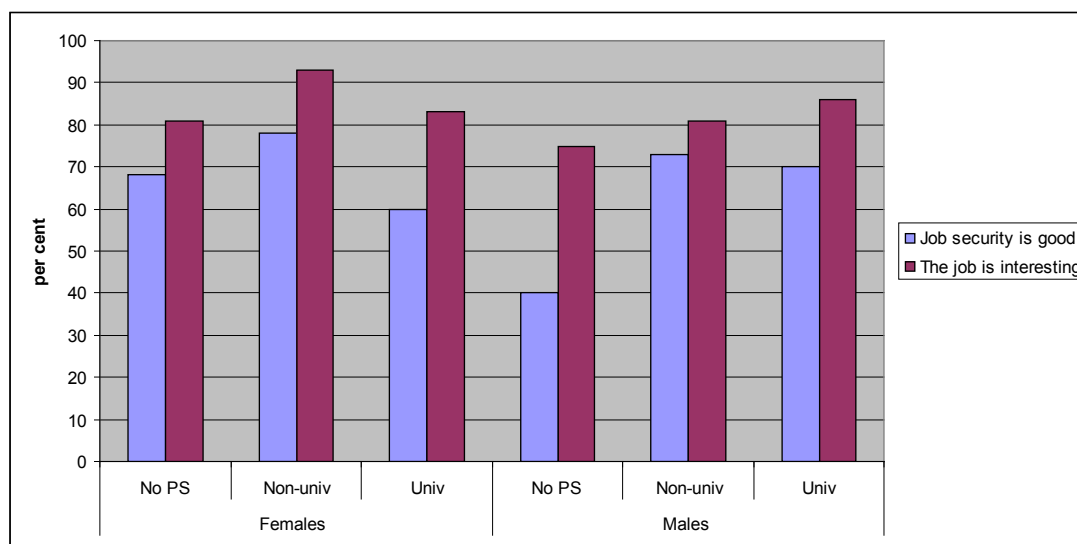
The divergence in working conditions is particularly striking between men and women with no post-secondary education, signalling the changing labour market in Australia. The group that were rapidly becoming the most disadvantaged were those who had low educational qualifications and were working in labouring, manual or low-skill areas. Young women with low educational qualifications were able to obtain work in the expanding service

Table 8. Current or most recent occupation in 1998, aged 24, (%)*

	Women			Men		
	No PS	Non-uni	Uni	No PS	Non-uni	Uni
Casual/irregular paid job	17	18	15	13	13	17
Unemployed, looking for work	1	6	4	7	7	4
Unemployed, not looking for work	1	6	4	0	0	6
Part-time job	11	6	10	9	7	6
Full-time job	51	58	64	67	68	63
Family/home commitments	2	3	2	0	0	1
Self-employed	3	0	0	2	3	1

*Univ = university qualification. No PS = no post-secondary education. Non-univ = post-secondary qualification other than university.

Figure 5. *Attitudes to work by gender and education qualification, aged 25 in 1999, (%)**



*Univ = university qualification. No PS = no post-secondary education. Non-univ = post-secondary qualification other than university.

sector where there were greater opportunities to learn skills on the job that would enable them to gain more secure employment.

The ongoing analysis of the work experiences and employment trajectories of the Life Patterns participants reveals that reaching their goals was not as easy as they had hoped. Job mobility remained high ten years after leaving secondary school. It was not until they were fourteen years out of secondary school that the Life Patterns participants began to achieve greater stability in their jobs. Over this time, a strengthening of gender-based divergence in their pathways is observable. By 2002, women were almost twice as likely (30%) than men (17%) to be working part-time and 72% of women, compared to 85% of men reported that their employment was permanent or renewable. Across all groups of women who completed a post-secondary qualification, they were 10% less likely than their male peers to hold permanent or renewable positions.

Table 9 shows that by the age of 30 women's and men's employment status had consolidated around gender lines. Although women with university degrees were marginally more likely than men with university degrees to be employed in professional occupations, they were less likely than their male peers to be managers.

The analysis conducted by Andres and Wyn (2010) concludes that the educational investment that women made in their tertiary education has not 'paid off' for them to the same extent that it

has their male counterparts. As we point out above, when they set out, these women aimed to achieve professional careers, and they placed the highest priority of any group on achieving these careers. They were the first generation of Australian women to be able to consider this option as a matter of course. However, as Esping-Andersen also points out with regard to patterns of family life and employment in other countries, including Denmark, the United States and European countries, achieving the right work-life balance has remained a challenge. Esping-Andersen's analysis suggests that professional women have had to choose between career and parenthood. Tertiary-educated women in Australia have had to make this choice as well.

The situation for those with little in the way of further education beyond secondary school however, is the worst of any group. The divergence in their pathways, compared with their more educated peers, occurred early – either before or at the point of leaving secondary school, when they entered low-skill, precarious jobs. In the comparative analysis of Australian and Canadian youth by Andres and Wyn, this group was identified as being the most disadvantaged on a whole range of dimensions. In 2002, aged 28, young men with no post-secondary credentials had the highest levels of dissatisfaction with their level of educational achievement, and had the greatest concern about their levels of health and fitness of any other group. These young men were the least likely to say that they drew on family support and were the most disadvantaged in the labour market. In 2004, when they were

Table 9. *Current or most recent occupation (ANZSCO) by post-secondary education completion status, aged 30 in 2004, (%)**

	Women			Men		
	No PS	Non-univ	Univ	No PS	Non-univ	Univ
Labourers	2	1	0	7	2	0
Machinery operators and drivers	0	1	0	10	3	0
Sales workers	5	4	3	7	6	0
Clerical and administrative workers	34	6	10	12	12	10
Community and personal service workers	10	9	4	10	5	2
Technicians and trades workers	2	6	3	12	18	12
Professionals	39	54	72	33	40	67
Managers	8	9	8	10	14	10

*Univ = university qualification. No PS = no post-secondary education. Non-univ = post-secondary qualification other than university.

aged 30 women and men without post-secondary credentials were concentrated in clerical and administrative positions in the workforce and men without post-secondary credentials were working mainly as labourers and to some extent in clerical and administrative positions. Both men and women in this group were also the most likely to express concern about their physical and mental health. At this stage, 20% of women and 32% of men without post-secondary credentials expressed dissatisfaction with their careers. By comparison, dissatisfaction with careers amongst the university-educated was 5% and 12% respectively. Men without post-secondary credentials were also the most likely to be still living in their parents' home by the age of 32. They were also the least likely to draw on friends and family for social support. The situation of men with no post-secondary education highlights the changing significance of educational credentials in Australian youth transitions. Without a post-secondary qualification, and relying on traditions of working in manual occupations that served a previous generation reasonably well, these young men entered a pathway that offered them few options. Without the levels of social support and material resources that their more privileged counterparts are able to access, they have borne the brunt of social and economic change.

Ongoing transitions

The Life Patterns data reveals the shift from patterns of gender equality in terms of educational qualifications to one of a re-inscribing of inequalities as the participants enter the workforce. Although the women in this study by and large expected to use their educational qualifications in the workforce, many found it 'very difficult' – especially those who were entering professional workplaces.

The interviews with both men and women document the challenges they faced in maintaining a balance between the spheres of work and of non-work. Our initial data of Cohort 2 (currently aged 22) resembles this difficulty in balancing work and other spheres of life. (We will address this issue in section 6.) Other research shows that in Australia, work intensity increased in the mid 1990s. In 1995, one study shows that 28% of employees experiencing work-related stress (Morehead et al. 1997). This study showed that in households where both parents worked, 70% of full-time employed mothers always or often felt rushed, as did 56% of fathers, and 52% of women with no dependent children. The Life Patterns participants reflected the intensification of work through their concern about managing the balance between life and work (Wyn et al. 2008). Although both men and women expressed feeling pressured by the lack of balance between work and life, this pressure was translated into choices between work or life by women only. As

one of the female Life Patterns participants said in an interview in 2002 said:

What do I want on my tombstone,
'a great worker' or 'a caring family
member'?

By the age of 36, only 16% of females in a parenting role were employed in a full-time position compared to 88% of men. Table 10 illustrates the gender inequality in employment status in relation to parenting role.

If we look at marital status, we see that the difference is even greater. Ninety four percent of married men and only 20% of married women were working full-time in 2009. No married men were working part-time and 45% of married women were working part-time. Table 11 illustrates these patterns.

This gender gap in employment status reveals a profound difference in the longer-term outcomes for men and women in terms of their workforce participation. The unequal employment status of men and women is even starker when we consider the outcomes for the tertiary-educated. Ninety percent of men who had gained tertiary qualifications were working full-time in 2009 compared with only 38% of women with tertiary qualifications. Women with tertiary qualifications were the most likely of any group (including women with no tertiary qualifications) to be not in the workforce.

It is important to remember that the women with tertiary qualifications were eager to hold career positions and to engage fully in the workforce. They were the most likely to find their work situation 'difficult' and have borne the brunt of the failure of workplaces to keep pace with changing expectations of young Australians to gain educational credentials. If the goal of increasing educational participation rates so that the full diversity of Australians is represented in workplaces, this has not been realised.

Table 10. *Employment status in relation to parenting role, aged 36 in 2009, (%)*

	In a parenting role		Not in a parenting role	
	F/T work	P/T work	F/T work	P/T work
Male	88	0	93	2
Female	16	47	81	18

Table 11. *Employment situation in relation to marital status, aged 36 in 2009, (%)*

	Married		Unmarried	
	F/T work	P/T work	F/T work	P/T work
Male	94	0	82	3
Female	20	45	73	20

Conclusion

Achieving educational credentials became a normative expectation for all young people. The Life Patterns data shows the extent to which young Australians in the 1990s responded to this message and participated in unprecedented numbers in post-secondary education. (Data from our youngest generation corroborates the relevance of gaining post-school credentials, with the majority undertaking further or higher education.) Young women were especially responsive to the opportunity to break the gender barriers established by the previous generation. Young women from middle and high socio-economic backgrounds in particular entered post-secondary institutions and universities to become qualified to work in the emerging urban economies in the service and knowledge sectors.

The longitudinal analysis of the Life Patterns data reveals that gaining educational credentials was a crucial step for the majority of the participants, enabling them to eventually establish themselves in work that they found satisfying and enjoyable. Those who did not gain educational credentials fared the worst, and of these, young men without post-secondary credentials were the most disadvantaged.

However, other gendered patterns began to emerge. Despite their wholehearted engagement with post-secondary education, differences in men's and women's experiences in workplaces become evident during their mid-twenties. By the time they were 30, the division

between tertiary-educated men and women was stark. Married men with a university education were the most likely of any group to be working full-time, and married women with a university education were the least likely.

Their comments in interviews throughout the years that we have been studying them to highlight the ongoing struggle that they felt in attempting to achieve a work-life balance. Gender equality has receded, as women who are parents are resolving the challenge of work-family balance by reducing their levels of workforce participation or by dropping out altogether.

Esping-Andersen argues that this group of the population, across most Western countries, are caught in an ‘incomplete revolution’. New patterns of employment for this group of women have not been matched by new patterns of labour market and family policies. The result is a stalling of change in the domestic sphere, as women continue to hold the major responsibility for children and domestic labour and a critically low level of fertility for this group (Esping-Andersen 2009).

The experiences of this cohort highlight the importance of a holistic conceptual and empirical analysis. The changes in women’s levels of education and their (and the government’s) expectations of employment have implications for other aspects of society. Esping-Andersen sees the changing status of women as a ‘fount of revolutionary upheaval’ (2009:1) and he places this in the foreground as he analyses the nature of societies that are experiencing major transformation. At the risk of over-simplifying Esping-Andersen’s argument, he argues that there has been an uneven social and economic transformation, as young women from higher-socio-economic backgrounds have entered professional working life in unprecedented proportions. The implications of this dramatic shift, he argues, have yet to be fully completed because workplace policies and the organisation of domestic labour remained locked into the past, with family-unfriendly policies, poor childcare and early childhood education provisions and social norms that continue to give full responsibility for domestic work to women. As a result, these women are forced to decide between having children or a career and many are deciding on the career.

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the plight of those who did not undertake post-secondary education. Their pathways diverged from their peers early on, leaving them somewhat ‘stranded’ in precarious, low-skilled work. Their situation also requires a more holistic approach to education and employment policies, recognising that multiple transition points are needed to keep opportunities open for individuals.

CHAPTER 5:

THE DIVERSITY OF RURAL YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Introduction

Transitions for rural youth are tightly linked with the availability of post-school educational and employment opportunities in their communities. A lack of educational and work options often presents young people with the need to abandon their rural communities. Thus, they face the choice of migrating from their communities or of staying and confronting a declining and precarious rural labour market structure; particularly in farming areas. In addition, poor or insufficient infrastructure, such as public transport often compromises the opportunities for young people to remain in their local areas.

Contrary to the traditional idealization of rural spaces as bountiful in freedom, security and socially homogeneous, usually defined by exogenous views, many rural communities are heterogeneous and lacking opportunities, especially for young people. This presents rural young people with an environment of uncertainty. Different studies have reflected young people's view of the idea 'lack of opportunities' as being a 'lack of freedom' (see Alloway et al. 2004, Cuervo 2009). Nonetheless, we acknowledge that not all rural areas are struggling. Some coastal towns (often populated by wealthy retirees or serving as summer holiday destinations) and, particularly, mining towns⁶ have experienced an important socially and economically growth in the last two decades. Mining towns, for instance, might be one of the few rural settings that can still offer

young people traditionally stable transitions from school to work, including long-term employment with appropriate wages to sustain an independent livelihood.

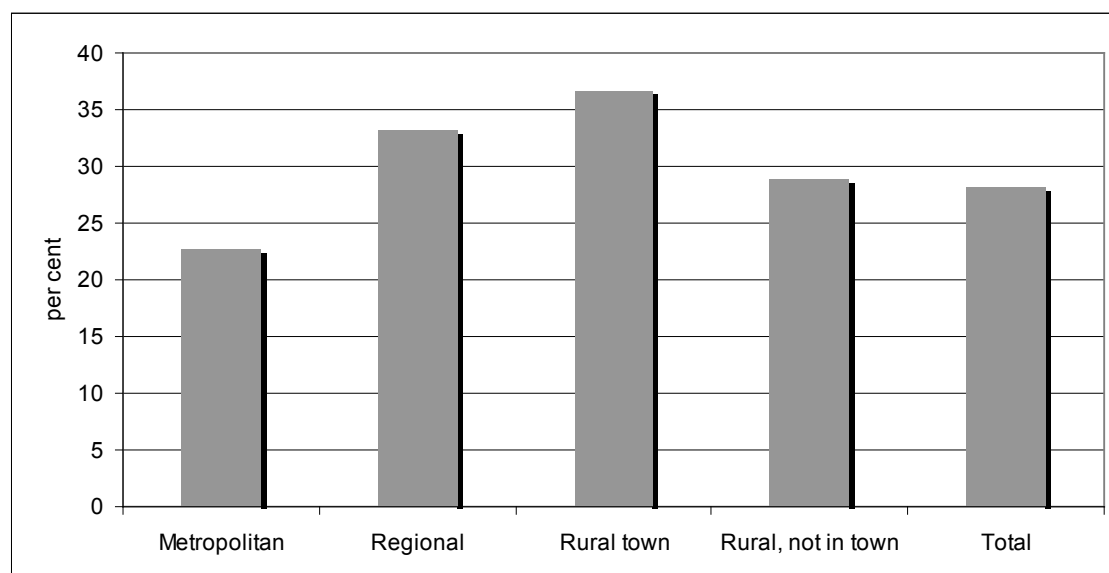
In this section, we examine the experiences of young people living farming areas and the possibilities of making a life for those that decided to stay in their local area. We analyse the precariousness of the rural youth labour market and the difficulties for young people to access it. Next, we look at the different post-school educational choices for young people and the obstacles to access further and higher education, including the issue of rural youth out-migration to metropolitan centres.

Staying in their local area

Recent federal and state inquiries and policy documents reflect that a significant proportion of rural young people wish to stay and live in their communities (see for example RRSDC 2006). The data from the Life Patterns study clearly reflects the youth out-migration to metropolitan and regional centres in search for further and higher education and work opportunities. However, it also shows that a significant minority of young people (approximately 20%) decided to make a living in their local area.

A significant proportion of our rural participants - at least a third - did not take up further study after

Figure 6. *Participants not continuing with post-school study in 2007 by region, (%)*



leaving school. Instead, they overwhelmingly took the pathway straight into employment. This group defied the trend over the last two decades for increasing proportions of young school-leavers to enter further and higher education. In addition, the choices taken up by these rural young people also partly highlight the lack of further and higher education options and the structural barriers (e.g. financial cost, lack of transport and time to travel) they face in comparison to their metropolitan counterparts. Figure 6 shows the proportions of participants by location that decided not to continue with post-school studies.

In accord with the above figure, in their first post-school year, a third of our rural participants stated that full-time work was their main current commitment contrasting only with 10% of metropolitan participants. Moreover, this commitment to full-time employment was also expressed by young people from lower socio-economic background. The first steps in post-school transitions are strongly influenced by socio-economic background and geographical location, while gender does not play a significant role. Different social groups enjoy different opportunities and have different aspirations and some social groups face greater structural inequalities than others. Furthermore, this data coincides with the findings from our first cohort, where linear pathways into further studies within prescribed policy timelines were most achievable for young people from metropolitan areas that were characterised by high and mid socio-economic status rather than for young people from

non-metropolitan areas and low socio-economic status.

It is important to state that some of our rural participants decided to defer their post-school studies and remain in their local area or in a regional centre working at least one year to save enough money to afford the costs of moving to an urban centre to continue with tertiary education. Our data from cohort 2 shows that at least 21% deferred from studying in their first post-school year, with more than two thirds stating they will start full-time study in the next year. A significant minority of these ‘deferrals’ were related to taking a ‘gap year’. It is very common for young Australians to take a ‘gap year’ to travel overseas for work and leisure experience (this was mostly young people from high socio-economic background and metropolitan areas) and/or to earn enough money to later start their degree or become eligible for youth welfare support (see below data about the Youth Allowance benefit). Thus, in accord with recent studies, regional and rural young people were more likely to defer their studies to work and save money than their metropolitan counterparts. Polesel (2009) shows that in Victoria, for instance, regional students are two and a half times more likely to defer a place at university than metropolitan students because of cost-related factors, such as relocating to a new area, and financial barriers. Similarly to this Victorian trend, in the following year, our study shows that seven out of ten of those who deferred had taken up a place at university and one in ten had started some other form of formal further

education one year after leaving secondary school.

Overall, young people from lower socio-economic backgrounds and in rural settings are more likely than their counterparts to go directly into the labour market without further study. Moreover, they tend to view their jobs as the first step in gaining their preferred job or occupation. Therefore, it needs to be remembered that the transition options and decisions for rural youth are very different than for urban youth. These differences, and inequalities, highlight the need for education and income support policies to address the relative disadvantage that rural youth face more adequately.

Most importantly, in terms of their transitions these younger generations of Australians that decided to stay in their rural areas face a different labour market structure than their parents and grandparents' generation. They confront the dramatic transformation and decline of rural spaces in the last few decades. In the following section we offer a brief explanation of these dramatic changes that affect rural young Australians.

The transformation of rural spaces

Rural communities across Australia, and around the world, have been experiencing significant social and economic changes in the last few decades (Alston 2002, Carr & Kefalas 2009, Cuervo 2009, Falk 2001, Kenway et al. 2006, Kenyon et al. 2001, Pincott 2004). A shift in Australian agricultural policy during the last two decades of neoliberal policies established trade liberalisation as a means to increase the sectors' contribution to the national economy (Pritchard 2000). Trade liberalisation included the abolishment or reduction of tariffs and quotas on agricultural products; the dismantlement of statutory marketing authorities; and the simplification of industry regulatory regime (Brett 2007).

The decline of Australian rural communities has distinctive features, such as: higher levels of unemployment than urban areas, lower level of household income, the pulling out of public and private services, loss of young people, and a population shift to regional centres, capital cities and coastal towns. These features are all

interconnected, being each one sometimes cause and others effect.

Yet, many of these challenges are not unique to rural areas. Additionally, not all non-metropolitan areas are struggling. In the last decade, most Australia's regions have experienced a positive economic growth. However, while this robust growth has been marked in a large number of coastal areas, mining towns and capital city areas and outer fringe urban areas; 'economic decline was most common among agricultural regions with a relatively small population base' (BITRE 2005: 19). Table 12 depicts the decline of the economic relevance of different sectors.

Furthermore, in terms of industry share of the national gross domestic product (GDP), the agricultural sector, once a prominent contributor, has experienced a steady decline since the mid-twentieth century. In the first half of the twentieth century the agricultural sector share of the GDP hovered between 20% to 30% to a current 2.5% (ABS 2004, DIISR 2007). Table 12 shows the diminishing relevance of the agriculture sector and its sharp contrast with the growth of two sectors that have an increasingly importance in the rural landscape: the service and mining sector.

The Life Patterns data for rural participants of our cohort 2 corroborates the fact that the availability of work for young people in rural areas is mostly in the service sector. Retail and hospitality and administrative work are the main sectors of employment for those young people that decided to stay in rural areas in their first post-school year. This is illustrated in figure 7.

Thus, traditional sources of employment, particularly for young men, such as farm work or in forestry have been replaced by the service sector. Furthermore, beyond the transformation of the rural labour market, rural participants generally commented either getting a job or the quality of it in non-positive terms.

Making a living in rural areas

The availability of post-school educational and employment opportunities as well as emotional factors (family, social and romantic relationships)

and the inclusiveness and participation of youth in community decision-making structures are the most important reasons why young people decide to stay in a rural area (Cuervo & Wyn 2009, RRSDC 2006). Further, a common trend in our participants' opinion is the role that two traditional social institutions, family and school, play in their choices to stay or leave their communities. That

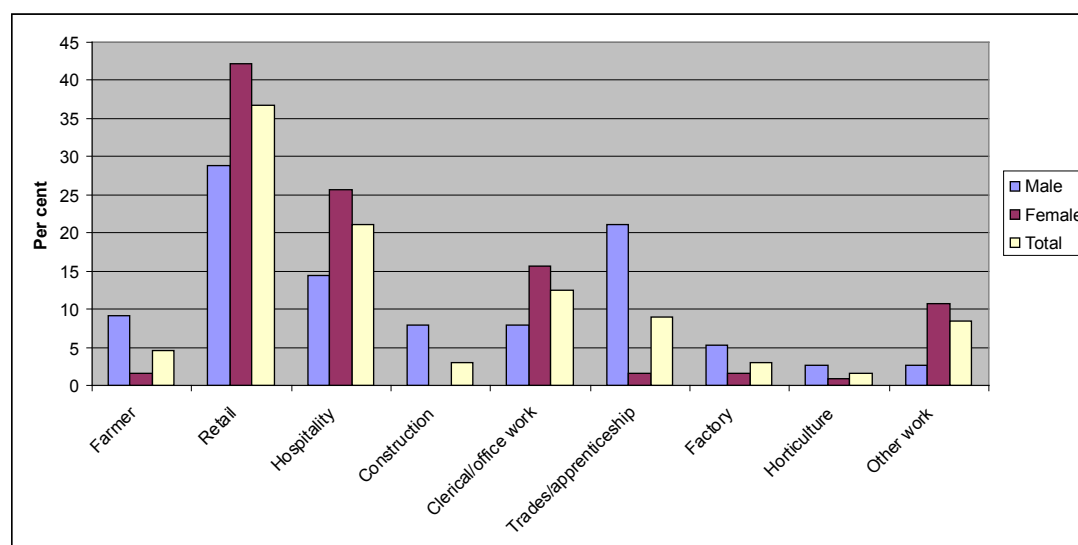
is, parents and teachers exert a great influence in young people's decisions in their early post-school years. This accords with other studies that depict the sway family and school have on young people's decisions (see Alloway et al. 2004, Cuervo 2009).

Table 12. Australian industry 2006-07, (%)

	Services	Manufacturing	Mining	Agriculture	Total
Contribution to GDP					
Industry share	77.1	12.1	8.3	2.5	100.0
Annual growth	4.2	2.2	7.6	-22.4	3.3
Investment					
Industry share	59.3	12.4	22.8	5.6	100.0
Annual growth	12.4	-12.8	22.0	-16.7	8.3
Exports					
Industry share	22.7	41.9	30.9	4.5	100.00
Annual growth	10.5	13.7	8.8	-9.1	10.2
Employment					
Industry share	85.0	10.4	1.3	3.3	100.00
Annual growth	3.3	2.3	0.9	0.2	3.0

Source: DIISR 2007

Figure 7. Main employment sector for participants in cohort 2 in rural areas, aged 19-20, in 2007, (%)



Note: Trades & apprenticeship include plumbing, electrician, mechanics, etc. Other work includes sports trainee, defence force, caretaker, childcare, cleaning, and housekeeping.

However, the decline of traditional employment, such as farming and forestry, coupled with the impact of natural disasters (e.g. the drought) has contributed to rural youth leaving their local area. As noted in figure 7, the service industry – with its casual, temporary and low skill jobs – have become the main employment sector in many parts of rural Australia. As stated by Alston and Kent (2006), young people who decide to remain in their communities, especially those who leave school early, undergo significant unemployment and underemployment. Youth unemployment is four times (14.3% for 15-19 year olds) and two times (6.7% for 20-24 year olds) higher than unemployment among those aged 25 and above (3.6%) (Mission Australia 2006). In non-metropolitan Victoria, unemployment in the financial year 2005-06 was of 18% for 15-19 years old and 10% for 20-24 years old; while 5% for 25-34 years old (RRSDC 2006: 324). The few jobs available in rural towns are generally casual, part-time or as part of apprenticeship schemes. They are mostly found in retail and hospitality or in farms during the harvest season. Thus, for those staying in rural areas, traditional pathways from school to work are precarious, uncertain or just not available. On the contrast, our participants in metropolitan areas were able to choose, leave and find another job, albeit precarious or casual work, with much less effort than their rural peers.

Most importantly, the radical transformation of the rural youth labour market has had a profound impact in the identities and social relationships of young people putting the ‘under the pressure of change and under the pressure to change’ (Kenway et al. 2006: 4). For instance, Kenway and colleagues assert that under the pressure of these rapid transformations, each rural place ‘is having to rethink and reconfigure its economic base, its view of sustainable living, its sense of place and what this means for local identities and identifications’ (p. 6). Different social researchers have emphasised the ‘feminisation’ of the rural labour market (see Kenway et al. 2006, Little & Morris 2005). That is, the changing roles and identities for young people, particularly males (as rural spaces have been traditionally symbolised as ‘males spaces’), with more young females engaging in work than in previous generations; and with the shift from traditional physical and outdoor jobs in the primary and secondary sectors to the service sectors (with its retail and hospitality jobs), as main employer in rural areas.

The following stories show the collapse of the rural youth full-time labour market, the changing nature of rural work and the demise of traditional transitions from school to work that enabled young people to remain in their local areas and make a self-sustained living.

Tamara, one of our cohort 2 participants living in a regional Victoria, experienced the hardship of being unemployed. She spent 10 months looking for a job in her town and nearby areas through different avenues; such as job agencies, internet sites and handing out resumes. She believes that, ‘there are not jobs in regional towns’. Jonathan also lives in a regional town, in New South Wales. He had a job while he was finishing secondary school: it was still a part time job that I got through an acquaintance’. Jonathan was working in a retail shop but the shop closed due to financial difficulties.

I was doing about four hours a week, and after I finished school I’d would go up to about twenty hours a week so it was sort of good; money wise I was sort of right but after they closed I didn’t have any work at all for several months so it was sort of eating into my savings and just not being able to do anything so I’d be very sort of stringent in what I did. I think that’s the only thing I struggled with, not finding full time work. I found job hunting very difficult, very difficult. I was just dropping my resume at every place I could. I’m just um overweight person and I don’t know if I’m right with saying this but some people sort of think “he’s not going to work as hard because he’s overweight” but I can be up there with everyone else like I mean I’ll put my hardest um into getting the job done, I’m one of those people who’ll push myself.

Jonathan was able to find work through an acquaintance as a kitchen hand and chef apprentice in the bar of the local university: ‘It’s just a kitchen hand a work, and hopefully I can move on to becoming a chef or something in that but see what goes on so.’ Jonathan’s story also highlights another important issue for young people in non-metropolitan areas. While our quantitative data shows that at least one in five of our participants that decide to stay in their local rural area found it hard to find a job in their first post-school year, the data from the interviews reveals that employment is

usually secured through young people's personal resources, their own social network, rather than relying in more traditional and contemporary ways, such as newspapers advertisement, internet search or local advertisements in public spaces.

Like Jonathan, Roger also had to rely on his personal resources, his own infrastructure, to find a job. Roger grew up in a small town in north-west of Victoria. He enjoyed the leisure lifestyle offered by rural areas and like many young men played Australian Rules, albeit having to travel more than an hour to a nearby town two or three times a week. After leaving school, Roger did a traineeship at the bar in the sports club where he has been playing football for the last five years (he currently coaches one of the junior teams, a job that he got through one of his former teachers at school). Roger says that he 'pretty much just got offered it' and that is how things 'pretty much happen over here.'

Further, in order to lower the cost of travelling and not spending his wages in petrol, Roger moved out of his parents' house to a shared-house with some acquaintances in the nearby town. After a few months, he had to move out, staying with his sister for a month. He is currently living in the house of his football coach. As he lives away from his parental home, Roger receives welfare support – 'home allowance' – which he asserts is a critical component of his budget and helps him make ends meet. Like many other rural young people in traineeships he states that 'just scraping through on not much money is probably the hardest thing, and living away from home'. After several months working in the bar Roger has been able to work more hours per week, even some weekends' nights. The pay in the bar is not very good, 'it is a little bit rough, just to get by'; forcing Roger to look for some extra work. He managed to find work with a friend in a factory: 'one of my mates' old man owns a tool factory, so when I had a day off or something I'd jump in there and do a bit of work for him.'

He realises that many of his friends are unemployed or can only find temporary employment or apprenticeships. Roger feels lucky and that his connections have paid well. He is looking for another job, mostly because he wants to leave the hospitality work (bar work) and because he wants to work for more than 30 hours a week.

He is looking around and in the newspapers but he knows it is difficult to find other work: 'Yeah, there's not much around, there's a few apprenticeships and stuff, but I don't really want to do an apprenticeship, there's not a great deal of exciting opportunities.' Further, like many other of our rural participants, the lack of job opportunities has Roger thinking that if he does not find a permanent a better remunerated job he will 'make a change of scenery, move interstate', to Queensland or Adelaide.

Other participants have also found hard to live on apprenticeship job. Fred found it 'a bit hard to live on the current apprentice wages, but welfare benefits for apprentices were quite helpful.' Fred left to Melbourne to continue his career as a motor mechanic. He believes the hardest part of moving out from your local area is leaving his girlfriend in his hometown because she was working and saving money to come and study in Melbourne. For Mathew, it was surprising how difficult was to get an apprenticeship, especially when 'everyone's going on about the skills shortage'. After looking for a while he finally got one. He also found it a bit difficult not having much money in his first year on the apprenticeship but the pay gets better every year. He works approximately 38 hours per week and sometimes 15 hours overtime. Matthew lives with his father who helps him get through when things get tough. He would have liked to move away from Tasmania after he finished school but he 'couldn't as it wasn't financially possible'. The lack of appropriate and decent wages does not allow many young people in rural areas to plan for the future or to establish their own independent livelihood.

The collapse of the youth full-time labour market in rural areas has pressured young people to take an apprenticeship, with its poor pay, in order to open a door for themselves in the labour market. In addition, employers in rural areas have stated that the restructuring of the rural labour market coupled with the decline of traditional industries has reduced the apprenticeships that can be offered (Kenway et al. 2006). This includes eroding the conventional notion of rural areas as males spaces. Finally, the above stories reveal the need to rely on their own resources to find work.

Most important for youth post-school transitions, traditional full-time and permanent employment

in agricultural areas as a tool for security and for planning other issues in their life has been undermined by the decline of farming, neoliberal policies and natural disasters, such as the drought. In the last three decades, post-school pathways for rural school students has involved even more risk and uncertainty than for the general population because of the more 'restricted work and lifestyle choices and the economic and labour market uncertainties associated with rural and remote regions' (Kilpatrick et al. 2003: 84).

The relevance of further education in rural Australia

The data from our cohort 2 shows that a significant proportion of young people that stay in rural areas continue with further education after leaving secondary school. Technical and Further Education (TAFE) courses are the preferred choice of post-school study for young people in rural areas and for those from lower socio-economic background, with no gender difference in this choice. Approximately 15% of our participants attended TAFE in 2007, while nationally the figure was around 27% (NCVER 2007). Table 13 depicts the preferred institution of those that continued studying in 2007 and 2008.

The figures in Table 13 show an increase in the percentage of young people attending university institutions across the board and a slight decrease in the percentage attending TAFE institutions between the first and second post-school year. As mentioned above, this increase is attributable to the significant number of young people who deferred study in their first year and then moved

to urban centres to attend university rather than participants discontinuing TAFE courses. Thus, of those who deferred in their first year, 74% enrolled in a university institution and 12% in a TAFE.

TAFE courses gain a critical importance in rural areas, particularly where the local school is not able to offer a vocational course, such as mechanics, automotive or beauty therapy. This issue highlights a perennial disadvantage faced by rural school students: a lack of breadth of curriculum. Peter's story illustrates this point. He found the careers advice at school useful and his teachers supportive of his aspirations; however, the school did not have any automotive course and/or facilities to offer him the course. Thus, after completing Year 11, he decided to step 'straight into TAFE... out of school, to get more information and more knowledge in automotive.'

Most importantly, our research and other research and policy studies (see Alston & Kent 2006, Australian Government 2008, RRSDC 2006) reflect another significant disadvantage faced by rural youth: the structural barriers rural young people face to attend TAFE and remain in their communities. These are the cost of petrol, a lack of public transport and a higher need of financial parental support. John, one of the participant's in Life Patterns cohort 2, asserted that 'living in a rural town and continuing studying after school is almost impossible, it costs you too much money and time'. He was living in a rural town in the northwest of Victoria, an hour and a half away from a regional centre of approximately 25,000 people, which offered a TAFE course of his interest. To attend the TAFE, he had to commute four times a week to this regional centre. Initially he stayed with his parents to save money in accommodation but the commuting

Table 13. Preferred institution for those continuing study in 2007 and 2008 by gender, SES and location, (%)

		2007		2008	
		University	TAFE	University	TAFE
Gender	Male	77	15	84	13
	Female	78	15	83	11
SES	Low	70	20	76	17
	High	88	6	93	6
Location	Metropolitan	83	12	85	11
	Non-metropolitan	73	17	83	12

was taking a heavy toll on his life: restricting the possibility of taking up other commitments; fragmenting his social relationships between the town where he lived and the regional centre where he studied; and costing too much money on petrol. These barriers to his post-school education forced him to move out to the regional centre ‘to a mate’s place’.

John’s story highlights a significant issue in the mobility of young people. Internal migration in Australia is happening not just from rural to metropolitan areas but also from rural towns to “sponge” regional centres, absorbing the population that might have gone to cities (Kenyon et al. 2001, RRSDC 2006). A critical factor contributing to the migration to “sponge” regional centres, and urban areas, is the loss of public and private services in rural towns, including further education and work opportunities. This loss of services in rural areas marks a loss of opportunities and a poorer quality of life, particularly for young people that have fewer resources to travel to access these resources, thus having to rely on the precarious available public transport. For example, the lack of a range of public transport options represents ‘a significant barrier to the wellbeing of rural young people, and a disincentive for younger people to live and work in rural Victoria’ (RRSDC 2006: 136).

Patterns of immigration in Australia: the rural youth brain drain

A plethora of studies signalled a lack of further and higher education and employment opportunities are the principal factors in the rural youth out-migration to metropolitan and regional areas (Alloway et al. 2004, Cuervo 2009, 2011, Eacott & Sonn 2006, RRSDC 2006). As mentioned above, rural young people are challenged by processes of institutional change where traditional support structures of a social, local or workplace kind have been weakened or lost. This includes an erosion of traditional rural identities that revolved around an economic structure based on primary and secondary industries (e.g. farming, forestry), and this has significant implications for rural young people’s sense of belonging to their communities. Most importantly, one of the main factors in

rural youth out-migration is the lack of local higher education opportunities. The need to obtain further educational credentials to access a precarious labour market contributes to the need to migrate for rural young people. Different research studies have found that this migratory pattern is fostered and desired not just by young people but also by their parents and teachers and other members of their communities. For many young people, leaving their local community has become the inevitable pathway in their transition to adulthood (see Alloway et al. 2004, Cuervo 2009, 2011). The limited structural opportunities in their rural towns are overcome by constructing their own opportunities to be pursued outside their communities.

It is important to state that there are other subjective factors in the choice to migrate to metropolitan centres. For instance, an important reason is rural youth perceptions of urban centres as an exciting alternative with its diversity of people and lifestyles and rural towns as prosaic and lacking options (Kenyon et al. 2001).

The data from the Life Patterns program accords with this national trend in rural youth out-migration. For instance, in the early 1990s, at least a third of our participants in cohort 1 migrated to metropolitan centres to continue, mostly, with further and higher education and to gain access to the labour market. In their first initial post-school years, our second cohort also shows a high level of geographical mobility, mostly from young people living in rural towns and farms, and some from regional areas, to the major metropolitan centres.

At the outset of our cohort 2 in 2005-2006, we had a fairly even geographical spread with approximately 40% of our participants living in metropolitan centres. By 2008, more than half of the participants were living in metropolitan centres. The proportion of those living in ‘country towns’ or ‘rural, not in town’ (mostly farms) decreased significantly from 2005-2006 (their last years of secondary school) to 2008 (their second post-school year). This pattern of rural-urban migration reflects the need for rural young people to leave their communities in the search for further studies, employment opportunities and new lifestyles. Table 14 illustrates the migratory patterns of cohort 2.

Table 14. *Location of Cohort 2 sample in 2005, 2007 and 2008 (n=942), (%)*

	2005	2007*	2008*
Metropolitan	39	44	57
Regional city	29	32	29
Country town/ rural area	32	18	13

* Note: In 2007 and 2008 some students did not answer this question in the survey, mostly because they were overseas taking a 'gap year'.

Life Patterns interview data also confirms that for some young people moving away from rural or regional areas was an active choice they made, in search of new opportunities, particularly educational options.

The cost of higher education for rural young people

Every year in Australia there is a major migration of non-metropolitan students to urban areas to continue with post-school studies (Godden 2007). However, while secondary school students living in rural and remotes areas include almost a third of the total population, only '17% of tertiary places are taken up by rural students' (Alston & Kent 2006: 21). The most important reason for the low numbers of rural young people attending tertiary education is the financial cost of attending university for rural students and their families (see Cuervo 2009, Godden 2007, James 2002). Godden (2007) calculates that for young people in non-metropolitan areas the annual living costs (including relocation and start up costs) to attend a metropolitan higher education institution ranges from \$18,000 to \$26,000.

A few of the young people we interviewed mentioned the costs associated with attending university. Some of the young people were able to get Youth Allowance and this enabled them focus on establishing themselves at university and postponing finding part time work. Others were unable to get Youth Allowance and because of costs of relocation, rent and living expenses, which were in part covered by parental support, had to find part time work as soon as they started university. This placed some stress on them and on their ability to then visit home during the university semester.

Most mentioned that they would like to study overseas for a semester on a university exchange but most thought this would not be possible because of financial constraints. They were aware of the costs already associated with having to live out of home to attend university in Australia.

As mentioned above, an important proportion of our participants had moved from home in a rural or regional area to a university in either a regional or metropolitan centre. This brought up a range of issues, such as how young people construct new social networks in a new location and the different inequalities in terms of access to parental resources between metropolitan and rural people and between people from low and higher socio-economic background.

Some of our participants were able to draw on their parental support and afford accommodation in university residences. This provided an easier transition to independent living. The participants mentioned that they were able to construct new social networks and engage in different social activities. University residences provided support in regard to looking after themselves, provision of food and stable accommodation. Most say they will stay in the on campus accommodation for a year or 2 to establish themselves and their networks and then maybe move out to rental accommodation after that. The following participants illustrate this pattern:

Julia: I am staying in International House so you meet lots of people and its really good. I think I will stay just for this year then I'll move off campus because I want to meet some people and lots of my friends are coming next year, they took a year off to travel and work. It's interesting to be here because in my town everyone is sort of the same, no one is sort of out there and its good to meet people with weird coloured hair and everyone is really open and accepting.

Anna: I will stay on campus at first I thought maybe just a year or 2 but now I have found I really like it. It is just the whole atmosphere of it and the support you get from everyone and you meet so many new people when you are on campus its awesome, lots of fun.

Our data, and other studies (see Cuervo 2009), have found a correlation between the election of a metropolitan area to migrate to study and having a family or social network to rely on. That is, rural

young people are more likely to consider a place over another if support is available for them, which will smoothen the transition. For example, Melinda's extended family and previous visits to Melbourne helped with her transition from the farm in northwest Victoria to Melbourne.

Well rooming at college definitely helps because you have, see I could definitely see myself becoming a bit of a hermit if I like rented or something, lived on my own. So definitely living in a college helps because you've got that social factor. So it's a bit hard to get lonely when there are people everywhere. I have family in Melbourne who I used to come down and stay with quite regularly so Melbourne kind of feels like home anyway.

Georgia also benefited from extended family and parental support:

I always thought when I went to boarding school it would make the transition to university a lot easier; like the living away from home part of it. But I haven't really sort of got into the whole paying bills and rent; and that is yet because I've got Nanna living with me so she's sort of paying for a bit of it and I'm paying for a bit of it, and Mum and Dad are paying for it as well. My Mum and Dad and Nanna both bought the house at the start of the year so Nanna and I can live there.

The majority of rural participants that were attending university had to work to financially sustained themselves; particularly those without an extended family in their new home or without parental support. This put pressure in how to balance their different obligations in life. Furthermore, young people from metropolitan areas who did not have to re-locate to study also confronted this issue. In the next section we will discuss the intersections of the different spheres of life for all our participants. These spheres have to do with how young people balance study and work, family and social relationships and how they manage their wellbeing and health.

Conclusion

Many rural young people and their parents believe leaving town is the only option to continue higher and further education and to find broader employment opportunities (Alloway et al. 2004, Cuervo 2009, Eacott & Sonn 2006). A dependence on the labour market puts at risk the sustainability for rural youth to create a future in their home communities. The few jobs available in rural towns are generally casual or part-time; these include work in the few grocery stores or during the harvest. Precarious employment and unemployment contribute in a direct way to the depopulation and social and economic decline of rural communities, placing a greater burden on the provision of support services for those who remain. This lack of suitable employment and of further educational opportunities are the strongest 'push-pull' factors for those who leave rural communities. Most importantly, the collapse of the youth full-time labour market signifies the breakdown of traditional rural transitions from school to work that were common for previous generations of Australians. It highlights the changing nature of work and the challenges to traditional rural youth identities, particularly for males.

Structural changes of rural economies have affected the fabric of communities and disrupted traditional forms of livelihood for young people. Those young people staying in their rural areas have to rely, mainly, on their personal resources to secure an employment position. However, these jobs are in some occasion part of the apprentice scheme, which include low wages that make the attaining of an independent livelihood very difficult. Furthermore, those attending further education in their rural and regional areas are confronted with financial barriers that compromise their possibility to obtain an education that would enable them to insert themselves in the labour market. Finally, these structural, and other non-structural, barriers forced many rural young people to leave their communities. This migration jeopardise the sustainability of rural communities but also imply important disadvantages for rural youth in their transition to adulthood.

CHAPTER 6

INTERSECTIONS IN YOUTH TRANSITIONS

Introduction

One of the most significant contributions of the Life Patterns project is the insights that have been generated about young Australians' lives over time and across a breadth of life areas. Most research on youth transitions is based on a snapshot approach at one point in time, focusing on a very narrow range of aspects of life. Longitudinal research (for example, HILDA) tends to focus on a selection of dimensions that are pre-determined. By contrast, the Life Patterns project, which has been studying cohort 1 for 19 years and cohort 2 for 5 years, has developed a depth and breadth of coverage over time that provides insights into the nature of transitions for different groups across a wide range of life areas.

In this section we focus on the intersections that occur in real life across traditional policy areas. As we stated in previous sections, rather than experiencing smooth linear transitions to adulthood, the transitions of both cohorts reveal non-linear patterns that can be explained by the interconnections between different spheres of their lives. In this section we draw attention to the impact education and work have on young people's family life and personal relationships, and their wellbeing and health.

We analyse the trajectories of both cohorts to reveal the common issues that have affected young people over the last two decades, exploring

the opportunities and challenges for these young Australians in their transition to adulthood. Our analysis cautions us against media stereotypes that portray generations X and Y as being radically different from one another. On the contrary, our data shows that both cohorts have similar, relatively modest aims in life; such as finding a stable job and a relative economic security rather than making a 'lot' of money or 'achieving a position of influence' (Dwyer et al. 2005). Further, they place a high priority on having stable, long-lasting personal relationships, owning their own home and having a balance in life, including keeping healthy.

Re-thinking work

The social conditions that young Australians encountered in the 1990s placed them in a potentially stressful situation because they accepted the notion that gaining educational qualifications would enable them to achieve their goals of job security, personal fulfilment in work and personal relationships and enjoying family life. For instance, in relation to work, the post-1970 generation has been conscious of the necessity for 'flexibility in how they define their careers' and they felt that to be doing well they must be 'proactive in ways their parents did not seem to contemplate in the 1960s and 1970s' (Dwyer et al. 2003: 18). The working experiences of cohort 1 taught them that 'having a single career for life' was something of the past and that it was important to keep their options open. That is, the

taken for granted understanding of career held by their parents' generation was changing from being a permanent job to the notion of a job that had scope for advancement, involved commitment and offered some degree of personal fulfilment (Dwyer et al. 2003). Interestingly, participants in cohort 2 agreed with this conceptualisation of jobs and career. They were slightly more likely than cohort 1 to strongly agree that 'having a single career for life is a thing of the past' and to reject the idea that 'career jobs really exist these days' than cohort 1. Furthermore, they have also learned to be mobile and flexible in the labour market, to be life-long learners and autonomous in their transitions to adulthood. Interestingly, both generations emphasised that the relationships between study, work and other areas of life were more complex than they had expected.

This loosening link between career and job, and particularly the link between full-time positions and a career, was embodied by our first cohort throughout their twenties and up to their thirties. The following comments by these participants in their early thirties characterise the conceptualisation of work and life by the post-1970 generation:

Fred: A career is who you are and what you make of life - who I am personally and professionally and ongoing.

Sally: My career is a 'mindset' of what I do every day; it's about what I learn, the journey I am on, the big chunks of learning and the relationships I develop. I'm going to be in life, not wait for it to happen! In my twenties I was searching, but now I know myself much better. I am much more confident.

George: Each job offers something different, and I like becoming more versatile; it helps to also stretch you so you can find your own limits. It is just difficult getting the balance right.

Furthermore, the extended period of time spent in education, the costs of this education in fees and in foregone income, the challenge of finding employment and the precarious nature of employment created a situation where many young people felt that their life was not in balance.

Their strategies for achieving success in the workplace proved to be barriers in personal life. As Andres and Wyn (2010: 159) comment, being flexible and keeping their options open were useful approaches in relation to their education and employment 'careers'; however, 'these approaches have possibly been a less functional way of forming and maintaining relationships'.

The gap between hopes and realities

The data of the Life Patterns program has convinced us of the emergence of a gap between what the young people in both cohorts hoped to achieve and the reality. In this section we present data on what young people's priorities were and document the struggle they faced in achieving their goals, particularly in the personal domain. We draw attention to this gap because of the impact education and work have had in other domains of young people's lives.

During their twenties and thirties, participants in cohort 1 have struggled to find a balance in life between their professional and personal commitments. In their early post-school years, cohort 2 is also working hard to find a balance in the different dimensions of their lives.

For cohort 1, the gap between their hopes and realities became a significant theme to emerge in the interviews and through the open-ended sections of the surveys for both cohorts. This gap between their hopes and realities, and the struggle to achieve a balance, has continued well into their thirties. For instance, in 2002 and 2009 we asked participants in cohort 1 to rank their estimate of where they spent most of their time and to compare this with where they would like to spend most of their time. Table 15 describes their responses.

Table 15 demonstrates that through their twenties and up to their mid-thirties, family life and relationships are the most important aspect for the post-1970 generation. Moreover, there is an imbalance between how young people spent their time and how they would like to spend it: both men and women would like to spend more time on family and personal relationships, and less time at work; however, for men pursuing work

Table 15. *Time spent on different activities – comparison of actual time spent with preferred time spent by gender and age, in 2002 and 2009, (%)*

		“Most of the time spent...”					
		Pursuing my work & career		Personal relationships		Family & home life	
		Actual	Want to	Actual	Want to	Actual	Want to
Male	2002	55	41	20	49	30	53
	2009	63	21	8	37	49	70
Female	2002	50	36	32	56	51	68
		34	10	23	45	72	80

and career has increased between 2002 and 2009, while for both gender there is less time spent on their personal relationships.

As we asked participants to tell us what caused the differences in time commitments, they almost uniformly said that work commitments overwhelmed all other areas of life. As these participants comment, work and family balance emerges as the biggest challenge for participants:

Robert: The usual struggle with work/life balance while in your 30s with a family, trying to set yourself up!

Anthony: I am currently time poor!! A full-time job, plus doing a master in business and a family with two kids; it is very difficult to fit all in.

By contrast, women began to spend less time on work and career, creating a better alignment between how they spent their time and how they wanted to spend their time. Even so, women continue to report that they spend more time in employment than they would like. Table 15 shows the ongoing struggle to maintain a balance between time spent at work and time spent with family and on personal relationships. Even though many women have responded to this by reducing their hours of employment, they continue to experience a “gap” between the way this works out in reality and what they would ideally like. In addition, whilst many people wish to spend more time with family, for some family responsibilities can also be stressful.

Karina: Doing too much at home- I feel I have slipped into a 1950s housewife role

(caring for child, cooking, cleaning) except that I am also working!!

Helen: Three kids at home and a husband who works very long hours means I am busy being a Mum and not devoting time to my personal ambitions, health and my career.

Thus, as we stated in section 4, it was mostly women who felt that domestic responsibilities made it difficult to sustain a balance in life. Nonetheless, both males and females participants stated that family was the most important aspect of their life; particularly since during their twenties and early thirties the pressure of gaining post-school credentials and securing a stable job hindered their opportunities to form their own family. We turn now our attention to this complex issue for cohort 1.

‘Delaying’ marriage and parenthood

One of the most important impacts of social and economic policies and the deregulation of the labour market in the 1990s has been the possibility for young people to form a family of their own, thus conceptualising young people ‘on hold’ or delaying adulthood. Past definitions of adulthood rely heavily on reaching some traditional ‘markers’ such as careers, marriage and parenthood. Compared to their parents and grandparents’ generations, young people in the 1990s and 2000s have had to wait until their late twenties to achieve these markers. For instance, for their parents’ generation (popularised as ‘Baby Boomers’) the median age at first marriage

for women was 21 years old and for men 24 years old, while for the post-1970 generation (our cohort 1) it was at 27 years old for women and 29 years old for men (ABS 2009). This generational difference responds to the emergence of new possibilities and priorities for younger generations; to the greater proportion of young people participating in post-school education, combined with the challenges encountered in a precarious labour market and the formation of non-traditional relationships before marriage, such as de facto relationships (ABS 2009, Andres & Wyn 2010, Wyn et al. 2008)⁷. In sum, generational differences in this domain of life reveal significant discontinuities with the past.

Interestingly, from the outset of their post-school life having their own family was an important goal. At the age of 22 (in 1996) we asked our participants in cohort 1 about their priorities in life. Nearly half (44%) said that they would be 'very unhappy' if they never married. A third of the women (33%) thought that it was 'very likely' that they would be married in five years' time and 23% thought that this was likely. This means that 56% of the women thought that it was at least likely that they would be married by the age of 27. In fact, four years later, when they were aged 26, only 29% of the cohort were married. By the age of 30, 28% of cohort 1 was still single. The gap between their hopes to become parents and the realities are just as stark. By the age of 30, only 22% of cohort 1 participants were parents.

It was not until they gained control over their professional careers that the majority of the post-1970 generation established a family of their own, particularly in the traditional sense. Table 16 reflects their 'relationship status' in their late twenties compared to their mid-thirties.

In addition, in their early twenties, cohort 2 presents the same patterns of their predecessors (cohort 1). By the age of 20 in 2008, only 7% of our cohort 2 participants are living with their partner, while 63% are living at home with their parents. (Our preliminary analysis of cohort 2 survey in 2010, at the age of 22, reveals that almost 60% are living at home with their parents and 14% with their partners; while 6% are in a de facto relationship, and 2% are married or in a parenting role.)

Achieving a balance in life

As mentioned above, from the outset, cohort 1 learned that to navigate the post-industrial labour market they had to keep their options open, be flexible and mobile. Cohort 2 embraced this attitude towards education and employment. Most importantly, young people in both cohorts have sought to make personal adjustments in their life in order to achieve a balance of commitments that will enable them to be well. For instance, one of the most important concerns of our participants was the difficulties in balancing work and study with personal and social relationships. This is related to the overload of work and study, including the irregular shifts in their employments. For instance, looking back at the last ten years since they left school, some of our participants from cohort 1 stated:

Peter: My generation is deeply concerned with attempting to attain a better work-life balance. This seems to be the catch-fry of my friends, and is certainly a reason for why I am looking for another job.

Table 16. Relationship status of cohort 1 aged 28 in 2002 and aged 35 in 2009, by gender, (%)

	2002 (aged 28)			2009 (aged 35)		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Single	37	29	31	13	20	18
Married	34	34	34	68	64	65
On-going or de facto relationship	25	27	26	N/A	N/A	N/A
In a relationship – living together	N/A	N/A	N/A	9	12	11
In a relationship – not living together	N/A	N/A	N/A	9	4	6
Divorced	0	0	0	1	1	1
In a parenting role	8	15	13	63	64	63

Sheila: All these years I feel that I have always been too busy and too exhausted, just dealing with the hassles of day to day life to be able to think of the bigger picture.

Patricia: I sacrificed relationships to study and get a career established; which I have not achieved so far. What I really desired more than a successful career is a happy family life, marriage and children. Most of my friends are married so there is no one to go out socially to meet new people with and I am often excluded from social events as I don't have a partner.

This difficulty to balance different spheres of life is also a significant challenge for our youngest cohort. Particularly, as they have engaged and combined work and study since their secondary school days. For example, at least half of our cohort 2 participants have already had a job while in secondary school and approximately nine out of ten of them have done some work in their first post-school year. Further, by their second year out of school, at least 80% of them were combining study and work. Figure 8 illustrates the combination of study and work in their first two post-school years.

In terms of availability of employment – albeit in many instances precarious, temporal and casual – participants in cohort 2 have benefited from an interrupted ten years of national economic growth (OECD 2009). Nonetheless, a significant proportion of them, at least a quarter, found it hard to secure a 'suitable job' (that is, a job that fit in with their studies and/or family and home commitments). Moreover, we found important social differences in terms of achieving a job that allowed young people to balance their different priorities in life. Young people from lower socio-

economic background were more likely to find it hard to gain access to a suitable work than those from higher socio-economic background; while females were two times more likely to find it hard than males.

In addition, the pressure of combining casual and precarious work with study is often intensified by the need to work irregular shifts. Almost seventy per cent of those working were employed on weekend jobs and more than half were employed during evening shifts and on public holidays. These figures are presented in table 17.

These figures show a strong correlation between participating in further and higher education and having to work irregular shifts. This pervasiveness of employment in young people's time implies a structural barrier in pursuing other goals in life, such as developing personal relationship or spending time with their families. The difficulty to pursue these goals was present in both cohorts' comments and responses.

Thus, cohort 2 also shows a struggle to balance life. Figure 9 reveals that by their second post-school year, 52% wanted to spend most of their time on family and home life but only 29% were able to do so. Further, 59% wanted to spend most of their time on personal relationships, but only 31% could do so.

Like cohort 1, their transition to adulthood is marked by the challenge of achieving a balance in life across the commitments of study, work, personal and social relationships and wellbeing. Young people were interested on spending more time on issues that they valued, such as developing their personal relationships and family life. Managing these different commitments is a major source of stress, particularly for those that were lacking the

Figure 8. Cohort 2 participants combining study and work in 2007 and 2008, (%)

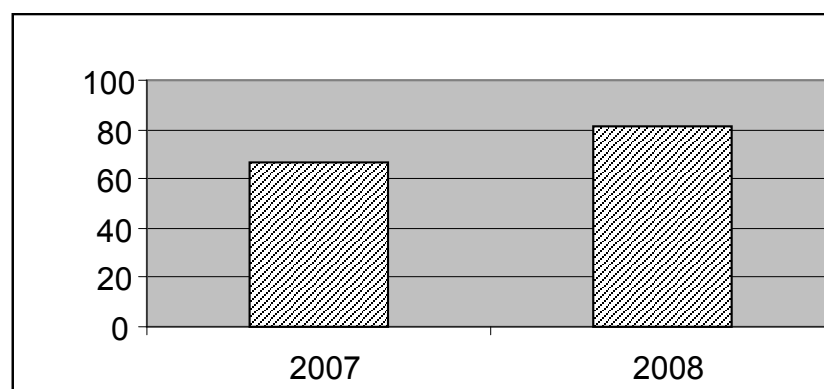
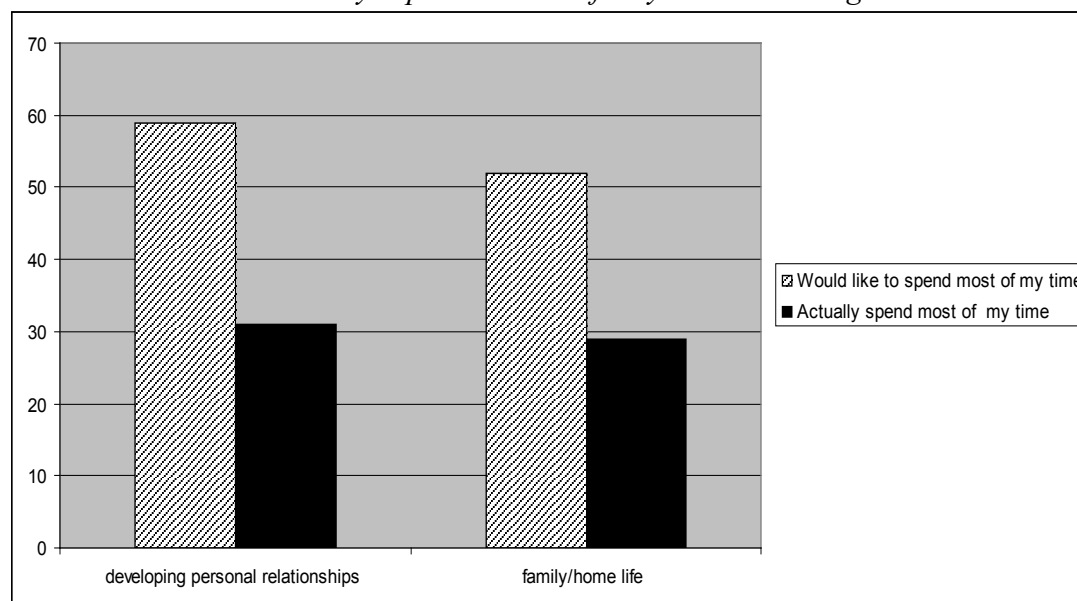


Table 17. Irregular shifts worked by cohort 2 participants according educational institution and for non-studiers in 2008, (%)

	University students	TAFE students	Non-studiers	Total sample
Night or evening shifts	52	48	43	52
Weekend work	69	74	66	70
Working public holidays	54	54	51	54

Figure 9. Participants who “would like to spend most of my time”, compared with those who “actually spend most of my time” at aged 20 in 2008, (%)



support of their family because they moved out of home to attend further or higher education. These young people illustrate these difficulties:

Monica: I feel like I’m in the rat race where I previously haven’t. I feel I need to work to sustain my living, for example rent, food etc. It is hard to get ahead whilst at university without financial support from parents.

Roger: It is challenging to combine your desire to meet and socialise with the demands of study and work.

James: As usual wishing for more time to do physical activity, I participate in sport twice a week when I can. Not enough, too often interrupted for study.

The relevance of their parents and social relationships was marked by both cohorts. For instance, in their early twenties, both generations ranked highest as the most positive factor in their

lives their parents. This was followed by the support they received from their closest friends; thus reflecting the relevance that relationships have for younger generations of Australians. Interestingly, these aspects rated over issues such as work and study.

This research highlights, the need to overcome the conceptualisation of family relationships in terms of intergenerational conflict (where parents feel the burden of having to support their children during their post-school years) or as a constraint for youth in their developmental ‘task’ of becoming ‘adults’ and independent, where ‘family’ is a part of life that youth must transition out. On the contrary, our data for both generations reflects the importance of family and friends have in youth transitions as a source of material and non-material resources; which can help or hinder their possibilities in life. This significance of relationships in their lives is corroborated by national youth surveys identifying very similar responses to what young people valued:

‘family relationships’, ‘friendships’ and ‘being independent’ (Mission Australia 2007). As Wyn (2007: 39) explains, the de-traditionalisation of social structures combined with an uncertain and precarious labour market reinforces the significance of meaningful long-term personal and social relationships for individuals.

The significance of wellbeing and health

In section 3 we commented on the disappointment that cohort 1 felt over their health and fitness when they examined their life in the past decade. Health and fitness have consistently emerged as the main point of concern and dissatisfaction for young Australians. Health and fitness is twice more likely to be a source of dissatisfaction than work and career. In their mid-thirties, their perceptions of their health have worsened. Most importantly, the complex issue of balance in life has had a direct impact on their physical and mental health. Table 18 describes their answers to questions about how physically and mentally healthy they felt in the last decade.

Table 18 shows that over time, levels of physical and mental health have decreased significantly for both genders. For instance, one fifth of men and almost a third of women now report feeling physically unhealthy or very unhealthy. In addition, one fifth of men and one quarter of women now report feeling mentally unhealthy or

very unhealthy. That is, currently only half of all participants feel physically and/or mentally healthy or very healthy. This deterioration in health was attributed to the difficulties of balancing life’s responsibilities. Rachel, who lives in a rural town, stated:

After having a child I find it hard to devote time to the fitness activities I love. Mentally I am in a fairly stressful situation at work and sometimes find it hard to turn off my brain and suffer from lack of sleep.

While Jasmine asserted:

I feel tired, rundown. Overworked. Working 12 hours a day 9 days straight. Starting work at 6am everyday is exhausting, leaving little energy for anything else.

Finally, Debra commented:

Full-time parenting responsibilities often mean that my own interests and health/fitness pursuits often take a back seat.

In sum, for cohort 1 the challenges balancing life’s various priorities have had large impacts on health and wellbeing.

Our youngest generation has also shown that health and wellbeing are important issues in their lives. Their struggle to juggle different commitments is already impacting in their health. While the majority of our participants asserted being healthy, at the age of 22 a significant minority has stated that they feel physically unhealthy (12%) and mentally

Table 18. Comparison of health status for cohort 1 in 2002 and 2009, by gender, (%)

	Male		Female	
	Physical health		Physical health	
	2002 (age 28)	2009 (age 35)	2002 (age 28)	2009 (age 35)
Very unhealthy / unhealthy	10	20	20	31
Neutral	30	25	27	17
Very healthy / healthy	60	55	53	52
	Mental Health		Mental Health	
	2002 (age 28)	2009 (age 35)	2002 (age 28)	2009 (age 35)
Very unhealthy / unhealthy	10	21	18	26
Neutral	24	29	24	19
Very healthy / healthy	66	50	58	55

unhealthy (15%). Our analysis of the 2010 Life Patterns survey for cohort 2 shows the same figures in terms of physical and mental health but with young females feeling unhealthier than males.

Participants from cohort 2 commented on the toll the pressures of earning a post-school qualification and building a career was having on their health. For example, Jeremy affirmed that he felt ‘a lot of study and work pressures, with no time to exercise... Mentally, I feel constantly stressed.’ In addition, this female participant illustrated the pressures for her generation:

Belinda: I was quite depressed in 2009. Doing a university course that I no longer enjoyed and over working. Changing course and taking time off work has greatly improved mental and physical health. Achieving work/study/life balance while a student has been the greatest challenge, it’s really easy to lose sight of that and just work and study.

The data provided in this section reveals the extent to which both generations strive to maintain their wellbeing. Managing to keep a balance across life creates a sense of stress for many of our participants. Moreover, the extraordinary numbers of young Australian that are managing study, work and social relationships during their late teens and early twenties, with issues of mental and physical health now taking centre-stage in their lives – calls for higher profile of these issues. As Andres and Wyn (2010: 192) put it, ‘health and well-being policies have a low profile in relation to young people, especially compared with the emphasis given to education and labour-market policies’. Thus, we believe that the experiences of these young Australians offer relevant lessons for policy-makers and society at-large.

Conclusion

The gaps between hopes and realities and the difficulty of finding a balance in life highlight the intersections across policy domains and young people’s spheres of life. It reveals how the costs of educational and employment policies in the 1990s and 2000s are still borne by young people in their personal lives. Policies in one domain impact on another domain – through unintended consequences.

For cohort 1, it has been in the form of low rates of marriage and fertility, and in the form of concerns about their physical and mental health during their twenties and up to their mid-thirties. Cohort 2 seems to be following a similar pattern, revealing the significance of these challenges. Thus, research on youth transitions needs to include a wider range of areas than simply education and employment and more needs to be understood about the impact (intended or otherwise) of social and economic policies.

CONCLUSION

Our conclusion highlights the main themes within this report and draws out the implications for further research and for policy. This report on Australian youth transitions has provided a perspective from the immediate post World War II years through to the present day. This historical period covers the shift from mass secondary to mass tertiary education. This change is one of many that have dramatically changed the nature of the processes that affect young people's lives. Indeed, the story of Australian youth transitions is really a story about a society in transformation, from an industrial to a post-industrial economy, from a reliance on rural prosperity and primary industry to a reliance on more urban-based economies and the service sector. As these and other elements in society changed, so did the positions and possibilities for young people.

The report identifies the broad patterns of change and discusses the implications not only for society, but for individuals and the nature of youth and young people's identities. For example, we argue that one of the most significant implications of the period under review is an increase in uncertainty. The relative certainties in terms of achieving a livelihood, living independently and setting up long-term partnerships of the 1950s and 1960s were, by the 1980s far more fluid. This was reflected in the trend towards later marriage and the beginning of the trend for young people to stay in education for longer. By the 1990s it became the norm for young people to complete secondary school, achieve some form of post-

secondary qualification and mix work and study from the age of 17. The average age of marriage moved from 24 years for men and 21 years for women in 1976 to 29 years for men and 27 years for women by 2001 (ABS 2005). Young people tended to live with their parents for longer, and there was also a trend towards living in group houses with other young people. With increases in the cost of housing, especially in the capital cities and large metropolitan areas, it became increasingly difficult for young people to achieve their dream of owning their own home.

These social conditions created a context where individuals were forced to adapt to 'new rules' of life, and to navigate new patterns of life that were very different from their parents' generation. We draw on the theoretical insights of social theorists Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) to identify the period of late modernity as one in which identities are reflexive and individualized. In order to navigate complexity and uncertainty, individuals need to become aware of themselves in new ways. They come to bear the risks (for example, unemployment) of situations over which they feel responsible, but over which they have little control. This is the meaning of Beck's term 'risk society' (1992). This is reflected in Australia in the emergence of the 'problem' of transitions in the 1980s. Because young people's trajectories were unproblematic until then, the idea of young people's transitions was not of interest. By the early 1990s, youth transitions and pathways were central policy preoccupations.

This report challenges some of the assumptions underlying these policy metaphors and approaches. By exploring the details of young people's trajectories, their hopes, achievements, across many life spheres over an extended period of time, we are able to offer some critical reflections and new thinking about social transition, young people and factors that enable them to achieve their goals, to contribute positively to society and to live and be well.

The report reveals the following trends:

1. Patterns of inequality persist. Although some of these patterns are changing in the short-term, as more young people participate in post-secondary education, older patterns of inequality are remarkably resilient. Other researchers, (e.g. Lamb & Mason 2008) as well as our own research (Wyn 2009a) have pointed out the fact that young Indigenous people, young people from rural areas and young people from low socio-economic backgrounds are the least well-served by education. The intransigence of these patterns of unequal outcomes from education requires new policy approaches.
2. Transitions are complex. The research reveals the increasing complexity of young people's trajectories. This means that the metaphor of linear pathways within policies is likely to detract attention from the ways in which different groups navigate across the breadth of life domains, including education, employment, family, relationships, health and wellbeing and leisure. There is a real danger that in employing simplistic, linear metaphors to characterise youth transitions, the options of one group are taken as normative. Our research has shown that as their trajectories diverge, young people's options become foreclosed because policies have been remarkably insensitive to diversity.
3. New transition policy approaches are warranted. Longitudinal research provides insights into the implications of particular life choices within their social and historical context. Given the extent of uncertainty and fluidity in labour markets and in life, it is reasonable to recognise that transition points do not line up in terms of age, gender and

geographic location. Policy approaches that support positive transitions can go a long way to creating more equal outcomes. In the 2000s, we have identified a number of crucial transition points that have very different outcomes for different groups of young people.

a. The transition from secondary school

This is a significant, policy-dominated and well-researched point of transition. Young Australians are under strong pressure to 'learn or earn' between the ages of 17-24 (COAG 2009). However, simply exhorting young people to enter post-secondary education at this point in time is not sufficient. Our findings that, by their mid-thirties, young men (and to a slightly lesser extent, also young women) with no post-secondary education are the most disadvantaged in terms of employment, health and wellbeing highlights the need to open new doors for this group. There are many legitimate reasons for young people to make the choice to enter the labour market directly after leaving secondary school – this should not foreclose their options to the extent that it does now. Good policy provides opportunities for this group to enter some form of post-secondary education at a time that is appropriate for them, at some point in the next five years or more. Offering incentives for this group to gain educational skills would assist them to have more options and to achieve their goals. Currently, once the normative point of transition into post-secondary education has passed; there are few opportunities to revisit this transition point. Keeping the door to post-secondary education open would enable more positive outcomes for many groups including young people.

b. The transition to work

While equality of opportunity has become a significant policy success in education, it is less so in workplaces. Our longitudinal research reveals that young people's trajectories began to diverge when they entered workplaces. Young women, even the most highly qualified, tended to lag behind their male peers in terms of occupational

achievement. The analysis provided by Andres and Wyn (2010) highlights the need for policies that a) ensure equality of opportunity in workplaces and b) the recognition of the right of all workers to have a life-work balance. Although workplace policies have not traditionally been seen as relevant to youth transitions, this has emerged as one of the most significant arenas of relevance to the nature and quality of young people's transitions.

c. The transition to parenthood

The transition to parenthood has emerged as a very significant point of transition that differentiates women and men's options. Following Esping-Andersen's argument of an 'unfinished revolution' in gender roles, we agree that at the point of deciding to become a parent, young people face significant difficulties. Young Australians are deciding to become parents later than ever before (and much later than their Canadian peers) and many, especially the well-educated, are deciding that they will not become parents. In the early 2000s, a broad policy initiative, the 'baby bonus' was introduced in Australia with the aim of increasing the rate of fertility. However, it is also appropriate for policies to ensure that social conditions do not adversely impact on one group more than another. The finding in the Life Patterns project that tertiary-educated women were the most likely to go part-time or to leave the workforce points to a need to change workplace cultures so that both men and women are free to manage the responsibilities and pleasures of work and family life. The reversion to such strongly gendered patterns in the late 2000s suggests that workplaces have indeed failed to keep up with changing gender expectations.

FOOTNOTES

1 This homogenization was also a product of distinctive social and economic aspects of post-World War II; such as the emergence of mass communication –leading to a concept of popular culture, a period of relative affluence for families, and a broader access to secondary education for the general population.

2 Another example of the failure or problems with these policies aiming to train young people to access the labour market can be found in The Youth Guarantee work-study program, where some young people were receiving training for jobs that didn't required any training at all, such as shelf stacking in the 'retail traineeship', or where training was already provided by another agency (transport authority), such as with petrol station assistants (see Smith 1988).

3 The Burdekin Report highlighted a lack of structural support by the State with young single people not eligible for independent public rental housing and prohibitive fees for those wanting to use the Victorian Rooming House Program. In terms of the private sector, average rent increases exceeded average weekly earnings, and young people were subject to stereotyped assumptions by landlords and real estate agents, thus denying them accommodation.

4 For a more comprehensive analysis of the methodology of the Life Patterns project, see Tyler, Cuervo & Wyn (2011).

5 The analysis of the Life Patterns data presented in the tables and figures in this section was undertaken by Lesley Andres. The full analysis, comparing the Australian Life Patterns data with Andres' Canadian Paths on Life's Way data is published in *The Making of a Generation: The children of the 1970s in Adulthood*, Toronto University Press, 2010, by Lesley Andres and Johanna Wyn.

6 Even though a few of our participants have moved to Queensland and Western Australia, the Life Patterns project does not cover these states that concentrate the majority of the mining towns.

7 While over the years, family life has been our participants' main priority, there is some diversity in what this means in comparison to what it meant for their parents' generation. Most people (55%) defined family in a way that involved extended family; that is, including parents and other relatives. For around a quarter, family included all extended family members as well as friends and others, while 20% defined family in terms of a traditional nuclear family comprised of parents and children only.

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