



BROTHERHOOD
of St LAURENCE

***Values and civic behaviour
in Australia***

In-depth interview report

**Charne Flowers
January 2002**

The National Engagement Project Trial

Values and civic behaviour in Australia

Project documents available on the Brotherhood's web site <www.bsl.org.au>

Project report

Research method

In-depth interview report

Report of the focus group discussions

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Contents

Research overview	1
Research objectives	1
Research considerations	1
Research methodology	1
Summary & recommendations	4
The sense-making approach to poverty	4
Project objective 1: Provide insight as to whether there are in fact common Australian values, or a diverse range of different value sets in different parts of the population.	4
Project objective 2: Tell us whether, and if so how, people’s personal aspirations (or behaviours) are different from their aspirations for the nation.	6
Project objective 3: Review the types of policies that people believe are needed to achieve their aspirations for the nation.	9
Project objective 4: Inform ways of framing questions that will effectively identify Australians’ value and policy positions.	11
Case Studies	16
1. Alexis: Female, 16-17 years, low income (< 25K h/hold), ESB, outer Melbourne suburb, public and some secondary education, no children	16
2. Craig: Male, 17 years, middle income (25-70K h/hold), ESB, regional Victoria, public and secondary education, no children	21
3. Laura: Female, 16-17 years, high income (>70K h/hold), ESB, Melbourne, private and secondary education, no children	29
4. Michelle: Female, 18-30 years, low income (<25K h/hold), Indigenous Australian, regional Victoria, public and TAFE education, youngest child under 5 years	36
5. John: Male, 18-30 years, middle income (25-70K h/hold), NESB, Melbourne, public and TAFE education, no children.	42
6. Trent: Male, 18-30 years, high income (>70K h/hold), ESB, outer Melbourne suburb, public and tertiary education, no children	50
7. Nancy: Female, 18-30 years, medium income (25-70K h/hold), ESB, Melbourne, tertiary education, no children	59
8. Maggie: Female, 30-50 years, low income (<25K h/hold), ESB, outer Melbourne suburb, public and secondary education, youngest over the 5 years	69
9. Larry: Male, 30-50 years, middle income (25-70K h/hold), Melbourne, Indigenous Australian, public/private and tertiary education, no children	75

10. Paul: Male, 30-50 years, high income (>70K h/hold), NESB, Melbourne, public and TAFE education, youngest dependent child over 15 years	83
11. Sam: Male, 30-50 years, income [unknown], NESB, Melbourne, tertiary education, no children	89
12. Alan: Male, 30-50 years, income [unknown], ESB, Melbourne, public and special education, no children, individual with a disability	97
13. Catarina: Female, 30-50 years, income [unknown], NESB, regional centre in northern Victoria, public and some secondary education, youngest child over 5 years, carer of a child with a disability	101
14. Peter: Male, over 50 years, low income (<25K h/hold), ESB, regional Victoria, private and secondary education, married with no dependent children	109
15. Sussan: Female, over 50 years, middle income (25-70K h/hold), ESB, outer Melbourne suburb, public and secondary education, no dependent children	117
16. Angela: Female, over 50 years, high income (>70K h/hold), ESB, Melbourne, tertiary education, youngest dependent over 15 years	123
References	129

Research overview

The Brotherhood of St Laurence (BSL) undertook a 'Trial' research task as the first step in the National Engagement Project. The 'Trial', referred to as A Study of Australians' Values, was conceived as an exploratory piece of research with two phases of investigation including in-depth interviews (phase one) and focus group discussions (phase two). These phases combined would provide some understanding of whether there is merit in progressing with forums across the nation to discuss poverty. If so, the research would provide some understanding of how these discussions could best be conducted. The 'Trial' project would also inform and direct the BSL's three-year national campaign for an Australia free of poverty.

The research expanded upon previous studies completed by the BSL such as the Understanding Poverty Project (Johnson 2000a) as it adopted a broader discussion approach with people, rather than confining the conversation to poverty. Although information was collected on perceptions of Australian society, preferred directions for Australia's future, personal aspirations and values, the focus of the research was on the network of views and how they cluster more than the views themselves.

The National Engagement Project will inform the way in which the BSL engages people in conversations about their values, and will involve an exploration of how these values can be integrated into a vision for Australia's future as a country. The project will also gauge people's commitment to this vision.

Research objectives

The following research objectives were determined for the 'Trial' research project:

- Provide insight as to whether there are in fact common Australian values, or a diverse range of different value sets in different parts of the population;
- Determine whether, and if so how, people's personal aspirations are different to their aspirations for the nation;
- Review the types of policies that people believe are needed to achieve their aspirations for the nation; and
- Point to ways of framing questions that will effectively identify Australians' value and policy positions.

Research considerations

A qualitative approach was adopted in the 'Trial' project. This has a number of implications for the research objectives. Firstly, a qualitative approach enables the researcher to understand the relationship between values, attitudes and beliefs in relation to behaviours. Discussions can 'mine' down past socially acceptable responses to get to a deeper level of comprehension that is not easily accessible from quantitative approaches.

The qualitative approach would yield results that offer some insights into the similarities between people from like groups and backgrounds, but it would not be possible to confidently extrapolate any findings to the Australian population.

Research methodology

The 'Trial' project was separated into two phases: in-depth interviews to explore the frameworks in which people process social and personal aspirations; and focus group discussions to test different methods of engaging people in a group to explore the issue of poverty in connection to values. A qualitative approach was selected to enable a complex and exploratory conversation with people to start understanding the framework in which their values, thoughts and actions develop.

This report represents the findings of the in-depth interview phase of the ‘Trial’ research project.

Recruiting specifications

Twelve in-depth interviews were initially scheduled according to the matrix present below. The twelve interviews were segmented across household income before tax and age.

AGE	H/HOLD INCOME			TOTAL
	LOW (<25K)	MIDDLE (26-70K)	UPPER (>70K)	
Under 18	1	1	1	3
18-30	1	1	1	3
30-50	1	1	1	3
Over 50	1	1	1	3
TOTAL	4	4	4	12

The following ‘soft quotas’ were applied to ensure a range of profiles were included in the research:

- Sex: minimum of five males, five females
- Background: minimum of two indigenous; two ESB; three NESB
- Location: spread across above matrix with four in each of metro Melbourne; Regional Victoria and Northern Victoria; outer Melbourne suburb
- Life cycle: minimum of one family from each of four types—youngest child under five; youngest child under 15; children over 15 that are dependent; older parent(s) with no dependent children.
- Education: minimum of three public; three private; three tertiary; two secondary only; one TAFE
- Community involvement: minimum of two people with community committee involvement

In addition to the 12 interviews, in-depth discussions were conducted with a person with a physical disability and a person who was a carer of a child with a disability. These 14 in-depth interviews were conducted in December 2001. At the conclusion of the 14 interviews it was decided that two profiles were missing from those already targeted: an adult who had moved to Australia from a non-English speaking country and a young professional female without dependents. Interviews were also conducted with people meeting these specifications. Overall, 16 in-depth interviews were conducted as part of the in-depth interview stage of the ‘Trial’ research process.

BSL project managers developed these specifications in consultation with qualitative research consultants Libby Smith (Motive Market Research) and Alison Fraser (Key Response) and the Research Advisory Group.

The first 14 in-depth interviews were completed between Monday 10 December and Friday 21 December 2001. The indigenous interviewees, the individual with a disability, and the carer of a disabled person were recruited by BSL staff through advocacy agencies. Cooper Symons & Associates, a specialist recruiting company, arranged the remaining interviews. Participants were recruited from market research databases and through cold calls. Some participants had not been involved in research before.

The interviews

Interviews were convened either in the participant's home or in a pre-arranged location, depending on the participant's preference. Interviewers provided beverages and biscuits. Participants were each paid \$75 for their involvement, which ranged from 2 to 2.5 hours.

The interviews were conducted by BSL staff members, Charne Flowers (nine interviews) and Mark Pegg (two interviews), and consultants Alison Fraser (three interviews) and Libby Smith (two interviews). To avoid a focus on poverty, the BSL was not identified 'up front'. Instead the research was sometimes identified as being conducted for a not-for-profit, community service organisation. All participants were told that the BSL was conducting the research at the conclusion of the interview.

Interviewers were armed with a moderator's guide to assist discussion areas and a variety of stimulus material and projective techniques that would assist interviewees to discuss these complex matters. Interviewers were given license to modify and prompt the interviewee as appropriate. Interviews were audio taped with the permission of the participants.

Summary & recommendations

The sense-making approach to poverty

A sense-making approach (Dervin 1989) to understanding human thought and behaviour uses the concept of a ‘gap’ to describe how thoughts, feelings and behaviours come into existence and are progressively modified. A gap (a problem) is unique to each individual and arises when a person’s current knowledge or information is inadequate in contrast to where the individual desires or feels they need to be in order to make sense of a situation. Once the individual has identified a gap they will build ‘bridges’ in their mind, drawing upon their available information, experiences and perspectives to develop solutions to overcome the gap.

For example, a person who is health-conscious and behaves in a health-preserving manner may become aware of the disease of cancer to which they may be vulnerable. A gap is produced between a self-consciousness as ‘a healthy person’ and a perceived vulnerability to cancer. To bridge that gap and resolve the subsequent discomfort the person could take a number of actions. They could gain information on ways to minimise the risk of cancers, such as having regular screening, reviewing their diet, quit smoking, and reduce other potential contributors to the development of cancer. Alternatively the person could dismiss their vulnerability to cancer (for example, by concluding that the research is wrong) and do nothing. Regardless of the nature of the bridge the outcome is the same: the gap has been eliminated.

As Kym Madden points out in ‘Householders’ experiences of ‘save the environment’ messages’ (1995), the use of a sense-making approach for communication strategy development is to ‘stop’ people in their continuum, forcing them to reflect on the gap. It is only when people become aware of an unsatisfactory gap, that they will reassess their thoughts and behaviour.

The ‘Trial’ project in-depth interviews have provided a number of insights into the way people conceptualise Australian society, as well as into their perceptions of themselves, their aspirations and their values. The research identified barriers to discussing poverty that will refine the manner in which the BSL undertakes communication strategies. Other findings were uncovered throughout the in-depth interviews which may be effective at ‘jolting’ individuals into reconsidering their perspective—that is, making them aware of a gap. Remaining observations have been noted in the summary of findings.

The findings of phase one of the ‘Trial’ project are presented in the summary and recommendations in relation to the four objectives of the project. An additional subsection addressing the recommendations for the focus group discussion concludes the summary and recommendations. All 16 in-depth interviews have been summarised and presented in this report. The interviews are grouped by age; and within each age range they are presented in order of lowest to highest income brackets.

Project objective 1: Provide insight as to whether there are in fact common Australian values, or a diverse range of different value sets in different parts of the population.

Although participants had difficulty responding to questions that explicitly referred to ‘values’, the interviews provide many useful insights into the things that participants felt were important in their personal lives and in Australian life generally. A number of themes recurred and appeared to cut across social groups.

Family and friends were commonly mentioned as values: ‘Family’s one of the main values of life because you need your family to support you.’ (Michelle)

Underlying the references to family and friends was the value of caring, for these people in particular, but also for others. Laura summarised it best when she said she wanted to treat others how she wanted to be treated herself.

I mean a key value is to be nice to people and to sort of treat them how I'd like to be treated and also treat them in a way that isn't going to hurt their feelings. Just to think that they're really important and ... make sure that people are happy and try to talk to people and cheer people up when they're unhappy. (Laura)

Respect was identified as another important value to have in relation to others. Doing no harm was a concept emerging when work, school and goal achievement were mentioned. Honesty and loyalty were further named by a handful of participants as being important in their life.

In addition to recurrent themes of family, respect, doing no harm, honesty and loyalty, several 'values' were mentioned by one participant each. These included funny people who are easy-going, having a good education, having good friends, the ability to think independently, having a social conscience, and a focus that isn't on materialist things. Other words that emerged included serenity, integrity, charity, sharing, liberty, security, and privacy. Asking participants to identify their values provided some insight into important principles in their lives, though responses tended to reflect different understandings of what a 'value' is. A discussion about society, including concerns and satisfactions, and personal aspirations enabled an indirect determination of what was important for these participants. Many of the concerns and thoughts echo what other research has already found and is detailed in the Background Literature Paper for the National Engagement (Pegg, 2001). The key areas of importance for most participants are summarised below.

There was an underlying sense of **care for others**, though there were occasional parameters on that care. For example, Paul mentioned a perspective that all men (sic) were created equal and was very concerned about the care of indigenous Australians. He wanted his children to be schooled in part through the public system to encourage them to mix with people from varied backgrounds. Yet Paul's solution to the refugee crisis was to 'shoot them all as they come on shore'. Reviewing ways to tap into the value of caring for all humans equally and ensuring this value is consistently applied in all situations is a challenge for discussions and campaign work.

There was a desire for a **less selfish society**, particularly amongst the older participants. These participants described a lack of discipline, responsibility and a focus on the rights of self in schools and at home, as having a negative impact on individuals and raising the expectation of hand-outs from society rather than working to contribute to society. Interestingly, some young participants had consistent views with the older participants: Alexis felt discipline in schools was insufficient, while Laura felt younger people needed to reflect on their values and their connection to society, recommending that a subject in school address these very issues.

Linked to this issue was the fact that approximately half the interviewees have been, or thought they should be, 'involved in the community'—whether community is considered to be geographical, a selected group (sporting clubs, environmental groups, union groups, clothing pools) or a work environment. Involvement in the community was a means by which a less selfish society was fostered.

There was a desire for **equality**, particularly in terms of wealth, though few participants thought that the trend to an increasing gap between the rich and poor could be halted. The Understanding Poverty Project also revealed, in a quantitative study, that the 'gap' between high and low income Australians was one of the main concerns people had with Australian society (Johnson 2000b). This is therefore a theme that could be used in messages to resonate with the audience before linking the issue of poverty to this concern.

Participants emphasised Australia's freedom of choice and of speech as highly desirable features of Australian society. **Freedom of self-determination** could therefore be taken as an important value for Australians. The ability to illustrate that not all Australians have self-determination is another opportunity for discussions.

Finally, there were comments about the appropriateness of **democracy** in Australia. Whether participants expressed a view, as Sam did, that Australia fell short of being a true democracy, or held a positive view about Australia's political system, as conveyed by Trent, participants believed democracy was a cherished means of governance.

It can be concluded that there is value in developing discussion and communication techniques which capture these underlying issues of importance even if opinions about certain issues such as refugees differ considerably. The areas identified above reflect values that were common among participants and suggest that Australians have a similar value set, though specific opinions do vary.

Project objective 2: Tell us whether, and if so how, people's personal aspirations (or behaviours) are different from their aspirations for the nation.

Participant's personal aspirations related to financial security and gaining material things such as a home and car, career fulfilment, maintaining family and friendship relationships and overcoming personal obstacles. Aspirations for society on the other hand tended to be associated with, for example, a society of opportunities, an unselfish society, improvement in the area of environmental care, and ensuring businesses value employees more than profits.

In few cases were personal aspirations linked to aspirations for the nation. The belief that people could achieve their personal aspirations regardless of the direction of society at large reflect a strong and positive perspective of their own capabilities to realise their personal aspirations. Even participants who felt that they had very low self-confidence, such as Catarina, were very upbeat about their own prospects: 'I should still be able to achieve what I want. Regardless of what anyone else does, I have to make those opportunities and I can do that... I think we all have control over the things we do in our life.'

Another example is Craig, a 17-year-old high school student who had few concerns about his future. Though Craig raised the issue of inequality in Australian society he clearly differentiated his own path from that of Australia's: 'It [inequality] doesn't really worry me myself... I know I'll work hard enough to get what I want.' For Craig, a careful handler of finances, faith in his own abilities resulted in a steadfast belief that he would be on the upside of any inequality in Australia based on wealth.

In contrast, Maggie did not believe she would have achieved all her personal aspirations if she were unable to make an impact on society around her. Indeed, Maggie understood improving society to be a personal aspiration. It may be this association that caused Maggie to be so involved in her community through her work in the welfare sector, through environmental organisations and through school associations. Her outlook was the exception amongst the interviews conducted.

The view that Australia has great opportunity and the positive outlook with which people assess their own prospects may compound the confusion about the reason for poverty. Surely if these participants have been able to pull through difficult times and have few concerns about their own prosperity, then others can too? This optimism may provide scope to draw attention to a gap between assumptions about the well-being of Australians and case studies or interactions with struggling Australians.

It is interesting to note that the positive outlook contrasts with a quite negative view of society expressed in the Purple Sage Project (2000). The difference between the research projects was the

profile of the participants: the Purple Sage Project involved people who were already concerned about the direction of society and wanted to have a say.

Addressing the disconnection between personal aspirations and social aspirations is essential if people are to view their personal needs as being infringed upon by social processes. Ensuring people receive information about the contribution of social processes to the presence of poverty in Australia when first sensitised to a problem will be critical. The Understanding Poverty Project revealed that people are keen to receive information about poverty (even acknowledging its complexity), though the use of simple language and presentation would assist the digestion of the information and understanding of the causes and consequences of poverty.

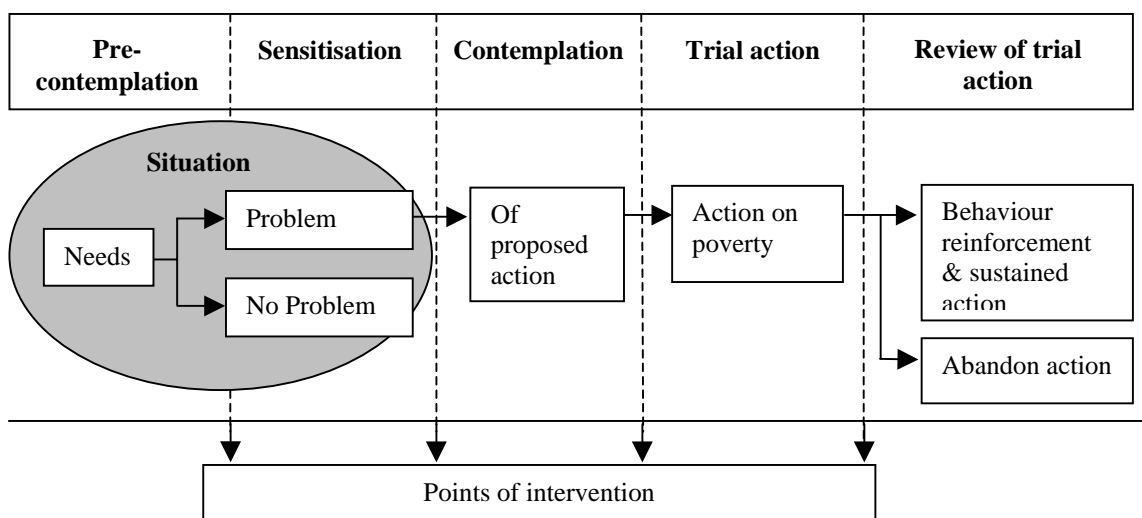
The relationship of social and personal aspirations affects the process an individual goes through in recognising a problem, determining the reasons for that problem and taking action to fix that problem. Assisting individuals to make an association between personal aspirations and aspirations for society will help move them along the Behaviour Change Continuum, and in time may motivate them to adopt actions that will eradicate poverty. The in-depth interviews suggest many participants are in the early stages of the Behaviour Change Continuum and considerable work will be required before they would be willing to make some useful behaviour changes.

Framework for identifying audiences for communications

The Nested Approach to Segmentation developed by Bonoma and Shapiro (1983) as discussed by James Grunig in *Publics, Audiences, and Market Segments: Segmentation Principles for Campaigns* (1989) contends that most public communication campaigns start from an established and recognisable problem, such as environmental destruction, cancer or AIDS. Problems are conceptualised by target audience members as personal: there is a problem and it is relevant to me. The article discusses only briefly the view that problems are recognised when a person's needs are not met. In relation to the sense-making approach, 'gaps' result when needs are threatened and a 'bridge' is required to restore balance to an individual's needs.

Based on the insights from the in-depth interviews as well as work completed by the BSL in the Understanding Poverty Project, the Behaviour Change Continuum model below offers an understanding of how an individual considers, processes information, and potentially acts on the issue of Australian poverty. The Behaviour Change Continuum will aid the development of a communication strategy that aims to involve individuals in a movement to eradicate poverty in Australia.

Figure. Behaviour Change Continuum



Pre-contemplation

A 'need' is a difficult concept to define and one which theorists continue to debate. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs was an attempt to specify the needs of humans and how these needs are integrated. Maslow argued that humans are motivated by unsatisfied needs; that is, the gap between a need and the need satisfaction. The needs Maslow included in his hierarchy include:

- Physiological needs, such as air, water, food, sleep;
- Safety needs, including stability of home and family, and security in the community;
- Love needs, including belonging to groups such as family, work, community, sports, religious groups;
- Esteem needs, related to a sense of personal worth which may be recognised by others; and
- Self-actualisation (the highest order of Maslow's needs) involving humans' desire to maximise their potential.

This report does not discuss whether Maslow's theory should be considered a comprehensive and acceptable suite of human needs. This specific theory is only relevant by way of example about what some needs are and, as one participant referred to it, to explain why people do not act in accordance to their 'values'. It was John who commented that when a person's needs are threatened, for instance their family is starving, they will compromise their principle not to steal, and steal to feed their family. However, when the person and their family are no longer starving, they will not steal.

In terms of the Behaviour Change Continuum, the majority of the interview participants are in Pre-contemplation in relation to poverty. They have not yet noticed a problem or at least they have not noticed a problem that requires attention.

Efforts will be required to bring the problem to their attention by making a link between poverty as a social issue and their personal needs. By connecting with personal needs it is hoped that people will reflect on why they don't, for example, feel safe walking at night and will begin to ask questions and seek information to resolve this concern. Techniques such as education campaigns and messages that aim to have people consider an ideal Australia, rather than Australia compared with other countries, may be a means of prompting such reflection. Linking poverty with other issues may be another way to create recognition of the issue.

Sensitisation

People in the Sensitisation phase of the Behaviour Change Continuum are aware of the problem of poverty. There were a few participants, such as Maggie and Larry, who accepted poverty to be a problem in Australia, though there was some uncertainty about causes and solutions, given the complexity of the issue. For example, Angela referred to poverty as being a downward spiral, which makes it difficult to escape, particularly for children; yet on the other hand people didn't want to work, and were happy to 'milk the system'.

Once people are sensitised to the issue they are receptive to information. People will seek information to bridge the gap to understand why poverty exists. To move people beyond sensitisation into contemplation will require the provision of sound information about the extent and nature of poverty in Australia, and will include the debunking of individual attribution theories.

Effective tactics may include giving first hand experience or creating real empathy, such as the challenge, 'Could you live on less than \$10,427.30 a year?' If this type of information is not provided at this point of sensitisation, the individual could arrive at the Contemplation phase having firmly placed the blame on the individual living in poverty and may have in the process removed their own responsibility.

Contemplation

An individual in the Contemplation phase has gathered the information they deem necessary to make a decision that will resolve the gap. In the example of poverty, a person may have attended to facts which suggest that impoverished Australians are in poverty because of their own bad decisions. If that is the case, the outcome may be to have an opinion that endorses mutual obligation with penalties for breaching. No action would be needed. Other individuals who conclude government policies are to blame may consult organisations to determine the best means of action to resolve their concerns.

A number of other factors will influence whether an individual progresses to the Trial action phase, including the perceived effectiveness of the action in resolving the problem. The Understanding Poverty Project provides some insights into approaches that assist acceptance of a problem and the encouragement of action. These findings stress the importance of viewing others in the community (decision-makers, media and general community) as being involved and making an effort. This involvement raises the profile of the concern—if others care it must be a real problem—and it also makes the individual feel their efforts will have a greater impact as others are working towards the same cause.

The in-depth interviews suggest that low risk and non-disruptive methods of becoming involved are needed for some people. Clarifying the nature of the proposed involvement, ensuring that the individual feels they won't be asked to do more than they are willing to do and that they are in control of their involvement will assist making action a safe option. Suggesting simple actions may also address concerns that people enjoy a 'whingeing' mentality where people are happy to see the problem as too big to be influenced by an individual because it lets them 'off the hook'. Linking the behaviour to rewards or mutual benefits, for example, 'My house will be safe because my neighbours are looking after it, and I'm looking after theirs', may also be helpful.

Trial Action & Review of Trial Action

The fact that participants did not link their personal aspirations and their aspirations for society presents a barrier to behaviour change. The Behaviour Change Continuum model indicates the need firstly to identify how poverty impacts on a personal need. This is essential to begin movement along the change continuum that will have individuals connect the eradication of poverty as a social aspiration with their own needs.

In addition, although participants generally felt able to realise their personal aspirations largely by their own actions, they made few links between their personal behaviour and the achievement of their aspirations for society. An exception is the link between recycling and not littering, as personal behaviour choices, and protecting the environment. In the case of poverty eradication, people may need to be persuaded that their personal behaviours can make a difference to social concerns.

Once an individual begins to take action and then to review the trial action, a number of the factors that influenced their earlier decision will need to be reinforced. For instance, the action will presumably support the perception that there is a problem. The reason for the problem as determined in the sensitisation phase will need to be reinforced. The benefits in resolving the problem and satisfying the original need will need to be clear and personally rewarding.

Project objective 3: Review the types of policies that people believe are needed to achieve their aspirations for the nation.

Though it was not envisaged that the in-depth interviews would directly inform this objective, nonetheless a considerable amount of information was collected. The information was not expressed as specific policy changes, but rather guides broader recommendations about work required to address concerns with Australian society.

An example of a broad recommendation related to the concern participants had about the lack of discipline and care in schools, creating generations of Australians who felt disenfranchised and uninvolved in society. Some suggested remedies included more discipline in schools, more vocational focus of education to teach responsibility and improvements to parenting skills. Laura, a student herself, recommended the establishment of a subject in school that would deal with community involvement and values identification issues. Clearly these comments **have implications for** to the policies of schools, the training of teachers, and approved curriculum guidelines.

Participants identified a discrepancy between public and private schools as providing a different standard of education and opportunities for young Australians, with privately schooled children receiving the greatest benefits. Some participants believed that the redirection of private school, government funds into public schools would assist with resources provision such as computers, would address the perception that class sizes were high, and would ensure improved teaching standards.

Participants generally encouraged processes and policies that would build a national identity to combat feelings of isolation. It was further suggested that having a stronger sense of community would make Australian businesses more obliging to Australian employees more so than their profits. Similarly Australians would be more supportive of Australian businesses. Several people also called for businesses to place greater importance on the protection of jobs rather than profit increases. Encouraging businesses to support employees above the support of their own 'bottom line' linked to concerns expressed by some participants that there was an insufficient number of jobs. Policies that assist Australian owned businesses, provide incentives for the creation of jobs and assist businesses when struggling to maintain jobs supported.

The sale of Australian-owned assets was another area of concern for these participants and the policy response was fairly simple: do not sell Australian-owned assets. Encouraging government responsibility as a stakeholder in Australian owned assets was a further strategy suggested by some participants.

Some participants felt that the protection and restoration of the Australian environment was treated as less important than economic development. They suggested that this was an area where government and business must work to ensure the environment was not compromised. It was typically acknowledged that Australians were aware of the importance of economic development as overriding the importance of the environment but had not yet made a stand, unwilling to forego their standard of living or Australia's economic prosperity. Education and assistance to businesses to be environmentally friendly, as well as review of business audits, are some potential policies emerging from these concerns.

Though welfare was not an area about which participants were able to talk with confidence, they noted that certain areas were identified in the media as being problematic. These included the number of beds in hospitals, the number of beds available for elderly Australians in nursing homes, as well as the quality of care in nursing homes. Policies that target availability of beds and quality care provision would resonate with these participants based on media reports.

There were a number of other concerns about Australia's future about which participants were unclear about appropriate policies or strategies. These included the inequality between Australia's wealthy and Australia's poor and the asylum seeker concern.

Though these are not specific policy areas they illustrate some general concerns and suggestions for improvement. Policy areas can be pursued in greater depth in the focus group discussions, though it is recommended that the discussion include an open-ended review of what policies are required to provide participants with the opportunity to suggest a diverse range of policies and ideas. However, depending upon the membership of focus groups, the presentation of pre-determined policies as

stimulus material will encourage discussion and will engage participants who feel they are not sufficiently informed to make comments about what specific policies are required to address their concerns in society.

Project objective 4: Inform ways of framing questions that will effectively identify Australians' value and policy positions.

The in-depth interviews have been instrumental in providing ideas as to how people formulate their outlook on life and how that in turn relates to their personal aspirations. This insight provides guidance as to how discussions can be structured to efficiently and effectively stimulate a level of conversation about values and policies that the BSL is seeking. This section is structured into barriers, opportunities and other important observations that will assist the development of a communication strategy.

Observed barriers to discussing poverty

Summary

- People presume a positive circumstance in the absence of knowledge (e.g. there is a welfare safety net).
- People extrapolate from their own circumstances to those of others (e.g. my middle class existence and the opportunities I have are shared by the majority of Australians)
- Poverty was not a key discussion point raised by participants. When it was raised by the interviewers in terms of 'disadvantage in Australia', participants would comment that it isn't the same as absolute, third world poverty.
- Some participants would avoid helping others, and specifically strangers, because they might face additional, unexpected and unwanted demands. One participant suggested avoiding community involvement was a means of maintaining a sheltered and comfortable existence.
- Few people made a connection between their aspirations for society and their own personal aspirations.

Discussion

A tendency to presume sufficient care (e.g. welfare care) even when claiming limited knowledge is a barrier to awareness and understanding that will need to be addressed. In regard to welfare—which was presented to participants as the support systems that look after people like the sick, elderly, disabled or unemployed—participants often did not know much about what support mechanisms were available. When pushed further, they 'presumed' that these people would be taken care of. This is similar to the finding of the Understanding Poverty Project (Johnson 2000a), in which focus group participants also referred to a 'safety net'.

Not only could the views and aspirations of the individual be linked to their own unique circumstances and experiences, but also their perceptions of society were clearly encased within their own reality. As participants were generally in a position to achieve their aspirations—to get a job, to complete study, to have a standard of living—it is understandable that they would have difficulty understanding why there are unemployed and disadvantaged.

As observed in the Understanding Poverty Project, poverty, though unacceptable if people do not have the 'basics', barely enters the mind space of Australians. This was true for the in-depth interview participants. Of the many social issues, poverty was rarely mentioned. When it was the subject of a prompt, it was not considered to be the same as experienced in other countries. For this reason a fear-based campaign might be less effective, as people simply don't regard poverty as a problem. If poverty isn't a problem, why would they start to consider consequences of poverty in Australia?

The need to guard against unforeseen demands or major changes to a comfortable existence was a reason for some avoiding giving help. For instance, some participants would not help a person on the street because they might be asked to give more assistance than they initially assessed was needed. Another participant felt he 'should' become involved with the community, but had not because he thought that it would have an unsettling impact on his own life.

A final barrier identified from the in-depth discussions was the fact that few participants made a link between achievement of personal aspirations and achievement of social aspirations. Individuals who did make that link had already made steps towards 'owning' and being responsible for social concerns. They were involved in order to make a difference. Others could not link the achievement of their own aspirations with the impact of broader social change.

Recommendations

- Though presuming satisfactory care in society is a barrier and could lead to views that blame the individual, it also presents an element of surprise that could be utilised to introduce discussion of structural concerns of poverty. The barrier can only be addressed through education to which the 'market' must be receptive.
- Though extrapolating from one's circumstance to the majority hides many problems from the individual, there are two approaches that may cause the 'market' to reconsider. Firstly statistics could provide a picture that is real. Expressing prevalence on a small scale, for instance—'X people will go without dinner in a street with X houses'—would bring the statistics within their reality. A second approach is to emphasise that it is unacceptable that even one person in Australia is living in dire circumstances. The need to debunk individual attribution (or blame) for their problems will however be essential in this latter approach.
- The BSL must be creative in its communications to link poverty into other issues people are concerned about. This will bring attention to the problem. Communications should not highlight international comparisons, but instead have Australians consider what is acceptable in Australia. Previous research suggests Australians have a low tolerance for infringements of basic needs in Australia 'the lucky country' (Johnson, 2000a).
- Risk minimisation will be critical if people are to become engaged in behaviour to eradicate poverty, since many people are concerned that their involvement may lead to unexpected requests. The precise extent of a person's involvement must be clear. Power over their involvement should be within the realm of the individual. Messages, which make community involvement simple to include in one's lifestyle without major disruption, will be important.
- It will be through linking a personal aspiration or problem to a social concern that individuals will ultimately raise the issue of poverty onto the national agenda. Communication strategies must establish that association.

Opportunities to build a discussion about poverty

Summary

- By using international comparisons as a means of benchmarking Australia, people consistently overlooked the issue of what Australia should ideally become.
- Barriers could be turned into benefits. A lack of awareness of the problem becomes a 'stopping' point, when people realize how little they knew and are open to learn more.

Discussion

People developed their assessment of Australia in comparison with other countries. For instance, though people did modify their behaviour because of safety concerns at night, comparatively Australia did not have safety problems. The habit of comparison proved to be a ‘jolting’ point for one of the interviewees when he had a sharp realisation that he ‘should’ be considering an ideal Australia. This mental process was not evident to other participants and could be explored further to see whether it provides a sufficiently large ‘jolt’ to have people stop and reconsider.

It is the tendency to make international comparisons that contributes to the view of Australia’s relative poverty as being insignificant compared with the absolute poverty of third world countries.

When poverty is revealed to be unacceptable by Australian standards, to be next door or around the corner, and not to be the fault of the individual, puzzlement can result. This was the case for one participant who was very concerned at the idea that the person next door to him could be going without dinner that night. This participant could not conceive how he would get by on less than a quarter of the average male salary (\$41,709.20 per year)—that is, on less than \$10,427.30 per year. This participant wondered how could he have not been aware of these issues, when he was an intelligent and caring individual.

It would be worth considering using the contradictions which emerged in participants’ responses to stimulate discussion in focus groups. On the other hand, if people are likely to sacrifice conviction for consistency, it may be advisable to present the contradictions in the third person and allow the individual silently to explore their own contradictions through association.

Recommendations

- Discussion techniques should allow people to discover for themselves (by making the ‘mistake’) the tendency to make comparisons of Australia against international benchmarks rather than against an ideal world. More direct techniques should also be considered—for example, ‘Don’t sell Australia short by comparing with other countries. What do you want Australia to be like?’
- Statistics and other facts should be used wisely to make poverty real to Australians, to make poverty proximal to Australians and to make poverty a structural concern. The example of the ‘quarter wage’ hit these three marks for one participant.
- Internal contradictions could be used to have the ‘market’ reflect on their own perceptions. Techniques should be explored further.

Other observations for discussions about poverty*Summary*

- Participants were shown to have contradictory views on how they dealt with the world and their lives.
- The individuals’ views could not be adequately predicted from demographic characteristics (including gender, language spoken at home, income). The richness of the comments involved a much more intense understanding of the person, their experiences and current situation than could be provided in a summary of sex, language spoken at home, etc.
- Participants struggled to use the term ‘values’ with ease. A discussion about values frequently became a discussion about particular opinions.
- An ‘us and them’ mentality was more prominent among those who felt less able to influence society and the political system.
- Though people had concerns about the direction of Australian society, they typically dissociated themselves from the consequences, considering themselves to be exempt.

- There was some reference to a negative perception that those involved ‘in the community’ are overly zealous in their intentions, and are not the norm.

Discussion

The first observation evident from the interviews was that people contradicted themselves. Some participants were conscious that they were seeking to be consistent with earlier comments. This suggests that when verbalising their thoughts, people are engaging in active screening. People may be willing to sacrifice conviction for consistency.

The discussions around employment raised a regular contradiction. People were willing to state that a person could find a job in Australia without trouble—if motivated—yet, to the very next question, participants also responded there were not enough jobs in Australia. This also suggested that people struggled to grapple with the complexity of an issue where some people appear to be doing OK, but others are not.

The extent to which each individual was situated in his or her unique experiences and circumstances was informative and might possibly be overlooked if using a simple demographic segmentation (sex, age etc). Commonalties with respect to demographic data were insufficient to grasp and understand completely each person’s unique position. That some participants moved between quite different life circumstances, particularly in relation to income, further supports a recommendation that a focus on demographic data would not be an effective means of segmenting the ‘market’.

The use of the term ‘values’ is problematical and caused more than a moment’s hesitation for most participants. Participants were generally able to associate values with things that are important, priorities and guidelines for living. However, examples of values tended to differ considerably from how the term is conceptualised in the literature. For instance, the importance of family and friends was regularly identified as a value. A discussion of values would frequently become a review of opinions such as beliefs about refugees or discipline in schools. There is some suggestion that people felt uncomfortable discussing values, with a few participants spontaneously apologising for being ‘too philosophical.’ It is difficult to say whether the discomfort was personal or an assessment that others would not want to hear such views.

A fourth observation related to an ‘us and them’ mentality about politics and politicians. This view was more evident in people who felt that they had less influence on decision-making. Those who believed they and those around them could influence politicians discussed the ability to express opinions via letter or in person to a sitting member, joining a lobbying group, or possibly entering politics themselves.

Few people made an association between their personal future and the future of Australia. Asked whether they could achieve their personal aspirations even if their fears came to fruition, most said they could. Participants thought they were able to take care of themselves. Even those who generally lacked confidence still considered themselves capable of fulfilling their own aspirations. Fear-based reasons for alleviating poverty (that is, ‘It could be you next’) would be unlikely to be effective as a persuasive technique.

There was reference, albeit limited, to a perception among some participants that individuals involved in the community are overly zealous. Larry noted that in his culture (Indigenous Australian) the fact that others may consider him to be a ‘goody goody’ was a negative. Trent told of an occasion when a girl he knew mentioned she was doing volunteer work because it would look good in her CV. He was shocked at the link between community involvement for personal gain rather than simply for the good of building a better community. Trent further expressed dismay when an ethics advisor directing some workplace training said helping a stranger on the street should and could not be an expected behaviour. He took exception to being called ‘altruistic’ and was disappointed that altruism was construed as a negative.

Caring for others was a consistently acknowledged area of importance for participants, that there is some evidence to suggest that the term 'community involvement' may be suffering a brand image problem therefore requires further investigation.

Recommendations

- Given a tendency to seek consistency of views, making an association between new information about poverty and views on other issues might assist people to understand and accept the new information.
- The individual focus of communications should be maximised to increase the resonance of the message and to also combat the potential rebuttal that 'that does not apply to me' in group and mass media approaches.
- Future research could explore perceptions before and after major life changes. It could be hypothesised that when dealing with life changes one must deconstruct oneself to get back to 'core principles', creating a stronger link between values, thoughts and behaviour. Research at intervals after a major event may provide a view to the intensity of beliefs over time.
- The use of the term 'values' is not helpful and would distract from any discussion. It is recommended that discussions avoid this term in favour of open-ended questions such as 'the guidelines you live your life by' which are more easily understood.
- Communication strategies may need to appeal to reward based reasons—'carrots' or incentives—for involvement, as people were not associating themselves with negative consequences.
- Further inquiry is required to determine if there is a potential negative perception held by some about community involvement. If there is such a perception, this could prove a barrier and would need to be address in communication strategies.

Case Studies

1. Alexis: Female, 16-17 years, low income (< 25K h/hold), ESB, outer Melbourne suburb, public and some secondary education, no children

Alexis was a 16-year-old female. She had left school midway through that year and was currently working part-time. Alexis, an only child, lived with her mother in a housing estate in outer Melbourne suburb where her mother owned a unit. Her father was living in Melbourne's western suburbs.

Alexis was a second-generation Australian. Her mother moved to Australia almost two decades ago from Malaysia. English was the primary language spoken at home. Alexis was not able to speak Malaysian fluently. Alexis had not travelled extensively, apart from the occasional trip to Malaysia.

Social values

Alexis had not considered many of the aspects of society raised during the interview. Much of the interview, then, was based on instinct and gut reactions, and Alexis frequently struggled to support or explain her beliefs. Alexis tended to extrapolate from her own experiences to reply to questions about Australian society. Where she had no personal experiences Alexis was unable to comment. Education and some cultural aspects were the main areas on which she Alexis spontaneously commented.

Alexis described Australia as 'pretty friendly' and 'easy going': 'I like it here.' Alexis was able to speak expertly about her experiences with Australia's education system. She contrasted Australian schooling with schools in Malaysia. Discipline was the key variant between Australian and Malaysian schools, with Australian schools characterised as being much less strict.

Alexis believed there was no difference between public and private schools at the primary level. It was at the secondary level of schooling that the differences appeared. Alexis would advise a person moving to Australia to send their child to a private school if they had the money, or select one of the better public secondary schools. She mentioned that zone constraints as well as waiting lists would impact on the ability to get into the better secondary schools. Though Alexis' own knowledge of private schools was minimal she thought they would offer something above and beyond a public school. That 'something' remained undefined.

Employment

Alexis was generally positive that, with a bit of patience, Australians could gain work. The work itself might be part-time and 'may not be flash but you could [get work].' Alexis later expressed the desire that more jobs would be available and she believed businesses should prioritise employment over profit, making job cuts only when necessary.

Alexis considered the greatest difficulty in achieving one's ideal occupation was not the lack of opportunity in Australia but rather determining what that occupation was. This reflected Alexis' own confusion about career choices. Once the decision had been made then 'you can apply yourself and achieve that'. Alexis placed the responsibility of finding work and pursuing career dreams on the individual.

Quality of life

Alexis was satisfied with the amount of freedom of the Australian lifestyle compared with life in Malaysia. Asked whether people could own their own home she initially commented, 'Probably, yes'. When asked whether all people in Australia *do* own their own home, she raised the issue of

homelessness as evidence that they do not. She could not reconcile these two ideas. She had a positive view of opportunity in Australia and was unsure why there were exceptions to this rule.

Alexis identified public transport as her principal means of travel. She felt restricted by infrequent services: 'Public transport is shocking. I can't do things because there are no more buses, no more trains.' Alexis commented that late night travel was particularly difficult for people reliant on public transport.

Business

Alexis identified Australia as having some good businesses and some bad ones. It was the 'fairness' that differentiated the good from the bad. Alexis struggled to clarify the term 'fairness', but suggested it had something to do with pay.

At this point she said that her status as a young Australian made her a prime target for bosses to 'rip them [young Australians] off.' Her father also received a casual wage because it was cheaper for the business though it was not in his best interests. When asked whether both small and big businesses were unfair she claimed the bigger ones were, 'because they're greedy'.

Alexis had not previously considered the role of business in society. On prompting she felt that the purpose of business was to provide employment. Alexis considered undesirable the involvement of business in the direction of Australia's future and the way society is run, though she struggled to explain her comment.

Welfare

Alexis was uninformed about support mechanisms in Australia. She presumed 'people get a little bit of help from the government'. Alexis tended towards a view that it was the individual's responsibility to make their own life satisfactory: 'There's homeless people and stuff like that. Most of it comes down to the individual.' She felt people might also be ineffective in searching for a job, but not unmotivated, and that this might be a reason they are struggling.

Security

Alexis did not feel unsafe from an international perspective, particularly in comparison with other countries. Alexis regarded crime as a problem but she believed that 'crime's going to happen everywhere' so there was little that could be done to eliminate it all together. In contrast to other countries, she regarded our crime rate as low.

Alexis had some concerns about drugs. The issue of drugs was raised in direct response to questions about her safety. As a public transport user, seeing 'smackies' on trains and at train stations concerned her. She believed drugs and drug users were becoming increasingly more visible. She attributed the increase in drug use to people having more problems, such as unemployment, and drugs were their way of dealing with it. Her solution to the drug problem tended to emphasise that people should find another solution for their problems.

Environment

Alexis believed that Australians generally had a good attitude to the environment and perceived the environment to be important. If there remained problem areas they included land-clearing and litter.

In later references to the environment Alexis focused on the issue of litter: 'I hope it gets better... litter... there's always rubbish everywhere.' She felt it was a problem resulting not from a lack of education but from laziness. She blamed people who 'couldn't be bothered going to the bin'.

Politics

Alexis thought all Australians do have an influence on politics: 'Everybody has a little bit of impact.' The primary influence was through the ballot box. She further identified groups, such as environmental lobby, as having an impact. She did not feel political decisions always corresponded to the belief of Australia's majority. She cited the introduction of a GST as evidence of that. She personally didn't want a GST and neither did any of the people she knew. She was surprised then that a GST resulted. Alexis did not feel she contributed to decision-making in Australia yet because she wasn't old enough to vote.

People

Alexis described Australians as having a sense of humour. She felt Australia has more in common with nations like England and the United States of America. If other countries were to see a negative in Australians it might be laziness.

Alexis did not comment on multiculturalism in Australia beyond a brief discussion about refugees. Even then, Alexis was not sure she was sufficiently informed to make a decision about whether the refugees 'were good or bad'. She believed, however, that there will always be refugees and nothing the Australian Government did would halt the flow of boat people.

She was 'not sure' whether Australia was a spiritual country or whether the people tended to believe in one or many faiths.

Direction of Australian society

Alexis thought that Australia was a considerable distance from an ideal future that she could envisage: 'I think Australia could be doing better.' She nominated drugs as a 'big problem' whilst unemployment and the environment, particularly litter, were also areas that improvement was required. Alexis also discussed, in length, improvements that were required in the education system.

With regard to improving the Australian education system, Alexis recommended the use of teachers who were smart—'Some are just stupid'—and in touch with the students. Good teachers explained the information well and 'didn't put up with crap'. She believed that teachers 'need to be a little bit harder on students'.

Alexis felt the Australian education system had an additional role of assisting teens determine what careers might interest them: 'It'd be really good if you could just try a lot of different things.' She had talked about her personal experiences of the pressure from home and at school to make a decision about her career. She felt this decision needed to be made early to ensure she selected the right subjects if going on to tertiary education. She also believed the decision needed to be right, because it would be a setback to start building another career path: 'You've got to have qualifications backing you up. Starting over again is a real issue.'

Alexis considered access to education adequate, though she noted that 'not everyone can afford to go to a private school'.

Achieving change

Alexis believed government and the Prime Minister needed to make the key decisions about Australia's future. It was the Australian public, however, who were responsible for letting government know what was wanted through their vote and from the impact of lobby groups. She thought writing a letter or voting when she was old enough could involve her in the decision-making process. She did not feel, in her present situation, that she was either informed or interested in making an impact on politics:

I don't really want to change anything because I don't really know anything about politics... I'll just think about what I'm going to do when I'm older. I've never really thought about it [before].

Personal values

Alexis expressed some frustration with herself and her life. She was annoyed that she had not yet determined what it was that she wanted to do with her working life. Without knowing what interested her, how could she move towards it?

She seemed to be dissatisfied with the relationship she had with her mother. She felt she was more like her father, who did not plan ahead or consider the future in detail. Her mother, on the other hand, was a planner and was regularly 'nagging' Alexis about being responsible for her future and doing things that would 'help her later on in life'. When asked how others would describe her, Alexis thought her mother would say she was 'lazy', 'irresponsible' and 'a good liar'. Alexis said that if she were an animal she would be a bird, because she wanted to 'fly away and be free'.

Alexis had difficulty describing what she did in her spare time. She would 'go out' and spend time with friends. She couldn't think of examples of the things that they talked about. After several prompts, such as music, movies, she seemed to agree that 'yeah' she would talk about those things. Alexis felt that she was generally 'lazy' and that 'there [wasn't] much to do at [her] age'. She felt it was a hassle getting to clubs and she wasn't overly interested in getting in under age. She admitted having tried once or twice though but she was always rejected. There was one club in the CBD where a friend could get her in if she wanted to. So far she hadn't wanted to.

Things which Alexis was interested in included movies (she hoped to see American Pie II when it was released), TV and music. She liked R&B (rhythm and blues) in particular.

Alexis nominated confidence as a trait that she liked in other people. She would like to be more confident in herself but ultimately thought that 'you can't change yourself.' It was her friends who helped her get through tough times. They 'reassure you' that everything would be OK. She did not consider herself to believe in a particular religion.

In the future, Alexis wanted to have a lifestyle where she would not 'have to struggle'. She did not express any doubts that she would be able to achieve a comfortable lifestyle. She found it difficult to give detail about the type of lifestyle she sought.

Work

Alexis was unsure what she wanted to do for a job: 'I don't know what I want to do. Everybody suggests things but I don't want to do that.' Her present work at fast-food outlets was only for money.

Given her belief that it was important to know what career you want to pursue because you need to select the right subjects at school as they might be a pre-requisite for entry to a university degree, it was surprising that Alexis left school. Alexis didn't offer any information on her decision to leave school. Perhaps her decision reflected a giving up or rebellion caused by her own frustration at not knowing what she was interested in.

Alexis commented that for some time she was interested the arts. She undertook a class in the arts but she didn't like the teacher and found that the class was boring. As a result, Alexis had pushed that career option to the back of her mind. A dream job would be a DJ but she hadn't inquired as to how to get a job in that field. Instead, the day after the interview, Alexis had an interview about an administration position. This was a traineeship that would offer one year's full-time work. At the end of the year she would have a qualification.

Quality of life

Alexis identified her main aspirations for the future as having a comfortable life in which she would not have to struggle. She wanted a comfortable house, she wanted a good car and to be well paid. Alexis was unsure what else she could want.

Relationships

Alexis thought she would want a family in the future but she commented that for now, boyfriends 'just doesn't work for me'. When Alexis did have a family, it would be small, with 'two children at the most'.

Alexis was unsure what 'community involvement' would mean. Her involvement with the community was an area that she had not considered. Her relationship with her neighbours was limited to 'a wave of the hand'. She felt the relationship she would like to have with her neighbours would involve stopping for a brief chat in the street.

Values

Alexis was unsure about what the term 'values' meant. She knew that values were 'something that's important'. Being funny, trustworthy, easy-going and fun to be around were all identified as 'values'.

Alexis was not a person who regularly discussed issues and opinions. She felt some people were inclined to do that and that was OK. She was happy that everyone had their own opinions and that these opinions differed: 'There's always people who disagree and sit there and argue. Everyone's entitled to their own opinion.' She thought that information from the news might be a way that people changed their views.

Final comments on poverty

There was not a lot of scope for discussion about poverty given the limited depth at which Alexis had considered the issue: 'I've never really had a conversation like this... about society.' Alexis considered to have a conversation about this 'stuff' was important to get her thinking.

Alexis felt that she did not know much about the different charity organisations. She did not have a pet charity and wouldn't know who to give \$100 to if she had money for a charity. Alexis had heard of the Brotherhood of St Laurence.

2. Craig: Male, 17 years, middle income (25-70K h/hold), ESB, regional Victoria, public and secondary education, no children

Craig was 17 years old and was living with his father in regional Victoria. Born in Australia and speaking English as the main language at home his parents were second generation Australians. His father had an Middle Eastern background and his mother was half-European. Craig had an older sister and a younger sister. A few weeks prior to the interview Craig had been living with his mother, stepfather and sister. Craig's decision to live with his father was prompted by some relationship difficulties with his stepfather. Craig's father was self-employed

Craig worked in a local fast food shop. Due to his employers' sickness, Craig had taken on a more managerial role. He indicated the pay—later determined to be \$6.00 an hour—'wasn't the best', but he worked enough hours to make up for the low pay. Craig would commence year 12 in the new school year.

Craig had not travelled widely by this stage of life, apart from a few trips to Melbourne and a visit to Adelaide.

Social values

Given Craig's age he spoke with some consideration of social issues, though in general he acknowledged that his understanding of Australia's systems was limited.

Craig's spontaneous comments when asked to describe Australia were about lifestyle. He regarded Australia's quality of life to be safe and blessed with space and suitable weather. These enabled Australians to live their preferred lifestyle:

I think it's unreal. It's a better country than Afghanistan. We don't have wars like that country... [Australia's] so big. Not everyone's just crammed in. Got pretty good weather...

Other systems in Australia including welfare, politics and education were all explored through direct questioning. Craig frequently tried to make international comparisons as a means of determining whether Australia was performing well. Because Craig had limited knowledge about systems overseas, he felt he was often unable to discuss the Australian situation: 'I don't know what it's like in other parts of the world.'

Throughout the discussion Craig indicated he felt individuals were responsible for themselves, but there were other factors like luck and sickness that might impact on a person's situation. He did refer to family and friends as having a role to help out others who are troubled, yet emphasised that he was a self-reliant person who would create his own destiny. On some occasions he was conscious of a belief that both individual and structural factors were at play but he had difficulty reconciling them.

Employment

In Craig's discussion of employment there was a recurrent theme of personal motivation. He felt the ideal job was achievable 'if you looked hard enough...' He did believe some groups in Australia have greater difficulty gaining employment. These groups included individuals aged in their 40s and 50s who have been retrenched, as well as youth. Craig's own friends had struggled to find suitable part-time work. Some who had found work had quit due to poor employer-employee relationships. Compared with older unemployed people, Craig believed younger workers had a slight advantage, as the wage rate was lower and therefore more appealing to employers.

Craig could not provide an initial response as to whether there were enough jobs for all Australians; rather he asked what the employment rate was to help him decide.

Welfare

Craig conceded he ‘wouldn’t have a clue about that sort of stuff [welfare systems and payments]’. He directed his discussion to local aspects of welfare such as disabled parking and his own experience with doctors. He mentioned the problem of aged care in nursing homes, possibly because of recent media coverage.

In relation to disadvantaged, and specifically disabled, individuals, Craig presumed ‘they [disabled Australians] would get looked after pretty good if you get the right help’. He cited the availability of disabled parking spots and carers for disabled individuals as some evidence of that care.

In the absence of knowledge, Craig presumed that there would be systems in place for people needing help.

Quality of life

Craig did not believe everyone in Australia could own a home though he expressed some hesitation. He qualified his statement with ‘Maybe... if they did the right thing’. Craig’s own discussion of his saving suggested the ‘right thing’ is a disciplined approach, regularly putting money aside and avoiding debt. Renting was the alternative for those who could not afford to own their own home.

Renting was not associated with any rise or decline in the standard of living. Rather Craig related standard of living to the cleanliness of one’s home, for which standards varied from one person to the next.

Craig responded that the most important key to Australians’ standard of living was having money: ‘[Money] you can’t live without it. Everything involves money... you just need it to get by.’ While Craig understood the importance of money in Australian society, the translation of wealth accumulation into a quality of life could not be explored. Craig himself was in a stage of development that focused on the accumulation of wealth. He was saving specifically to purchase a car when he turned 18 and had the idea of making a housing investment a few years beyond that, although he did not know the price of houses. Craig rarely associated wealth and quality of life issues possibly because he had yet to make the transition to a fully independent consumer when his own wealth would have to cover his living expenses.

Public transport was another transport issue Craig discussed, since he relied on the bus system. The buses themselves were satisfactory though he would prefer services to run later at night: ‘It’s all right, though I wouldn’t mind it if the buses went all night.’ Craig felt there would be demand for later services though he wasn’t sure how you would go about getting the timetable changed.

Environment

‘Compared to other cities around the world, [Australia’s environment is] pretty good.’ However, Craig believed that pollution was a problem. He referred to litter, emphasizing cigarette butts, everywhere on the ground. When prompted to think about our bush he referred to dumped vehicles. He raised the issue of deteriorating water quality as a hot topic in Regional Victoria. It is interesting to note that though Craig expressed concern about the environment, he dropped his cigarette butts on his front lawn during interview breaks. How isolated this incident is cannot be determined.

Businesses

In relation to business in Australia, Craig talked about his own experiences and the experiences of friends. He qualified his comments in relation to Australian businesses as reflecting only those relatively limited perspectives. He felt there was mixed bag of good and bad employers, though ‘maybe more bad than good.’ He personally had had positive employer relationships, although a

demanding work experience boss caused Craig to question his desire to pursue engineering as a career. Craig described a fun workplace as a good workplace.

Craig raised a number of apparently contradictory views in relation to businesses. He commented that they could be too greedy and agreed that it might be interesting to see business profit rates. Craig also commented that some businesses were struggling financially, with the GST a contributor to business difficulties. He regarded the difficulty of finding good staff as an additional stress on business owners trying to make a profit.

Education:

Craig felt ill informed to make comparisons between schools because of his limited experience at his Secondary School. Therefore, apart from noting that private schools seemed stricter he could not comment further. He did discuss in some detail his personal view of teaching styles and the impact of teaching on his interest and ability to learn, but these were not comments on the education system as a whole. This discussion is detailed later in this case study.

Access to education was limited in his regional Victorian town, particularly at a tertiary level. Though most of Craig's friends 'want[ed] to finish up and get a trade or something', a few wanted to continue with their studies and that would typically involve moving away from country Victoria.

Politics

Craig had a negative impression of politicians that included a reputation for lying and making few decisions that impact on him: 'Nothing gets done that affects me.' He conveyed a perspective of politics as game-playing, with the opposition party adopting the opposing position to that taken by the elected government. Indeed in an offhand discussion that politicians should wear lie detectors he felt politicians would agree to that though the opposition might not, simply because it was opposite to the elected government's view.

Craig was cynical and untrusting of politicians: 'I reckon they're [politicians] just in it for the money and the trips overseas.' Though not of voting age he indicated a preference for Jeff Kennett compared with Steve Bracks because Mr. Kennett was responsible for bringing the Formula One Grand Prix to Victoria. Craig seemed to be disinterested in politics.

Craig did not feel empowered or informed about the ability of Australians, particularly young Australians, to influence politics: 'To me it doesn't seem like that [people have a say in politics].' The lack of decisions that affect him was evidence that his generation do not have a say. When changes did affect Craig, they tended to be negative such as a tax increase on cigarettes.

Safety

Safety at both an international and domestic level was of some concern to Craig at the time of the interview. Internationally, he felt the September 11 events and the War Against Terrorism had made all Australians less secure: 'I don't reckon anywhere in the world is safe at the moment.' Though our vulnerability had been revealed, Craig was not really expecting an attack on Australia. More topical for Craig was domestic safety, given some recent break-ins in his local area.

People

Craig described Australia as 'a friendly country' that valued barbecues, having weekends off and drinking beer. Australians are 'laid back, pretty lazy in a way'.

Craig felt that the way Australians treat each other was dependent on who the person is. Specifically Craig referred to the reputations of certain minority groups, though he did acknowledge that such reputations often resulted from the deeds of only a few people: 'We have a lot of Aboriginal kids around here... The ones around here just give them all a bad name.'

Craig believed other countries would regard Australia as trying to emulate the Americans, given our lifestyle choices as well as our recent allegiance in the War Against Terrorism. Though Craig felt a 'national identity' was not very important, this contrasted with his objection to being considered like an American. Indeed he was keen to ensure Australians were seen as 'laid back' and even 'lazy'. From the way Craig spoke he was proud of what he perceived to be Australian culture.

Direction of Australian society

Craig was asked to consider what would constitute an ideal Australia. Craig spontaneously nominated a society in which all Australians were equal. Craig specifically referred to equality from a wealth perspective raising the issue of the gap between the upper and lower classes. He was not however, equipped to describe an equal Australia in detail beyond equal income and being able to dispense with the need for bank loans.

Craig didn't believe an equal Australia was achievable in his lifetime and ultimately felt that inequality was practically a human condition: 'It's like that everywhere in the world; you have your upper class and lower class.' He later linked 'the gap' with unemployment and as an inevitable result of businesses competing with each other.

Outside Craig's personal experiences at school and work he struggled to envisage an Australia much different from the present. He noted ideals of full employment, no disadvantaged Australians and the opportunity for all Australians to start a business if they wished. But Craig didn't think Australia would change much, although technology would continue to advance.

Education

Craig's comments in relation to improved education related more to teaching skills rather than Australia's education system as a whole. Newer younger teachers were highlighted as having better teaching skills because they 'can relate to the kids,' and they 'joke around with you.' Craig requested a reduced focus on theory and wanted to learn more from practical examples, experience or more general class discussions.

Craig qualified his comments as suiting his unique method of learning. He was comfortable with the perception that school would change to be more IT-dependent, but with most students having laptops. What Craig seemed to be requesting was a more individual means of learning. However he was resigned to the fact he wouldn't always get it and would be unsuccessful in some subjects as a result.

Achieving change

Craig had limited knowledge about how Australians could influence politics. When asked what politicians could do assist Australians to gain equality he mentioned they should take a pay cut. This focus on personal action rather than structural change reflected Craig's limited awareness of Australia's systems for change. Craig felt powerless and regarded this feeling to be typical of all young Australians: 'We [young Australians] don't have much power now 'cos we don't have a say in anything.' Craig felt parents and teachers made all the decisions for young Australians. He would like to feel he had more of a say though the tone of the conversation suggested Craig considered himself uninvolved and possibly uninterested at present. As Craig became fully independent, it would be interesting to note whether his perspective altered.

Personal values

Aside from work and school, Craig preferred to be with his friends and specifically mentioned parties at a friend's house or being around friends at the local skate park. Though Craig had a number of friends of both genders he mentioned only three he would regard as confidants, people he could trust with anything. Craig didn't have a girlfriend but 'wouldn't mind one'.

Though there are under age nightclub events in his town Craig hadn't been motivated to attend. He was willing to wait until he was older. Craig had played Saturday sports in the past but his work commitments limited his ability to play regularly. At present, his sporting interests were confined to cricket and other games, played with his friends during school recesses.

Craig believed his friends would describe him as a person who liked to have fun and was outgoing and talkative in established relationships. He might be considered shy when meeting new people. Craig felt respect was a critical factor in any relationship he built. He felt that there were some marked differences between himself and his friends. These differences tended to be things like musical tastes, though respect for each other's interests Craig noted was vital for those healthy friendships.

Craig's parents had some religious leanings. Craig's father believed in Allah though he was not a serious worshipper. Craig could not recall his mother's faith—'What sort of churches are there?'—but his mother did attend church regularly. Craig did not consider himself to be a religious person and had never really thought about it. Despite these comments he did believe in God: 'I believe in God and everything but I don't go to church every Sunday... [God is] a big guy in the sky and we go up there when we die.' He hadn't thought about how you get entry into heaven. When times were tough Craig distracted himself by keeping busy and spending time with friends.

Craig identified work and friends as the key ingredients of a happy life. Craig also talked frequently about freedom, self-reliance and independence. Interest in what he was working on or studying was also critical to Craig's sense of satisfaction. He noted that pay was secondary to being motivated and interested.

Craig nominated the biggest dissatisfaction with his life at the time was not being able to visit his mother because of the difficulties he had been having with his stepfather. Craig talked about the discussions he had had with work mates, most of whom also had split families. The difficulty with step-parents was their perceived right to discipline: 'You just can't handle getting told off by someone who's not your parent... not my dad.' Before living in the same house Craig had had a good relationship with his stepfather.

Work

Managing the store was Craig's immediate challenge. Though demanding Craig believed this responsibility was providing great experience for him and would position him to own his own business one day.

His final year of school was the next looming challenge. Despite the stereotype that 'you don't like school when you're a kid', Craig felt he generally had fun at school. In relation to year 12, however, he would 'have to starting trying'. Craig's preferred subjects included 'timbers and systems, motors and computers' though he would miss his favourite class because the school wasn't offering it anymore. Instead, Craig had taken up a communications unit. Craig foresaw the successful completion of this unit to be a major challenge for him as his interest was relatively low. Craig did have the opportunity to do his favourite unit in conjunction with another school but had dismissed this as an option.

Though Craig conceded his dream of Formula One racing would go unfulfilled, an interest in all things mechanical lingered. Craig had career interests in customising cars or being an electrician. Being an electrician had been his primary goal, but a poor relationship with his work experience boss had dampened Craig's enthusiasm. He had seen a person customising cars at home in his neighbourhood and might approach him one day to see if he had any jobs or at least some advice. Given his experience in the store he thought becoming a car salesman could be an alternative career.

When asked about something he was proud of he named managing the shop. When asked what he felt bad about he mentioned turning away customers. Craig acknowledged, 'I relate everything to work'. Craig described hard work as not only being good at what you do but also being efficient. He didn't object to 12-hour days as long as he could sleep in every few weeks.

Quality of life

Craig's focus at the time of the interview was on wealth accumulation. The purchase of a vehicle and later the purchase of a property, either as owner-occupier or as an investor, were two key goals: 'I bank half my money every week... that's going on a car when I turn eighteen.'

Craig was a conscientious saver and had certain well-defined principles about saving and debt. Even when discussing having his own business he commented, 'I'd make sure I'd always have a certain amount of money in the bank'.

Craig regarded his future as unfolding in regional Victoria. Despite some problems that were associated with smaller towns, his community was a quiet community where Craig was comfortable. Working and finishing school were key goals. Afterwards he would like to travel in Queensland for a few months before settling into a job. In the long-term, Craig wanted 'to keep having fun or to have more fun'.

Relationships

Craig talked of owning a home for his family: '[When I'm 30 I'll] start to settle down, get a family and house, get a good job that I like.' Friendship was important to Craig in the present and for the future.

Craig had difficulty defining the term 'community' and was unsure how he could be involved in it. However, after recent burglaries in Craig's area, he had formed relationships with his neighbours with the common goal of a secure neighbourhood. Craig felt positive about this involvement and was hopeful his family's involvement would keep his father's house safe.

Craig described other contact with community, beyond neighbours, as bumping into someone new when walking down the street. He acknowledged this as very rare. Craig said he would help an older lady across the street or help a known person home if they were drunk or sick, but would hesitate if he thought he might place himself in danger.

Interplay of social and personal aspirations

Craig regarded himself as an independent and self-reliant individual, demonstrated by his dedication to his work and ability to make life-altering decisions such as moving in with his father. It was therefore not surprising that Craig believed himself responsible for achieving his personal aspirations: 'Just depends on how hard I work.'

Though Craig raised the issue of inequality in Australian society he clearly differentiated his own path from that of Australia's: 'It [inequality] doesn't really worry me myself... I know I'll work hard enough to get what I want.' For Craig, a careful handler of finances, his faith in his own abilities resulted in a steadfast belief that he would be on the upside of any inequality in Australia based on wealth.

Values

Craig defined values as priorities: 'It's your priorities in life. What's most important.'

Craig nominated his own values to include friends, family, school and work. He did seem to discuss these with a sense of ownership – 'I value friends...' There appeared to be a separation between values and opinions though this could not be explored in full, given time constraints. Craig

mentioned various examples of values—from traits such as independence, to actions such as wrongdoing.

Craig identified his parents, self, school and friends as sources of value development. It was noteworthy that Craig mentioned himself, suggesting an evolution of his values based on his experiences: ‘You learn from what you’ve done wrong.’ His actions would be assessed in terms of how bad they were and his future behavior patterns modified. This indicated a bottom-up value development based on experience, rather than a top-down approach in which the values were clearly articulated and action flowed from those values.

Craig had difficulty discussing the how different values had emerged in different cultures. Specifically the values underlying the Taliban were contrasted against the United States. Craig searched for rational and informed views. He knew the Taliban had values: ‘They’re all willing to die... so they value something.’ He even admitted they might have share some values with Americans: ‘Probably but I don’t know which ones.’ In summary, values were not an area that Craig had considered in depth.

Values for children

Craig charged schools with the responsibility to teach children about drugs, sex and other lifestyle choices. Craig noted however that, ‘I think they [schools] teach kids everything anyway.’ Specifically he nominated a Community Development class as exploring the consequences of drugs.

There followed some discussion of the prevalence of these problems for teenagers that Craig knew. Craig discussed with disillusionment some friends who had become involved in drugs. He chose to remain out of this scene, unable to even explain where his past friends got money for the drugs (he no longer communicated with them). Craig acknowledged his own vice in smoking and had made a New Year’s Eve resolution to cut down the number of cigarettes he smoked per day (currently half a pack). Health and expense issues were raised as motivating factors for his desired behaviour change. Craig believed these choices were a personal responsibility, and disliked individuals who blamed and sued cigarette companies.

Craig felt parents should also be teaching children about important issues like drugs. Parents, he reported, should also be giving children freedom.

Living out values

Given time constraints this area could not be explored in depth. As noted earlier there was an interesting contrast at the interview between Craig’s perspective on the environment and his dropping of cigarette butts on his front lawn. This might be an isolated incident but suggested a distinction he made between social problems and his own personal situation.

Craig indicated that although he had engaged in some discussions about social matters for example the War Against Terrorism, he didn’t mind disagreeing with those around him. In general, though, he tried to avoid conflict. Craig questioned the thoroughness of information sources: ‘I don’t believe everything I hear.’ He thought, for instance, the reporting of the War Against Terrorism was only the ‘U.S. side of things’.

Final comments on poverty

Craig had previously discussed disadvantage when reviewing the area of welfare. Craig felt there was disadvantage in Australia which he reported was caused by some not earning as much money as others and as a result, struggling to get by. He provided examples of debt, failed businesses and gambling as other causes.

When asked whether everyone has the same chance of getting out of poverty, Craig commented, 'I could answer yes or no'. Craig discussed the need for motivation as critical: 'You've got to want to help yourself first.' He also had a fatalistic view that some situations destroyed your chance of working which he linked closely with poverty. He gave the example of an accident causing a disability: 'There goes your chance.' Craig struggled to clarify his own thoughts around this complex issue. He mentioned the role of family and friends as support mechanisms to help people who have a problem such as gambling or who are struggling. Family, for instance, could make you go to see someone and stop you from going to the pokies.

Craig was asked who should be responsible for poverty. Craig felt everyone should all be worried about poverty as it could affect be one of your friends. He was unsure, however, the specific changes that would be required to eliminate poverty.

3. Laura: Female, 16-17 years, high income (>70K h/hold), ESB, Melbourne, private and secondary education, no children

Laura lived with her family in northern Melbourne. She had completed year 11 at a private Catholic school and would start year 12 in the new school year. In addition to her studies, she had a part-time job at a local store.

Both Laura's parents were born in Australia. Her mother had worked in the employment field before quitting to spend time caring for a family member who experienced a long-term sickness. Her mother now did emergency teaching in secondary schools.

Laura had travelled to Queensland and Adelaide. She had not travelled overseas.

Social values

The opportunities that are available to people in Australia were a recurring theme emerging from Laura's comments. Laura emphasised the opportunities in education, despite tertiary education being fee based. Good training and education Laura considered a vital start to positive employment and quality of life experiences. Freedom was another theme Laura felt was a highlight of Australian society.

I would say there's lots of opportunities in Australia—like to learn, education opportunities, opportunities to obtain employment... [Employment]'s becoming less and less I think, but the opportunities are there... anyone can really make good I think if they work hard.

I feel like I can do lots of things that I like to do. Like I can go out and it's safe and there are lots of things to do that are enjoyable... you've got lots of opportunities in education.

Laura was a motivated individual and interested in current affairs. She felt her beliefs and thoughtfulness were a consequence of her involved and outspoken parents. Her interest is reflected in her comments and aspirations for herself and Australian society.

Employment

Laura believed the employment opportunities in Australia were diminishing with education and cultural barriers making it difficult for some to find work. Laura believed a focus on education was necessary if people were to have the skills to compete for a position.

Laura also identified immigrants with limited or no English-speaking skills to be disadvantaged in finding employment, and specifically in getting their ideal job. She felt communication was important in many careers. A doctor who could not speak English would be very limited in their practice: 'It'd just be really impossible I think.'

Businesses

Laura was only able to talk about her experiences with Australian businesses from her job at the supermarket. She reported that her managers always treated her well. She felt some businesses were ethical and some weren't: 'Some ... huge businesses just rake in the money and pay really low wages to people. I think that's really unethical.'

Laura felt there were opportunities in Australia for someone wanting to pursue their own business venture. She believed businesses did receive government support for their enterprise and were 'taken care of'.

In principle, Laura would prefer to see Australian ownership of businesses and assets.

Welfare

Laura felt she wasn't able to speak in great depth about welfare systems in Australia. She identified the pension and superannuation as financial assistance, but she 'had a feeling' that they wouldn't provide a lot of money. Laura believed more could be done in the area of aged care and she was particularly concerned about the 'isolation' of older Australians. Aged care services should include assistance to involve older generations in the general community.

I just think that they're not really included that much in the community. People just look at them as if they're sort of not very important, I think.

Laura could only speak about the health care system from her personal experiences and specifically from her sister's sickness. She felt there was a shortage of beds in hospitals, resulting in really sick people having to stay at home until a bed became available.

Quality of life

Laura described the Australian way of life as 'busy'. She mentioned that most people worked, or at least wanted to work, and though work was a dominant culture Australia remained 'family-oriented' at the same time.

Laura felt it was hard to own a home in Australia, with the challenge of getting enough money for a deposit a principal obstacle. Nonetheless, she was hopeful that Australians could own their own home: 'I think that would be pretty hard but I think, yeah, hopefully. I hope so because I want to.' Though home ownership might be difficult for some, having housing in Australia was not generally a problem, with different standards of housing to fit different budgets, including housing commissions and housing flats.

Education

In general, Laura believed the opportunities for education in Australia were good. She felt 'you can get really good schools in both systems [public and private]' and that the biggest challenge in schooling was finding a school to fit the individual's needs. Regardless of the quality of schooling in Australia, she felt that education 'just isn't for everyone'.

Fees were beginning to limit the opportunities for tertiary education in Australia and this was Laura's principal criticism of the Australian education system. She mentioned on a number of occasions that education should be free. Laura linked a decline in preparedness for employment with a slight decline in the quality of schooling. Ensuring skills and knowledge were provided to help a person gain employment was important and should remain a focus.

Environment

Laura did not believe there was sufficient attention paid to the Australian environment. Laura considered this to be the number one issue in Australia at present. She felt the government, in particular, had ignored this issue. She was 'saddened' to hear about oil spills and mining that ruined the Australian environment that Laura regarded as being 'relatively pollution-free'. She felt there was room to do a lot more to improve and maintain the environment.

This is the only country. This is the only world... We should really look after it well because it's not just for us now, it's going to be for generations and generations in the future.

Security

Laura had experienced few safety scares in her life and was general unconcerned about security in Australia. She had confidence in the law and order systems within Australia that protected her at a

domestic level. She also believed that Australia's geographic isolation contributed to our safety from an international perspective:

I think we're a pretty safe country. I feel really safe here. I mean, after the New York bombings I think it made me look at it a bit differently, but I still feel really safe ... safe enough to travel on public transport.

Politics

Laura expressed positive and empowered views about the Australian political system. She supported a democracy that provided the right to the individual to have a say in the running of the country. She felt that if she had a concern, she would 'write into a paper and make [her] opinion known'. Laura further commented on the structure of federal, state and local levels of government, endorsing the present of local government as it was 'not as formal as the federal [government] and ... more accessible'.

I feel that... if there was something really bothering me about my electorate or area that I could approach the local member... which I think is a good way to be.

She felt compulsory voting caused people to be more interested in Australian politics: 'I think people do take a bit of an interest in it because they think, "Well we have to vote, we might as well be bit educated on who to vote for".'

People

Laura described Australia to be a country that was 'friendly', 'welcoming' and 'laid-back'. She felt the average Australian was pretty straight with people and avoided exaggeration. These were the characteristics she thought people from overseas would see in Australians and had seen when Sydney hosted the Olympics. She further described Australia as having 'a whole different range of cultural backgrounds'.

People don't go around smiling all the time and stuff but I think if people need assistance, I think other Australians are pretty ready to give it to them.

Laura considered Australia as seeking alliances with the United States, as well as with Britain and New Zealand, nations with which Australia had the most in common.

Laura believed Australians were a caring people. She did not think Australia was a religious nation. She believed religion was 'pretty personal for each individual... people would just follow whatever religion they choose to and try to live their life by it.'

Direction of Australian society

Laura described her ideal society as including the following features, in addition to what Australia presently has:

- 'Holds environment in a high priority.'
- 'Is welcoming to other people that need a safe place to live.'
- 'Has a free tertiary education system.'
- 'Has different sorts of learning programs at school' that emphasise more 'outdoor' and 'hands on' education.

Laura believed that Australia in the future would become more accepting of different cultures. She would 'like to see more community spirit and people getting to know one another'. She would like refugees to be taken in, to share our good fortune: 'We have so much here and I think we could

share a lot of it.' She believed that people were beginning to realise that others were not as fortunate and required help.

She believed that the standard of living would be improved in the future, but would be dependent on the person's work, reflecting differences in income. Laura would like all Australians to have a standard of living that provided people with the basics, plus extra money to have the furniture they liked and the ability to go to the movies or to dinner.

Achieving change

Laura did not feel it was a realistic expectation that her ideal future would come to fruition in the short term, because the people in government did not share her priorities. She also felt her ideal was not possible as the majority of Australians elected people into government with different priorities. In other words, her priorities were not the dominant ones. To change people's opinions Laura believed a 'shock' was needed.

Laura did not believe others shared her interest in social issues: 'I don't think everybody finds it important like me, I think everyone just has their own opinion of it... People want security and money and stuff like that.' Laura did not believe people gave much thought to an ideal Australia.

One of the career options Laura was considering was politics. She believed her role in achieving her ideal Australia would be through her work in the future: 'Maybe I'll try to put some of these things in practice.' For the moment however, she believed she could at least raise awareness of the issues by talking about them.

Personal values

Laura described herself as a friendly person who took care of and was loyal to her friends. Laura thought her friends might describe her as genuine, well-spoken and hard-working. On occasion, she could be rebellious. She had great affection for her family, though on the 'down' side, she thought she could get snappy around the people she knew.

Laura was confident that she knew what her needs were and she was able stand up for herself. She believed she was 'determined' when it came to doing what she wanted, like pursuing her career ambitions.

Laura was concerned she was expressing contradictory descriptions of herself. She felt she was 'always herself' but maybe different sides of her would emerge with her friends, as opposed to her family.

Laura was attracted to people who are friendly, warm and genuine. It was important to be able to have a conversation and shared interests might help. A good sense of humour was always further valued.

School was an important issue for Laura. Though the semester had not started she anticipated a 'big' year 12 dominated by a lot of homework. She also made mention of the sickness in her family as being 'pretty hard' during the year past. She assigned herself the responsibility of 'knuckling down' in her schooling. She felt she would need actively to pursue avenues to get her out of the house and away from the stresses there.

Laura was happy with her life 'especially on holidays'. She felt there were a number of factors that created a sense of satisfaction with her life. She nominated religion as being important. She also felt satisfaction resulted when you are happy with who you are, what you want and how you get it. Relationships that were fulfilling, enjoyable and challenging were also important. She drew on her religion, family and friends and her inner strength to get her through tough times.

Work prevented Laura from going to church on Sundays. When she could attend she would sometimes run the Sunday school.

If Laura could change something in her life she would make herself a less stressed person. She would also want to remove the stress from her family. Laura believed she was the sort of person who did reflect on the state of her life and was already working towards improvements: 'I look at things and how I can sort of change things in my life to be how I want my life to be.'

Laura was responsible for her life, though her parents and friends were there to help her. Laura felt the only thing stopping her from her from achieving her ambitions would be a loss of confidence, though she did not think this was likely.

Work

Laura was pleased with how her schooling had progressed. She intended to go on to university though she had not yet decided upon the precise degree. She was interested in a number of areas including music and performance, but she would like to work with people. Some career options included psychology, social work or politics. Regardless of the actual career Laura pursued, she wanted her work to be enjoyable and not 'just a job'.

Quality of life

Laura's standard of living was not really an issue for her at the time of the interview. She was able, however, to project about the quality of life she would like in the future. Essentially Laura wanted to be comfortable and secure. A secure job provided a regular source of income and would therefore be important. Laura wanted a life where she would not have to worry about bills or buying clothes. Laura wanted a big house to house the big family she hoped to have.

Relationships

Family was important to Laura. Family took precedence over all Laura's ambition and work would need to fit around the children she would have one day. The sickness in her family had also reinforced her immediate family as a priority.

With my [relation] being sick this year, that's made me think you're not the only person in the world... it makes me think you ... family is so important. Other things don't matter as much.

Laura talked about wanting a big family, including four children. She was keen to have an even number of children, as she observed siblings tended to 'pair up'. With an uneven number of children, the pair could 'gang up' on the third child.

Laura conveyed throughout the discussion a strong interest and involvement with social issues. It is not surprisingly therefore that she is keen to be involved in the future with her 'society', primarily through her career. Even now she knew her community through her work at the supermarket where she could talk with her neighbours and in general, feel a 'part of the community'.

[I'd have a role in] whatever job I was doing I suppose. If I was a politician I think I'd be pretty important, or a social worker or something, that'd be important too. Also my role as a mother maybe would be pretty important to educate your kids you know, [about] what's important and how to behave and stuff like that.

Interplay between social and personal aspirations

Laura did believe her social and personal aspirations were linked, because Laura would be keen to give her life meaning by working towards the fulfillment of her aspirations for Australia. She would discuss her views about an ideal society with her own family and friends and convey her sentiments to her children. Laura seemed to believe that her personal aspirations would be, in part, met if she was working towards her aspirations for society.

Well I think work, depending on what I did, would have a lot to do with the ideal world, especially politics, that would have a lot to do with it. Also family, like values and stuff has a lot to do with. Maybe [I'd] teach my kids what my values are, like what I find important in society.

Values

Laura described values as the 'guidelines of how you live'. Laura believed treating people in a manner she would like to be treated, and ensuring everyone was happy were her key values. Treating family, others, and the environment with respect were also values. To look after herself she noted might be another value which 'the other stuff sort of contributes to.'

I mean a key value is to be nice to people and to sort of treat them how I'd like to be treated and also treat them in a way that isn't going to hurt their feelings. Just to think that they're really important and ... make sure that people are happy and try to talk to people and cheer people up when they're unhappy.

[Current affairs and values] make your life more meaningful, [instead of] just living like you're just doing stuff and you're not really doing it for a reason. You're just doing it because you have to earn money or you have to go to school. Values and stuff makes it worth something, you get something out of it, or something more out of it.

Laura felt her beliefs were largely influenced by her parents and the way she had been brought up: 'I know I'm pretty involved because my parents are really interested and I think that's rubbed off on me a bit.' Laura also was an avid reader of newspapers to keep her informed about current affairs. Furthermore, she was also on mailing lists of some political newspapers and gained similar information from teachers. Laura discussed social issues regularly with family and friends.

[I think it's because of] religious values—I mean I'm just brought up that way and I think other issues like refugees and environment and stuff—that's a bit to do with parents, because they sort of [have] opinions but they're not as extreme as mine I think.

[I read] all types of newspapers like the *Herald Sun*, *The Age* and *The Australian*—bits that I can understand, and just other political newspapers. Like sometimes I read *Green Left*.

Laura didn't feel the need to have an opinion on everything.

Sometimes I have to tell myself that I don't have to have an opinion for everything. Sometimes you can just let things fly by without having to save the world... sometimes you just don't have an opinion and you don't mind either way. If I do have an opinion it usually comes to me straight away.

Laura felt she did change her views on issues. The issue of IVF for gay couples had been one such area where she was plagued by indecision. Laura struggled to reconcile her views, having known gay people who she thought would be great parents, with a perception of homosexuality as 'unnatural'. She 'confused' by the issue and in the end tried not to think about it.

Values for children

Laura would like more current affairs and news issues taught at schools. Other topic areas include the political system, different cultures and religions with less of a focus on the Bible: 'You don't have to agree with them [opinions], just give people a bit more perspective of where others are coming from.'

[Fellow school students] have opinions about things but not really current affairs that much. I think they could do a lot of good if they knew... I don't really know many people my age who read the newspapers. They should just maybe make things a bit clear, like explain what's going on with Israel and Palestine... things like that.

Laura felt that education in Australia was becoming more focused on personal development issues rather than being strictly subject-oriented: 'Secondary school education is not just for actual learning subjects but [understanding] that phase of development that people go through.' She encouraged more values learning and self-analysis in schools.

I think there should be a class that makes you think about your life... and how you want to treat people and want to be treated and just stuff like that.

Living out values

Laura felt people would see her values from her actions, including her interest in the subjects she was studying and how she related to her friends and family.

Although she could not initially think of an example, she was sure she had felt remorse about a past action or inaction. She could remember the sensation of remorse if not the incident. She later recalled that she sometimes regretted her actions when tired: 'Maybe at school if I was tired... ignoring people or can't be bothered being nice... little things like that.'

Laura considered 'sticking by' her family member throughout their sickness was an action that she could be proud of.

Final comments on poverty

Laura commented about advertisements for charities. She noted that the TV advertisements about third world poverty always made her feel 'guilty'. She felt she would like to help but she 'couldn't afford to do it herself'. She thought brochures from charities did give information but she felt she learnt more by seeing 'life in the streets'.

Laura thought poverty in Australia was different from poverty overseas:

It's a different kind of poverty to the poverty that you see in Third world countries. Some people live in a rumbled[sic] old flat or not a flat, just like some kind of dwelling, they just have water and stuff like that and not really any furniture and, you know, no money.

Laura felt poverty in Australia was linked to poor quality and inaccessible education. She felt that by making tertiary education free, a lot of poverty would be eliminated, as unemployment was related to a lack of training to take on a job. Laura also made mention of a lack of opportunities and drugs as contributing to poverty. Laura refuted suggestions that people who were impoverished were responsible for being in that state. She wasn't sure what could be done to relieve poverty in Australia beyond making education free and improved.

I think if maybe tertiary education were free there'd be more opportunities for them to study and get better employment or stuff like that. If high school education was more accessible and... the state system was a lot better.

4. Michelle: Female, 18-30 years, low income (<25K h/hold), Indigenous Australian, regional Victoria, public and TAFE education, youngest child under 5 years

Michelle, 28, was the oldest in a large family. Born in Queensland, she had spent much of her life living on orchards in regional Victoria and the surrounding district.

Michelle completed public secondary education to year 11 and had since gained a TAFE certificate. She had received some recognition for her Aboriginal art which had been commissioned by some commercial agencies. At the time of the interview Michelle was working part-time in regional Victoria. Her three children consumed the majority of her time. She was engaged to be married.

Michelle had returned to Queensland regularly, and had been to Adelaide, Alice Spring and Ayers Rock. Michelle had not travelled internationally.

Social values

Asked to describe Australian lifestyle, people and systems to a person moving to Australia, Michelle would firstly say, 'Australia is a lucky country'. She believed Australia to be a country in which you could live your life in the way you wish. Freedom of speech was further noted by Michelle.

Michelle described Australia as increasingly multicultural. She felt some people still harboured some ignorant and racist attitudes. She cited the way shopkeepers in her father's home town would ignore the local Aboriginal people, not saying hello or raising a smile when they shopped there: 'Their business depends on Aborigines but they [shopkeepers] have the nerve to look down on them.' These attitudes, Michelle believed were becoming less prevalent in an increasingly multicultural Australia: 'You can't live like that, not in this day and age.'

Michelle had a strong people focus and she felt her experience with people of diverse backgrounds added to her knowledge of cultures. However, Michelle struggled to comment in depth about areas such as employment, business and welfare.

Employment

Michelle reported that there were a large number of seasonal jobs available in regional Victoria, including fruit-picking. Michelle believed that finding work in Australia should not be a problem.

However, Michelle believed that people would not have access to some professions without having the appropriate qualification: 'There are jobs but you've got to have the qualification for whatever that job is.' Michelle stated her aspirations for her own children included their completion of school 'because it's hard now to get a job [without VCE]'. They could go on to university, depending on their interests.

Businesses

Michelle's experience with business, aside from the sale of her own artwork, was primarily from shops where she purchased goods. She queried why supermarkets charged such different prices for the same product. Michelle avoided supermarkets, buying fresh produce from local fruit and vegetable shops, or direct from the orchards, where it was less expensive.

Welfare

Michelle had faith in the welfare system. She believed that people who struggled were receiving monetary assistance from the government. She felt it was important to have those systems in place,

particularly for people who were not brought up in sound financial circumstances: ‘Some people just haven’t got that sort of help there.’

Although she spoke of tough circumstances, Michelle was unsure why people were disadvantaged. She commented later that, ‘I don’t really know why people are poor. It seems like they just can’t handle life’. Michelle felt that it might come down to how people spend their payments. She was aware that there were disadvantaged people around, and a lot more than ‘we’d probably know about’.

She also felt some people were claiming assistance when they didn’t need it. She felt this ‘wasn’t fair’ on those who did.

Quality of life

Michelle mentioned changes to the family unit and drugs as having a negative impact on the Australian quality of life.

Michelle firmly believed in the traditional (two-parent) family structure to raise children, and was concerned about what she perceived to be an increasing number of sole parents, who she felt had different values.

Michelle reported on the increased use of drugs as problematic. She felt people start out using drugs for ‘recreation’ or to help deal with their problems. Then addiction set in and they needed help. Michelle felt a critical first step was that drug addicts needed to help themselves first by realising they had a problem.

Despite the growing concerns mentioned, it was the ‘freedom’ to live your life as you wished that influenced Michelle’s satisfaction with the Australian quality of life.

Education

Michelle was concerned that some people had gone through public schooling and still did not have the basic skills of reading and writing. Though the individual should be motivated to learn, it was also the responsibility of the school system not to let people emerge without these basic skills.

Michelle also commented on the attitudes of children. She felt, or at least hoped, that there was less of the racism amongst children that had made education difficult for herself and her siblings: ‘We copped a lot of flak just because we were Aboriginal. We were the only black kids in the school... It wasn’t a very good time for us going to school.’ She said, despite rationalising that ‘kids are cruel’, you remembered those things when you were a kid and it detracted from learning. Michelle believed having a tolerant school environment was important.

These days you see on TV and everything all about reconciliation... so it could be better because they’re making more of an effort with the kids in the schools. Aboriginal people going in and talking to kids in the school, come NAIDOC week and special things through the year. The kids are the ones that you have to get to... they’re the future. The older people... you can’t really change them. They’re already set in their ways.

Security

Michelle thought Australia was a safe country particularly in comparison with other countries. There were, however, certain behaviours that could not be undertaken without putting yourself in danger, such as walking by oneself late at night. Michelle made a connection between drug use and an increased prevalence of crime and violence.

It’s safe but a lot of people do stupid things. I wouldn’t go walking around by myself in the middle of night. I’d be too scared to. There’s just too many idiots around at that time. In this day and age people are on drugs. People have to be cautious... but I think it’s safer

than America because there are a lot of gangs [over there], and other countries are having wars.

Michelle's own view on the refugees was one of caution. Michelle felt that the behaviour seen in other countries, such as rioting, was undesirable: 'That's all they do over in them countries—they riot.' She felt refugees might bring these behaviours to Australia, if boat people were smuggled in without screening by Australian officials. She raised the potential for terrorists to enter the country in this manner.

Politics

Michelle regarded herself as fairly uninformed in the area of politics. She was uncertain of the processes but would pay attention to certain issues that affected her or were of interest such as the War Against Terrorism.

I don't really pay much attention. It all depends on the issues, what I'm interested in.

People

Multiculturalism was a topic that Michelle raised spontaneously as a real benefit of Australian society. She felt enriched by the diverse backgrounds of people who come to regional Victoria. Though Michelle was keen for further immigration, she raised the issue of boat people who were inappropriately entering the country.

Michelle placed the blame on the traffickers. She felt that the traffickers probably deceived the boat people, giving them false expectations. Michelle struggled to reconcile her feelings in relation to the asylum seekers. She was empathetic to their plight and noted that they spent their life savings to get onboard a boat. However, she encouraged people to migrate via the appropriate systems: 'I think it's wrong how they come into Australia like that. They should go about it the right way... Other people do.'

Reports on rioting within Australia's refugee camps caused her some annoyance, as she considered the conditions of Australian refugee camps to be an improvement on the living standards in the third world countries from which they came.

They come from third world countries where they've got nothing and then they come here and they get put in a detention centre. Then they kick up a stink because they've been treated bad or they haven't got air-conditioning. When they've got a bed, blanket and they've got all that... over there they've got nothing.

Direction of Australian society

Michelle was unable to say that society as a whole was going in the right direction. The news she commented provided images of increasing theft and crime: 'When you read those things and you think about it, it makes you wonder what's going on. Are the police doing their job?'

You can't really say that we're heading in the right direction on a whole. Every area (schooling, housing...) has its flaws and some are worse than others.

It was clear that family and drugs were important areas of concern for Michelle. She struggled, however, to provide reasons for the increase of sole parents and drug use. She wasn't sure what the solution to these issues could be. In general, Michelle was pleased with Australia at large and whilst improvements were possible in all areas including education and employment, an ideal Australia was difficult for her to conceptualise.

Personal values

Michelle saw respect as the critical foundation for her friendships. Michelle believed she was a person who spent the time getting to know people and would 'not judge a book by its cover'. She hoped people saw this as a defining characteristic and would treat her similarly. Even then, she felt they could choose whether to spend time with you but they 'don't really have the right to judge anyone'.

Michelle nominated her children as the reason she persisted through tough times: 'The main thing that keeps me going are the children... you have to keep going, they're so young.' Michelle also has faith in 'God and the Lord Jesus Christ'. She read the Bible and prayed but did not regard herself as an active church attendee. She did not feel church attendance was not necessary for her to sustain her belief: 'Church is good [for] fellowship with people, but God's always with you.' She described her faith as a unique relationship she has with God. She noted that her family had always had a religious focus.

Michelle was 'quite content with the family'. She was satisfied with a focus on her children and was looking forward to sharing the challenge as her eldest child started pre-school in the coming year. Relationships with her children, fiancée, family and friends were critical to Michelle. Making some time, however small, for her artist pursuits was another key contributor to Michelle's happiness.

Work

Michelle had clear aspirations for her career, though these were overshadowed by the needs of her children: 'I'd like to spend as much time as I can with my children while they're small because once they go to school you're not going to be spending much time with them.'

Michelle discussed the potential to be involved in her art in a self-sustaining manner. Her fiancé was also involved in creative work and a future where they could work together in a purpose-built studio would be ideal: 'That's one of my goals for the future. Hopefully start a business with my partner. I don't know how, but.'

Michelle did not question her ability to be successful in the area of her art. She felt there was 'big money' to be made. Money however was 'just an extra' for her in relation to art. Her creative involvement in her art was the driver and Michelle could not see the 'point in doing a job that you don't like doing'.

The reason Michelle had not pursued making a living in Aboriginal art was because she felt that once she started she could not stop. Michelle felt she wouldn't be able to say no to people if they requested pieces and that would impact on her ability to be an attentive mother: 'I'm thinking about the kids. I'd like to have time with them.' She worked on her art when the children went to sleep.

Michelle had no interest in going back and finishing year 12, which she believed she would need if she was going to pursue a career other than art.

Quality of life

Michelle said she would like to move back onto a farm in the future, away from the centre of town. It might be on a farm that she could establish an art studio for herself: 'One day I wouldn't mind having a farm... having a bit of land, whether it be a hobby farm or whatever.'

Michelle did not talk about any other material things that she would change in her life. It was observed during the discussion that her glasses were broken, though she did not comment on anything she and her family were missing out on.

Michelle discussed the type of person she would like to be when she was older. Keeping active was a key theme. She believed an active body would translate into an active mind. 'Moping around the house' would be an unattractive lifestyle.

Relationships

Getting married was Michelle's long-standing aspiration which had been delayed by the recent birth of their third child: 'The only other thing I need to do, for myself and my fiancé, is get married. That was supposed to happen this year but there was a surprise. Maybe next year or the year after.'

Her parents had been married for 29 years and she wanted a similarly long relationship with her partner. 'It's how I've been brought up [to get married]... It's just a normal thing.' She joked that her 'children have got his name and I feel kind of left out having my own name'.

Michelle gained an appreciation of people and cultures from meeting people from diverse backgrounds on the orchards where she grew up. She would enjoy their experiences and culture and remembers her Dad bringing out the didgeridoo and boomerang to share their indigenous culture. She regarded socialising as an important component of her life and had an interest in meeting new people. Michelle was not formally involved in any community groups though she did meet people through sporting clubs her family attended.

She raised the issue of racism affecting her interactions with others. She felt that people were concerned that they 'will say the wrong thing' because she was an Indigenous Australian. People she met would often admit this to her after they got to know her better. This misconception was frustrating: 'Man! I'm just a normal person. What can you say wrong? I think they're scared to offend.'

Values

Family was the only value Michelle could identify. 'Family's one of the main values of life because you need your family to support you.'

Michelle commented that she could see a difference in the children who were brought up in a traditional family unit as opposed to single-parent families:

Everyone's different in how they bring their children up. It depends on the values they have in their family... I think a lot of it's to do with the parents. You see a lot of single parents around and I think that plays a different role... you can tell the difference lined up with other kids and that. How [the kids] act differently, how they're quieter.

Though Michelle did not nominate equality as a value, her belief that one should not judge another by the cover and that we 'are all the same underneath' suggests this perspective.

Values for children

Michelle felt that schools should be focusing on teaching children the basics in reading, writing and arithmetic: 'School is for kids to learn the three Rs.' She didn't feel there was a need for schools to adopt another role. However, earlier Michelle had commented that it was important that misconceptions about Indigenous Australians were overcome at this level to ensure racism didn't develop. Thus another role of education was creating an understanding of diverse cultures.

Michelle believed parents had a role in reinforcing family as a value for children. Family was important to Michelle and she hoped her children would grow up to have a similar respect.

Living out values

Michelle could not identify any specific situations when she had not lived out her values, but thought it was likely she did on occasion as a child. Michelle believed that commitment to her values was something that came with maturity.

Aside from major events such as the War Against Terrorism and the Asylum seekers, Michelle did not engage in discussion about social issues. Her information about what was happening in Australian society was primarily from TV news and the local paper.

Final comments on poverty

Michelle was prompted further on the area of poverty. Though she had some thoughts, she felt she could not comment in many cases because she simply did not understand why people were disadvantaged.

I can't really say anything about that area [poverty] because I don't know what it's like. I would never let myself get to that place. So that's why I can't understand why people manage to be in that place. I don't know how they can get up every morning when they've got nothing.

You don't know whether they go and gamble it all or spend it on drugs and alcohol... People haven't got a home, you don't know why they're like that.

She did feel that people who were raised in poverty would find it more difficult to land on their feet but she had a sense that poverty could be alleviated.

Of course it would make a difference, but it's how they as they grow up into adulthood, it's how they look at it and think if they're going to make their life better for them [and their family]... or whether they just feel sorry for themselves all their life.

Michelle did believe welfare was essential, as some people will also be down on their luck:

'You'll always have disadvantaged people. You just hope it's no more than what we've got today.'

5. John: Male, 18-30 years, middle income (25-70K h/hold), NESB, Melbourne, public and TAFE education, no children.

John was a 31-year-old male who grew up in Europe. John's parents had migrated to Australia before John was born but had been overwhelmed by the change and returned to Europe. When John was 16-years-old his parents again migrated to Australia and on this occasion remained. English was not the language spoken at home, though John considered his schooling in Europe (for which English is the second language) as having provided a good basis of the English language. He did not find language to be a barrier on arrival.

John had always lived in outer Melbourne suburbs. He built his home in close to the airport where John had worked for Ansett Airlines.

After losing his job with Ansett, due to the collapse of the company, John had started work at a manufacturing company in Melbourne's west. His work was primarily in the area of industry assessment. John was highly involved in study for his work and did not feel there would be a time in the near future when he would not be pursuing additional education. His studies specifically related to industry assessment in varied applications: 'I take my study very seriously.' John participated in one year of schooling after moving to Australia; he completed one year of schooling at a public school.

John had travelled throughout Europe and to many places in Australia. John had married almost one year prior to the interview and he and his wife built and lived in their own home.

Social values

When asked to describe Australia to someone moving here John discussed the Australian people and Australian culture:

As far as the people go they can come across at the start as a little bit rude... but as soon as they get to know you, it doesn't matter where you're from, it doesn't matter what your background is. You become good mates and you're good mates for life. But you need to come across and make the effort.

John went on to say it was understandable that there might be some initial difficulty mixing into the new culture and that the onus was on the newly arrived Australian to make the effort: 'It's a natural thing... you do have to prove yourself.' He explained that it was important that the new cultures be shared.

John felt there were opportunities in Australia though these became available to newly arrived Australians only when they have been accepted by Australians: 'Once you break that barrier [acceptance] the opportunities are endless.' After that initial step John described Australians as 'good friends to share a life with'.

John was a cautious interviewee and was difficult to draw out on subjects he considered himself ill informed. When he did comment he usually qualified the statement to ensure it was clear that the basis for the comment was his own experience. Given a personality devoted to work and study it was surprising that John became so interested in poverty. Indeed, John kept me talking for 30 to 40 minutes after a 2.5-hour interview. It was his puzzlement that he had not considered the issue of hidden poverty before that fuelled his queries. This discussion is described in greater depth at the end of this case study.

Employment

John initially spoke about the chances of getting employment in Australia. For a person with high motivation and persistence he thought the probability of finding work would be high: 'It depends on the person but the possibility [of getting a job] is quite high.' John later indicated that all Australians could expect to work but they should not expect to have their dream jobs.

Later again, John seemed to change his mind when he said that all Australians could achieve their dream occupation, 'given motivation and a lot of hard work'.

Welfare

John offered few comments on the existing welfare system in Australia. He had not received welfare in any form nor had any of his friends. When asked whether elderly or disabled people would be taken care of, John responded, 'I would presume so. I just can't see why not'.

John felt a combination of factors contributed to an individual being disadvantaged including the individual trait of motivation. Luck was also identified as a critical factor. John gave as an example of bad luck as being if your husband passes away and you didn't have income. He felt that if this person was already struggling financially this situation could 'really set you behind'.

Quality of life

John believed there was a dominant and typical standard of living and that his own life reflected this standard of living.

I think I have fallen into the same trap myself. Most people here are trying to make work their life. You always want more... Over here [in Australia] you tend to stay at work until 6pm or 7pm and then come home and go to sleep or study.

Though describing this lifestyle as a 'trap' he did not consider it to be overwhelmingly negative: 'It's probably not a bad thing.'

Environment

John was of the belief that Australians do not have a good attitude towards the environment: 'I don't think they take it that seriously.' He said this attitude existed in spite of a wealth of information which explained the issues and solutions in relation to the environment. He wasn't sure why people continued to act in a manner that damaged the environment, despite knowing the right behaviours.

Businesses:

John expressed positive experiences with his employers with regard to the treatment of employees, which was 'from my experience, very good'. He felt there was an awareness of occupational health and safety issues in the industries in which he had worked. John could not identify any problematic issues with employee relations for Australian business.

John's main concern in relation to Australian business was the lack of incentive for new businesses. The risk of starting a business discouraged up and coming entrepreneurs from trying innovative ideas. This environment was further seen to reduce Australia's prosperity in terms of global innovation as well as reducing employment opportunities.

You hear a lot about small businesses failing... maybe there is lack of opportunity. I think it's important to have something in place to keep small businesses operating... You don't want to let businesses eating each other up and be left with no competition as a result.

John expressed a perception that Australian products suffer from poorer quality not because of the poor intentions of Australian business but due to the lack of expertise: 'Australian companies...

think they are producing a quality product... It's not that they aren't trying.' Expertise is required to improve the quality of Australia products.

John felt the role of business with respect to the larger community was 'definitely through [providing] employment'.

Education

John felt equipped to comment only on post-secondary study in Australia given his limited experience with Australian primary and secondary education. Similarly John did not consider himself knowledgeable about public versus private education. He mentioned that people would assume private schooling is of higher quality: 'The assumption is always that private schools are better than public... but this is only an assumption.'

John was positive about post-secondary study in Australia. In particular, John reflected on the TAFE studies he had engaged in with respect to quality management. He regarded the practical nature of the education as a highlight: 'It's designed to cater around people's needs.'

John had paid for his own education so he had limited knowledge about education funding. He assumed there would be financial assistance to help people wanting to study, and therefore access to education would be freely available.

Politics

In general, John thought politics were relatively unimportant to Australians: 'I don't think people take it as seriously as other countries.' John regarded the compulsory voting system as implying that Australians mustn't be serious about politics because they have to be forced to vote.

In discussing the ability for Australians to influence politics, John mentioned demonstrations as the principal means of influencing government. He regarded demonstrations in Australia to be peaceful affairs that 'bring the issue to the surface'. An individual who is sufficiently concerned about an issue could influence politics in that way: 'I think they're the ones that make a difference.'

Security

Security was of minor concern to John but he felt that he had been lucky to be unaffected: 'It's a lot safer [at a domestic level] than a lot of other places.' Nonetheless he believed

There is always room for improvement when it comes to safety. Who wouldn't like to go to sleep with their door open without having to worry about anything else?

Australia's safety from an international perspective was not discussed.

People

The diversity of the Australian population dominated John's conversation at this point. He felt Australians were highly accepting of varied cultures. He felt this might have been hard earned at first, but that over the years 'people have realised that everyone is just the same as them'.

I think on the whole most people are very open minded about what neighbours they have, who their friends are, who they drink with... definitely most people I know.

Though John considered cultures to have an influence on society he did not believe religion had the same impact in the Australian context. Instead religion belongs to people's private domain and does not get discussed nor forced onto others.

Though John had some initial difficulty discussing the concept, his comments show him to be a supporter of a strong national identity. He felt a strong national identity would enhance the prosperity of Australian business. He also commented later that our dollars should be going to help Australians as our first priority, rather than assisting overseas.

John felt our current international identity must be positive, given the number of people wanting to move to Australia as well as the warm reception Australians receive when travelling abroad. Australia's peaceful life, the freedom to live life as one pleases, and the opportunities to own a home, were qualities that make Australia seem attractive at an international level. John could not think of anything that other countries might find negative about Australia: 'I really can't think of anything that other countries could point a finger at.'

Direction of Australian society

John was satisfied with Australian society at large: 'I'm glad we live here and I just hope it stays the way it is.'

John wanted a society where everyone had the basics but also had a life that could be built on so the lives of their children could be improved: 'It would be great to say that nobody is struggling to live. That everyone has the opportunity to whatever... [to] have a house!'

John identified an increased number of business failures, unemployment and disadvantage as an important area of concern jeopardising Australia's future economic security. He put forward a number of recommendations in the area of Australian business:

- More encouragement for Australian owned and operated businesses.
- The need for Australians to be more discerning with their consumer dollar. John mentioned a few dollars extra at the grocery store is better than paying more taxes to cover welfare benefits. 'With every purchasing opportunity' John considers buying Australian owned and made.
- A reduced focus on price and an increased focus on quality.
- Maintaining Australian utilities as Australian owned and accountable. These businesses were regarded as a source of pride for Australians.
- Government in particular should acknowledge their stake in large businesses as they were providing employment and taxes for Australia: 'I think governments need to realise that they still have a stake in big companies because they employ Australians. These people pay taxes...'. Support must be provided to businesses to ensure they prospered. Governments should not walk away from troubled enterprises.

I think there is so much more scope to get more things done in this country. We don't even build our own aircraft... what we build we don't even export. People in Australia are just as capable as the ones that live in America to do this. As a whole Australians are very well educated and a lot of these well educated people end up having to leave the country to find the job that they want, taking their experience and knowledge with them.

Employment

John was concerned about growing unemployment if businesses, both small and large, continue to fail in Australia: 'It's another fear that people, young people, new people to Australia are going to find it harder.' John saw the importance of business and confidence in Australian businesses as critical for maintaining employment. He believed adequate income was critical to the closeness of the upper, middle and lower classes to each other: 'This [unemployment] will start to separate the classes. The opportunities for those on lower incomes will be less and people will always get behind.'

Welfare

John felt Australia's welfare systems would be more effective if they adopted a preventative rather than a remedial approach. John wanted to see the factors causing disadvantage eliminated where possible, rather than a focus on fixing the problem that had already been created. He felt in the short-term the system must care for those who are already disadvantaged, but with a view to shifting the emphasis to prevention in the long-term.

Quality of life

John related his discussion of quality of life to housing and the consumer dollar. In addition to employment, he regarded housing as the other key contributor to a 'gap' in society, and was concerned about the increasing difficulty for some people to own a home in the future given escalating house prices. These individuals would become a part of an increasingly disadvantaged lower class: 'I think houses should be kept in proportion with wages. Obviously if there is a gap there it's going to become harder and harder to fulfil that dream.' John referred to the situation in Europe, and felt we should be learning from the examples of other countries.

John also felt consumers should be more aware of the impact of their purchases. In addition to his reflections on purchasing Australian owned and made products, he regarded society's emphasis on price as driving businesses out of operation. John referred to the pricing war for airline tickets as reflecting our price driven society. He noted that no airline could operate safely with the ticket prices that were on offer preceding Ansett's demise: 'People were putting their hands up for \$77 trips!'

Achieving change

John felt that the current situation in Australia, particularly with some insecurity about business and employment, was not one facilitating the development of an ideal society. Yet John believed the vision of an ideal society including full employment and the provision of basic needs for all, should be pursued as an achievable goal.

John charged the responsibility for developing an ideal society to government, as well as to the general community. Given John's strong and positive focus on business, and the perception of business as being the key to a happy and healthy society, he charged government with the role of endorsing and supporting business ventures:

They [government] definitely have a hand to play. These people are in a position to make a difference in this country so they have to accept responsibility... which is out of reach for most the people that just go to work everyday.

John expected the general community to support local business through their consumer dollar. He thought the emphasis on price was the reason people might ignore 'Buy Australian' messages. John said he bought Australian in all circumstances, unless quality was compromised.

Personal values

John emerged as a highly goal-oriented individual. He described himself as being hard-working, setting goals and gaining satisfaction from achieving his goals. He believed friends would describe him as a good source of information and assistance. When describing qualities he likes in others he again mentioned the importance of a similar work ethic to himself: 'We do like working...' John also highlighted honesty as an important trait in others: 'I tend to disattach myself very quickly from someone who has acted dishonestly.'

John conveyed general satisfaction with his life situation. Work and study were clearly important. He worked toward the achievement of goals in regard to both. 'Peachy' was the word he used to describe his home and family situation.

John did not consider himself to be a religious person. When faced with troubled times he 'tries to stay focused and achieving my goals'. He noted having to find new work after the demise of Ansett. He made his own work opportunities by focusing on the achievement of a job as his goal.

John nominated career as a key focus for himself: 'I would have to say that career is definitely top of my to do list'. In particular the new job presented a strong learning curve that was 'taking up most of his thinking'. He also nominated people, including his wife and friends, to be important.

Work

John's career ambitions included lateral advancement in his area of expertise – quality management. He did not necessarily want to take on more responsibility. He was keen to expand his experience in other areas of quality management. He felt that the means of this lateral growth was study and confirmed that he 'enjoys learning too much to stop.' John's rewards from work appeared to be more intellectual than financial. John prided himself on 'doing what I'm supposed to be doing in the best possible way'. He 'wouldn't stay in a place or an organisation for money. It's more important to be happy'.

John identified the benefits of work as keeping him busy, providing an opportunity to meet people and help build a better Australian workforce.

Quality of life

John was pleased with the quality of life he had established. He was not interested in the 'big house or big car' dream. He had a nice family home and comfortable standard of living. His main ambitions were to sustain this lifestyle. He did not seem to fear that this lifestyle was under threat.

Though John might travel in the future with his family, he believed he had been to all the places that interested him.

He felt that some older people could become set in their ways. He hoped to be an older Australian who was still open-minded to new concepts and able to get along with people of all ages.

Relationships

John rarely volunteered information about his personal relationships and even on prompting tended to be quite guarded in what he mentioned. However, piecing together comments throughout the interview suggests a person, though pragmatic and career-focused, who desired a solid family unit. John suggested a preference for a small number of close relationships in his life: 'I don't think you can care for everybody.'

John 'definitely would like to have kids'. His wife and himself were considering having a family at the time of the interview. Maintaining his recent marriage was also raised as a personal aspiration. Though work and study dominated John's life, he arranged, where possible, to do study at home so he could be around his wife.

I just want a happy life with my family, my house, with a job that I like, with friends around me.

John was not involved with community groups or activities. John's perception of community was geographically based and focused on the village in which he lived. He did interpret involvement with his community as helping out his neighbours. He mentioned buying presents for the Christmas trees in K-Mart as the type of giving in which he was active, though he did feel people weren't given the opportunity to help out as much as they should.

I wouldn't say [I'm involved] as much as I'd like to be as far as community organisations are concerned, mainly because between work and study there's not much time. But it is something that I'm aware of and I feel that I should. I get on very well with all my neighbours.

The discussion addressed John's perception that he 'should' be involved: 'Communities are better for it'. He clarified that he did not see community involvement as a duty but something that made him feel satisfied that he was building a better community: 'I don't think it's an obligation. I don't think it's a responsibility either. It's something that I get a lot of satisfaction out of.' John also believed a better community would benefit his own family.

Interplay of social and personal aspirations

John believed that he could achieve his personal aspirations regardless of the direction of society. He considered himself a problem solver and ‘would find ways and means to still achieve’. John noted that he didn’t want to give up or think that ‘this is as good as it gets’.

Values

For John, ‘values are what makes a person. It’s the line you draw for the things that you do and the things you wouldn’t do’.

John considered his values as achieving goals, and achieving them in an honest way and not hurting anyone along the way. He did not consider friends and family to be personal values but as something that everyone should have.

As a rule, John avoided heated debates about issues where differing opinions are challenged. He was accepting of differing opinions if they did not intrude on his beliefs.

The link between opinions and values was explored in this interview. John considered opinions to indirectly reflect values. John equated values to goals. As goals tend to relate to action and opinions are more in the realm of the mind, goals and opinions do not necessarily correspond.

He further explained values as having an evolving nature. He felt that values are situation dependent and for this reason he did not judge others. He quoted the example of stealing as being wrong, yet when needing to feed one’s family it became acceptable. It was interesting that when providing examples of values he discussed opinions rather than goals, in contrast to his earlier comment. This suggests that the concept of values was not clearly defined for John.

Most values are something that you build on as you go through life and as long as you have the luxury of sticking to them. Not stealing probably is a value but what if you’re in a situation when your family is dying of hunger, surely that is an opportunity to challenge your values.

Values for children

John’s comments in relation to values for children were pragmatic and goal-oriented. He suggested schools assist the individual to recognise his or her own interests and that the structure of education be specific to the individual’s career. This recommendation John believed would address the key reasons he considered to cause school drop-outs—lack of interest and lack of connection to the real world: ‘Children are not empowered with the knowledge of what to expect from the world.’

Parents, on the other hand, need to encourage children to focus on setting goals for themselves and should assist children to achieve those goals. This would ensure children could sense the satisfaction that goal achievement provides. He felt parents have a role in instilling a belief in their children ‘that boundaries can be stretched’. This might encourage children to pursue dreams that might seem distant.

Living out values

Initially John expressed the view that his actions would suggest his values: ‘Just from my actions. The things that I do and the things that I don’t do’. Therefore his involvement with work and helping people find the answers they need reflect John’s values. He later reconsidered his thinking, realising that we do not necessarily live out values. John struggled in this complex area, though some of the confusion might lie in his belief that values and behaviour are situation dependent.

As an afterthought, John referred to Maslow’s ‘Hierarchy of Needs’ as a theory to which his own views were similar. As Maslow had conceptualised, John related values and one’s behaviour to one’s life circumstance. According to the five-level hierarchy of needs (physiological, safety, love,

esteem, self-actualisation) a change in circumstances might also alter the person's focus. It is only when basic physical needs such as air and water are provided that someone will move beyond the 'physiological' need stage. When an individual reaches self-actualisation, they might turn their focus beyond the self to assist in what they regard as 'higher' causes such as environmental, religious, and so on. This characterises 'life circumstance' as the key determinant in an individual's behaviour.

John could identify, but did not verbalise, times when he had knowingly acted in contradiction to his values. These times, he reflected, involved situations that were not ideal and he considered his behaviour to be an exception.

Given John's disposition to build relationships with a small group of people, his actions or non-actions put them first. Hence, if someone was being attacked he would want to help, but he would not if he felt it would endanger his family or friends.

Final comments on poverty

John was generally an optimist. In accordance with Maslow's 'Hierarchy of Needs', violence, lying and other negative traits are not normal human behaviours but rather reactions to the deprivation of needs. Therefore John considered more structural changes, with a focus on business prosperity, to be a possible solution to a number of issues including poverty. By ensuring needs are provided for, society will be more contented.

John noted the interview to be 'quite tough... I suppose it challenges things that you don't talk about everyday'. His views at the conclusion of the interview cannot be considered to be like those that will be found from fresh encounters—not everyone will have the benefit of a 2.5 hour discussion about their social and personal aspirations as well as their values.

At the conclusion of the interview John became engaged in the issue of Australian poverty and was puzzled why he was not helping. He was concerned that he was unaware of the extent of poverty and that he did know how he could assist. John also commented that he thought if he became involved, in the community, he thought he would not be able to stop. Community involvement might therefore shatter a persons comfort zone and was therefore avoided.

He asked if there was anything on TV or in the mail about how people could help. He considered sources of information to be credible and if something had arrived in the mail he would read it. He would be less likely to pay attention to TV campaigns.

Whether there are people who need a hand picking up the shopping or having their gutters cleaned and they're in a situation where they can't afford to get them done. But I'm not aware of anything in place that looks after them. Is it because I'm not listening or taking the time to find out?

6. Trent: Male, 18-30 years, high income (>70K h/hold), ESB, outer Melbourne suburb, public and tertiary education, no children

Trent grew up in Melbourne's west. He lived there until he was 11 years old, when his family—parents and sister—moved to Melbourne outer eastern suburbs. Trent resided at his family home. He was 26 years old at the time of the interview.

Trent attended the local high school, after which he completed a Bachelor of Business degree. Trent had since completed his CPA Certificate (Certified Practising Accountant), Public Practice Certificate and Tax Agent Certificate. He is an accountant specialising in tax.

Trent had worked in several accountancy firms. Most workplaces he left due to dissatisfaction with management. Another place of work closed pending an ethics enquiry. He had been at his last place of employment for several years. Trent felt he was paid well (in excess of \$50,000) given the reduced demand for accountants in outer suburban areas.

Trent's travel had been limited to Victoria and Tasmania. Three weeks after the interview Trent and his girlfriend were leaving for Sydney before flying to Europe where he would be working for some time.

Social values

Trent spontaneously started describing Australian society with respect to our people and our culture. Australians' drinking habits were a top of mind response: 'The guys enjoy drinking copious amounts of beer. The girls do as well.' Trent went on to describe Australia's lifestyle as relaxed but changing: 'It's a reasonably relaxed culture but everything's becoming more stressful as time goes on.'

Trent attributed increasing stress in Australian society to longer working hours, a topic that he raised regularly throughout the interview. Trent related difficulties in family and health to this issue: 'Because of [long working hours] people have less time for their families and their families are a means of taking stress away from their lives.'

Other spontaneously mentioned influences on Australian life included geography, which means people have longer distances to travel. He also identified our government to be stable and our system of democracy fair.

Trent believed there was a shift in Australian society towards a culture that is accepting of selfishness: 'I think people are more openly selfish than they used to be... before people used to hide it.' He provided the example of a girl he knew who became involved in a charity because it would look good on her Curriculum Vitae. Trent expressed greater surprise at the girl's openness about her motives than at the act itself:

She was working for charity but the only reason that she was doing it was so it looked good on her resume. And she told me that... People acknowledge they're being selfish more and it's becoming more acceptable whereas the old traditional way was that you did it because it was the right thing to do.

He did feel that this girl would have gained more than the impressive CV she hoped for from her involvement with the charity, which might have altered her perspective. Trent attributed increasing selfishness in Australia to the message that 'you've got to do what's best for you' as conveyed in the media and in our education system.

In his discussion of Australian society Trent frequently would begin by saying, 'In comparison...'. Trent explained he was comparing Australia with other countries. He was surprised when he

realised he was making this comparison. He thought it was easier to compare internationally, though the best systems overseas might not be what Australians want.

I didn't realise I do that. It's harder to think in terms of what it should be and it's easier to look at the way others did it and replicate, look for the best systems.

He felt it necessary and helpful to compare the Australian situation with some kind of ideal.

Employment

Trent was positive about the employment situation in Australia. He believed that most people were able to find work: 'I think there are enough jobs for people but I don't think everyone will be in a job.' He felt the unemployment rate was deceptive, in that it included people taking a break from the workforce who might be 'stressed out' as well as people who had given up looking for work. He did believe that the opportunities for someone to be in their dream occupation were 'excellent if they work hard enough'.

Trent considered that employment was changing, particularly in terms of pay. He felt that while labouring work was readily available, it tended to be low-paid. Trent believed that highly paid jobs tended to require some level of post-secondary study.

I'd say at the moment the ability to get a job was pretty good ... that there is a lot of opportunity around. But if you want a job with a reasonable amount of pay then you really need to study. There's just not much highly paid labour[ing] work around anymore so you'd be working longer hours and getting less for it [in labouring jobs].

Welfare

Trent felt he was too uninformed, firstly about Australia's welfare system, and secondly about other welfare systems internationally, to make a comparison. His impressions tended to the positive. He reflected that though the health system had some problems it was ultimately still 'pretty good'.

Quality of life

Trent was satisfied with the quality of life available to Australians. He believed all Australians, including those on lower incomes, were able to enjoy holidays and get work. An increasing gap between the classes was mentioned, though it was not considered problematic at present.

There is a growing gap between the rich and poor but there is still a fairly large middle class. Even the poor people still have a pretty good quality of life. You can still hop in a car and go to a great destination for a holiday. You can still take your four weeks off and you don't have to work seven days a week to survive. There are still enough jobs around that you can get some work.

Trent responded to queries about housing with reference to the availability of land for more housing though it was located in areas more isolated from the CBD.

Environment

Trent made links between Australians having a poor attitude toward the environment and lack of interest at the political level: 'It doesn't seem to be on the political agenda... Well, it is, but it's kind of an aside.' Trent considered that the 'balanced' approach endorsed by government to be an unacceptable compromise. He felt there was no need for the amount of environmental depletion, such as deforestation, and would like to see a firmer stance on this in the future.

[Attitudes of Australians to the environment are] terrible at the moment. Our policies are terrible. The idea that we have got to balance industry with the environment to me is just an excuse for making more mess of the world.

Businesses

He did not believe Australia was sufficiently advanced in the area of innovation. He cited the lack of a policy on technology as evidence of this. He considered innovation to be a critical factor in business, which would cause a division of countries into the haves and have-nots.

Higher technology countries end up effectively having the lower technology countries as their little slave labour countries. These are the countries that will really miss out.

Trent had a higher regard for small businesses than big business. He perceived big business to 'take advantage of people', whilst small business created competition and at present provided the bulk of employment for Australia. He felt small business struggled to survive and that the majority of new operations did not succeed.

Education

Trent discussed extensively the contrast between public and private education in Australia. The calibre of the teachers as well as class sizes were reasons that Trent argued private schools provide better quality education. This was reflected in VCE results.

There's a big gap between private and secondary schools. The private school kids are just so much more advantaged over the public. Teachers are more available to them and the teachers seem to be of higher quality.

He also believed that teachers in private schools were closely monitored to ensure their performance was satisfactory whilst public school teachers were not. Trent felt it was easy for poor teachers to enter the public school system:

Public schools seem to take everyone and once in the system, can't get them out. Teachers just move on to other schools and the problem goes with them. In private schools they just don't take that.

Trent also believed private school students had an advantage in the job market given longer hours of study, which would naturally be more attractive to an employer.

Despite his views about the advantages gained from private schooling, Trent would not send any children he had to a private school. He argued that the longer hours endured by private school students take away from the enjoyment of being a kid: 'I don't think I'd send a kid to a private school for that reason.' Trent also observed that many private school students struggled in university where there was no-one to motivate them. If advising another person, he might suggest public school for most of their education, followed by private school in their senior years.

Trent was not sure why there was such a disparity between public and private schools, though he considered it might have something to do with the influence of powerful Australians wanting the best for their children:

I don't know if funding is an issue, however it seems like it is. That they're pouring millions into private schools that no longer require the money... I think it comes down to politics that there are a few people in high places with kids in private schools that don't want that to [stop].

Trent's comments about Australia's tertiary system were positive. He cited Australia's HECS system as assisting Australians to gain access to further education.

The way our uni. system is set up it's so good because you don't have to fund the degree. You can wait until you're actually working before you have to start to pay it back. So it's not a situation where you have to have rich parents to be able to go to uni. Compared with the United States our degrees are so cheap... \$10-15,000 here and \$100,000 over there. That's fantastic!

Politics

Trent believed politics were important to Australians: ‘Politics are important enough to be in the news. It’s still the best system we have to govern our country... Every time a politician announces something, it’s going to affect someone so you’re going to listen.’

In terms of who determines Australia’s political agenda, Trent felt that, in absence of strong public opinion, it was Australia’s powerful including the wealthy and politicians. Rupert Murdoch rated a mention in Trent’s discussion. He felt that political parties picked topics where they could win points:

In election mode they tend to pick their topics. It depends whether they think the other team has a weakness... they’ll argue [that topic]... They wouldn’t have a debate about the environment because they don’t have a strong stance on it.

Trent believed he was able to influence decision-making. He could either express concern about a particular issue by writing or discussing the matter with the appropriate member or, if sufficiently motivated, he could stand for election himself.

The good thing about it is that anyone can run and be elected. So how could you not feel that you can control your own future?

Security

When prompted about the issue of security in Australia, Trent felt Australians had become too complacent. The focus on defence in Australia since the September 11 terrorism attacks was welcomed and he thought the focus should be ongoing:

‘It’s always an important issue. Even if it’s not on the political agenda it still should be looked at. People get into a false sense of security about these sorts of things.’

He placed the responsibility for national security in the hands of government: ‘The government has a responsibility to continue to monitor our safety and make sure we’re safe even if people don’t think we need it.’ He went on, however, to describe an initiative such as Neighbourhood Watch as an effective means of involving the community. He reported considerable faith in Australia’s police forces with respect to the lack of corruption.

Neighbourhood Watch [safety house] was a fantastic system but it seems to have died. It’s just not there anymore. Again I think it comes down to [the fact that] people are working long and don’t have time to put into things like that... which is sad because I’m sure that saved a lot of people from having things done to them, especially kids.

People

Trent was concerned that the tensions between other countries would be carried into Australia if certain suburbs become dominated by one culture: ‘If these cultures get too strong are we going to have a microcosm of Vietnam here, Israel there? I think the community should be integrated.’ Without integration, Trent was concerned that tensions between cultures might flare and crime and violence would result:

I’m also concerned about the tension between different religions... Australia’s full of different religious groups and the more strong they get to be the more tension that may be between them. So for example, Springvale is a hugely Vietnamese area and I’m not saying it’s bad but if you imagine that their archenemies are beside them would they have the conflict as well?

Trent regarded the fostering of a national identity as important because of the effect on society:

The principle that Australians are always helping out their mates, I think it's a great idea and when you have ideas like that are supposed to identify the country then they tend to flow onto the people in the country.

Trent did not believe Australia was a religious country, commenting: 'Not at all! One or two per cent of the population really!'

Direction of Australian society

Trent was pleased with the Australian society he perceived:

Yeah, I think it's great. The career prospects are good and the weather's fantastic. There's still plenty of things to do on the weekend... It's a safe country compared to others. I am happy with Australia.

When prompted on areas of dissatisfaction, he discussed the dishonesty he specifically encountered in his work: 'To do my job, people expect me to be dishonest [for example, exaggerating on tax returns].' He preferred to discuss 'hopeful expectations' rather than his 'fears'.

Some of Trent's spontaneous suggestions for Australia's future addressed his concern about the length of the working week. Because he saw long working hours affecting family, friends, work performance and health, he believed a restricted week would have benefits for society in many ways:

I think they need to put a limit on the hours people work... I think it's in the best interests of everyone... even employers' interests are taken care of because they'd have more stable employees... if you're doing less hours you've got more time for the community.

In Trent's ideal Australia, there would be a higher minimum wage and the difference between 'qualified' and 'unqualified' workers would be minimised. Though Trent felt that there should be more equality in pay—the gift of medicine being no different from the gift of art—he mentioned a number of factors that would need to be balanced. Trent would prefer people be paid according to their effort and not the type of work undertaken, though effort could not be equated to hours worked. At the same time future doctors need some incentive for putting in the time to study.

Trent spontaneously mentioned that an ideal Australia would have no gap in its health care system. Trent further envisaged his ideal Australia as being environmentally friendly.

Employment

Trent was pleased with the opportunities in employment so he did not feel further effort was required in this area. He believed 'full employment would be good' but did not feel it was achievable because some people did not want to work.

Education

Trent requested a greater emphasis on improved training for teachers and felt ongoing audits of teacher performances would improve Australia's education system.

Quality of life

To address Trent's concerns about cultural tensions in Australia, he suggested a focus on 'humanitarianism', possibly through the education system: '[Newcomers and others] really need to be educated constantly about fairness, equity and justice, and all those good qualities.' An ongoing effort to reinforce these values would ensure all Australians, regardless of background, would have the same principles: 'We need to keep educating people about the value of others and how we're all just people and it doesn't matter what religion we are.'

Politics

Trent was satisfied with Australia's system of government. In particular, the perceived lack of corruption was a major highlight of Australian politics: '[My] hopeful expectation is we will continue to have governments which are corrupt-free [sic], which is absolutely vital for a country to survive or do well.'

Trent had some suggestions for a more effective system Australian political system. He advised a reform of the upper house to ensure the pace of decisions was improved without losing the checks and balances: 'What's the point of having a government if no decisions are being made? But at the moment, with the Democrats, all the legislation that goes through gets watered down so that it doesn't have its effect.' With a quicker system of decision-making in government, more time and attention could be allocated to gaining public feedback about the issues at hand. He noted that no one reads the *Government Gazette*. He further recommended more education to ensure younger generations felt empowered to make a difference at the political level.

In summary, Trent regarded key issues that should receive attention for an ideal Australia in the future as including the quality of education, attention to technology, and developing a more ethical society. Trent felt the impact of a more ethical society would be 'huge':

It would be a lot fairer place. There wouldn't be so many people who had been ripped off. If people were more ethical and had their values it would be closer to Utopia.

Achieving change

Trent assigned responsibility to the government for policy and Australia's political agenda, though he felt the general community should be the driving force behind any decisions: 'I think the average Australian needs to speak up more [about the environment] because at the moment the government doesn't seem too concerned.'

All of us are responsible for our future. Everyone plays a part in society... we all need to make a contribution. Society will be what we make it in 20 years.

Trent believed he had the capacity to influence decision-making in Australia. He believed his own involvement would be through his work, where he provided good accountancy skills, as well as through the extended use of his expertise in voluntary work and committee involvement.

Personal values

Trent struggled to describe himself: 'You know that's the hardest thing to do, to describe yourself.' He was concerned about coming across as arrogant. Trent resisted any description expanding beyond being easy going, accepting of new tasks and dedicated when studying. On the negative side, he felt he had some difficulty following through on tasks but hoped he had improved in that area. He felt he was always trying to learn more about getting along with all people, though he reflected that maybe the best possible way was to *be* a better person. 'Then you don't need to learn tricks on manipulating people.'

Trent hoped that many questions about his future would be answered by his year-long trip overseas. He would consider plans for work and his relationship with his girlfriend only after his trip.

Trent discussed the preparations for his overseas adventure. He expressed concerns that although he was leaving Australia for Europe only three weeks after the interview, he had not been able to secure a job despite a time-consuming amount of effort. He planned to work for six months, before travelling throughout Europe and America.

Trent considered a number of factors contributing to satisfaction with his life. He went on to explain that these were often contradictory and hence a careful balance would need to be pursued.

I think it's more than just one thing. If it was just one thing it would be easy... you need to work on all aspects of your life. On one hand we have a need for certainty in life but if you have a job that was the same everyday you'll be bored out of your mind so you need uncertainty as well... you need to find some sort of point in between them.

Trent believed it was 'the fact that I know things will get better' that kept him motivated through tough times. He needed to be specifically asked if he believed in a particular religion. Even when he admitted that there was a religion that he believed in he did not volunteer the details. When prompted he said he identified himself as a follower of a minority religion in Australia. He described his faith as a 'breakaway', but essentially 'stock standard religion'.

Trent's hesitancy to discuss religion was of note. His later references to religion included the spontaneous raising of the issue of abortion and his assertion that the Bible does not condemn abortion: 'One of the interesting things is that there is nothing in the Bible about abortion.' He believed that if a woman wanted an abortion, then that service should be provided. He went on to argue this point further. He felt that people often avoid learning new information because they might challenge their current beliefs. He felt this was especially true in religion.

Work

Trent had given some thought as to his career options on return from overseas. He was contemplating some offers of partnership in accounting firms.

He had areas of professional interest that he would also like to pursue. For instance, he was interested in starting a discussion group for different financial controllers in not for profit organisations. He might also be involved in a consultative committee at the tax office on a voluntary basis. He had done some background reading but 'a lot of this stuff is so up in the air'.

Quality of life

Though Trent wasn't sure of the material possessions he would want in life, he wanted to live within his means. He was uncertain about an appropriate balance between comfort and being too pampered.

I'm a little bit unsure about [what material possessions are wanted]. I want somewhere where I will be reasonably comfortable but at the same time I don't want somewhere that's going to be absolutely lavish. I'd feel guilty for living in a massive house. I'd just feel like I'm one of the rich guys that taking money away from the poor guys.

If I did have 10 million bucks in the bank, my goal for keeping 10 million bucks in the bank would be to help more people with it rather than to keep it for myself.

Relationships

Trent approached the next year as a trial period for living with his girlfriend. After that he would know enough about the relationship to make a more formal commitment.

Trent expressed his aspirations in relation to a family as fairly flexible. He presumed he would have kids but it was not a dominant ambition. Indeed he regarded the decision to be in the hands of his partner as it would be their responsibility to take care of children. He would prefer to adopt the role of the working parent caring for his children 'on the weekend'.

Trent's sense of community was not bound by geographic parameters: 'I've never really thought of keeping in contact with my neighbours just because they're my neighbours.' Rather Trent would form relationships based on group involvement. He was treasurer in a local yacht club as his main activity beyond work, family and friends. Though at times he found this involvement demanding, his long-term dedication was rewarding: 'Becoming the kind of person you always wanted to be [by giving yourself to others] is the ultimate satisfaction.'

Interplay of social and personal aspirations

Though Trent felt his own efforts would enable some realising of personal aspirations, he could not achieve as much as possible without the ideal society he discussed. His own efforts would also be limited without the assistance of other people: 'I can achieve more with the help of others than I can achieve alone.'

Values

Trent connected one's behaviour and values: 'It's really the things you practise on a day-to-day basis, the habits you form.' Trent gave the example, 'If I valued my family then I would do something for my family on a day-to-day basis'. At this point Trent apologised for getting philosophical.

Trent tried to distinguish between the terms 'values' and 'principles', but considerable confusion remained. In essence, Trent thought there were a number of pre-existing principles, but each person picked the ones important to them, which became their values.

In general, Trent was more comfortable with the term 'principles' than 'values': 'Principles are the ways that you would like to act.' He felt he had made an effort to live his life according to 'principles first and not consequences'. Hence a person does what is right because it is right, and not purely from fear of what their actions might cause.

I come from a background where principles were at the centre of your life and everything else was determined based on those. For example, if you make a decision to marry someone you stick with them. If you told your boss you were going work hard then that's what you do. I think most people now have shuffled principles aside and they focus on what's best for them and I don't think that's good.

Trent identified his own values as 'family life, having good friends... having a good education'.

Trent believed his own values came from his parents, friends and his religion. He worked hard on being open-minded but believed to be open-minded was to invite discomfort on occasions: 'It's difficult when you come across those situations... if you learn something new and you think that changes everything I believe in, it's unsettling in some respects.' He felt this was particularly true for religion.

Values for children

Trent raised a variety of elements that schools could be instilling in students. He listed 'humanitarianism aspects'—which he explained to be community linkages; an understanding of the consequences of their behaviour; and also self-defence. In particular, Trent commented that school excursions into society would help children learn about good business practice and principles. Similarly, taking children to places like hospitals might help them to see the health consequences of certain behaviour (though Trent was anxious to avoid traumatising the children). This approach is somewhat in contradiction to a life he preferred to be lived by principles and not consequences.

Living out values

Trent admitted that he did not always live according to his values: '... That's the thing, that we're not all perfect and that we all make mistakes.' He felt immediate gratification and temptation were strong forces that could lure a person away from acting in accordance with their values. For example, stealing might be unacceptable to him but he could see how the appeal of a holiday might make a person 'fudge' their tax.

An issue that troubled Trent was the reputation of accountants and a willingness of many Australians to falsify their tax return to take more than they are entitled to. He equated false tax returns to stealing. To address the disparity between the expectation of others and his own beliefs, Trent developed a rule in his mind, that a tax return unjustly claiming above a pre-determined

percentage is not appropriate and he would be forced to express his concerns to the client. Once his concerns were aired he felt he had satisfied his principles.

Trent would stop and help a person who was in trouble. He discussed an ethics training session held at his work. An ethics advisor claimed in this situation no one could and should be expected to stop and help. Trent took exception to this statement and spoke out. He seemed annoyed that the ethics advisor called him 'altruistic' for this sentiment when he did not regard his thoughts to be exceptional: 'What's he doing as an ethics advisor?'

As a rule Trent avoided conversations which would be challenging: 'I try and steer clear of heated debates.' In particular he cited politics and religion as two areas where he avoided conversation. He considered himself both open-minded and a seeker of information, through reading, that would inform his thoughts and opinions.

Final comments on poverty

Trent felt 'sure' we have poverty in Australia. He viewed Australia's poverty however, as different from the 'physical' poverty experienced in other countries. He characterised the Australian situation to be a poverty of time, family and friends when working 70-80 hour weeks.

When asked whether Australia had 'physical poverty', Trent commented on housing commission flats, describing them as 'just terrible', and referred to people who could not afford to have expensive operations. Trent felt poverty in Australia resulted from people taking advantage of others, lack of education and bad luck. Bad luck was when 'people get addicted to things or abuse alcohol.' When asked if addictions were the fault of the individual he responded, 'I'm thinking yes and no at the same time.' He felt people do make their own choices but often they are not sufficiently informed to know the consequence of their choices. For example, he believed the first time people drank alcohol they might not know the impact of alcohol on their system.

On the other hand, he thought sometimes people did not have a choice about their situation. For instance blaming people in Somalia for their situation 'wouldn't be fair.' In Australia, external factors included being born in a poor area, not having access to a good education, or being brought up in a culture that doesn't have the skills or wisdom to make good choices. Trent did not clarify the type of cultures that would be problematic, but the choices referred to financial decisions.

Trent idealised an Australia of the future as providing an opportunity for people to get out of poverty: 'I would like them to change their circumstances if they wanted to... and even if they didn't want to be helped out that we would still help them out.' He had read that funding of charity in Australia was \$550 million per annum, and regarded this as low.

7. Nancy: Female, 18-30 years, medium income (25-70K h/hold), ESB, Melbourne, tertiary education, no children

Nancy was born in Melbourne and was 30 years old at the time of the interview. She was living in shared, rented accommodation with a girlfriend. Nancy's mother was born in Australia but her father moved out to Australia from England as a child. Nancy had travelled extensively. She noted it was easy when she worked in England because she had an English passport, but she had few connections in England, since her friends and family are mainly in Australia.

Nancy's parents separated in her primary school years and her father moved interstate. She mentioned that she remained closest to her mother and sibling, and has a more distant relationship with her father. Nancy was single with no dependants.

Nancy had completed a tertiary degree and now worked in the surveying field. Nancy started work in a private surveying firm before she spent a year working abroad. During her working trip overseas, Nancy travelled in western Europe and some parts of the United States.

When Nancy returned to Australia she freelanced for three months. Though her friends 'laugh at [her]' for not lasting long as a freelance worker, Nancy felt she wasn't learning as much working by herself and the work was not challenging. Nancy returned to private firms after that. Her work since had involved travelling for extended periods—several months—to other states.

Social values

Nancy spontaneously described Australia as 'a country of extremes, in the geography and the people.' Nancy spoke about differences between Australians, though she added she was generalizing. She felt the differences were evident by location. She characterised people living in Australia's north as 'more laid back' whilst the people in Sydney are 'on the go the whole time'. She commented that tolerances for minorities alter by location; 'Generally the further north or out of the bigger cities, then tolerances are not the best thing.' Nancy also commented that tolerance varied for different groups, for instance Asians were better accepted than Indigenous Australians who were frequently more 'marginalised in people's attitudes'.

Having worked up there [Darwin] a lot of people say, 'Oh, they're [Indigenous Australians] ungrateful with their homes they are provided with because they burn them down. You sort of feel like saying, 'Well, if you built a central courtyard where they can have their fires which is part of their customs then perhaps they wouldn't be burning the house down'.

Nancy perceived the Australian life to be dominated by opportunities. She contrasted Australia to England where she felt background details such as family and schooling determined your position in life. She felt in Australian society opportunities were more dependent on the individual, what they wanted from life and how hard they were willing to work, and said, 'That opportunity you can create and be whoever you want to be, with application'.

Employment

Nancy believed there were jobs available for Australians but felt that degrees for 'skilled' employment were becoming necessary and too specific. Nancy felt that university courses were becoming very work-oriented and people were being 'pigeonholed'.

There will always be menial tasks, cleaning garbage collector, whatever. In terms of skilled employment then, yes, you need to have certain educational background... By streamlining people there is this risk of pigeon holing people into only being able to do certain jobs, certain employment, instead of being able to be an all-rounder [she mentioned Arts degrees create all-rounders] and then always get on the job training.

Nancy thought a person could get their ideal job, but it all came down to how people 'sell and market themselves'. She believed that people were actually fairly secure in their jobs, though probably over-committed to their employer out of concern that job security was not as high, or would not be high in the future.

Businesses

Nancy's own friends had positive relationships with their employers, who are satisfied with the 'benefits they receive'. These examples tended to influence her view of business in Australia. She felt that Australians were possibly over-committed to their employers working long hours without pay or bonus recognition, but believed employers were good in verbally acknowledging the efforts of staff. When queried further she noted that the longer hours provided self-satisfaction.

Welfare

Nancy was aware that there were support systems in Australia, the most visible being 'the dole'. She discussed these support systems as a 'safety net'. Nancy felt her knowledge was limited in this regard. She had a general perception of the application for and maintenance of support becoming more difficult, with the need to attend and track a certain number of interviews: 'I'm sure there'll be weeks when you just feel that you can't face one more rejection.'

Nancy also felt that several people were slipping through the system and not receiving the support they needed: 'I don't think that safety net is probably high enough, in that a lot of people appear to fall through that safety net... The homeless are... a visible sign of [people] falling through the net.'

Nancy believed that disadvantaged Australians including the sick, disabled and specifically the elderly were largely 'ignored'. She felt that once people were no longer in the prime of their life they are quickly placed into a nursing home or 'put on welfare', reducing the concern of other Australians.

Nancy thought that Australia's health care system was good though it might be starting to falter from a lack of funding. Nancy was concerned about the government's private health care initiative which she thought created a separation between the 'haves and have-nots'. It did not make health care more accessible for those who need assistance, for example the 'married couple with four children'. Nancy questioned whether the savings from people paying for private cover was in fact being returned into the public health care system.

Quality of life

Nancy considered Australians, and particularly Melburnians, to be 'sports obsessed', though Melburnians tended to be spectators whilst people in other cities would 'get out there and play a bit more'. Nancy was somewhat disappointed in admitting that sport was the primary focus in the Australian way of life: 'I would like to say the arts or anything like that is just as important.'

Nancy had a number of concerns about the Australian way of life. Her principal criticism was the 'urban sprawl' which she felt created isolated outer suburbs, yet the facilities were not in place to support the areas: 'I would love to tell them [new Australians], "Forget the quarter-acre dream. Enough already thank you".' She believed 'ghettos' in schools were a consequence of this poorly planned development. Nancy was concerned that there were insufficient shops and facilities within each area to avoid the need for car travel. She questioned the need for every house to have two cars. The consequence of a car-dependent culture was poor health and fitness, as well as the negative impact on the environment.

When you look at your old areas you actually have milk bars on corners and all that sort of thing, so to a degree it removes the need to use a car. In the new areas you have to drive a couple of k's to a supermarket.

Nancy felt that home ownership was still a possibility but that her generation would probably be the last in which the majority did own a home. Nancy thought the money people might have put aside to save up for a home was now consumed by additional costs in society, including health expenses and the need to spend extra to send your child to a good school because the standard of education was declining.

Despite these problems, Nancy felt that in Australia individuals could make their own lifestyle decisions: 'If you want to stay home and watch television all the time, that lifestyle is still available. If you are an outdoors person who likes sport, there's a lot of team sports ... that's why I say lifestyle is whatever you want.'

Nancy considered work to be a major time consumer for Australians. Other responsibilities with children and travel to and from work consumed some of the 'play' time that Australians had left over after work and sleep. She thought, however, the perception that work hours were increasing was false—in fact it had always been like that.

Education

Nancy believed that education was accessible for all Australians. She felt there was some discrepancy in the performance of students at private and public schools and suggested that funding caused the discrepancy. She had read reports that state schools were struggling and having to 'go out and earn extra money' as their own initiative. This was also happening at the university level and she believed could compromise the independence of decision-making. She felt that students from private schools constituted most of the top 10 per cent because they paid more for education and could 'afford the top teachers and state-of-the-art facilities'.

Nancy was concerned about the orientation of universities to what she described as 'purely vocational' education. The courses that 'teach you about life and question everything' were 'struggling' to get numbers in seats or were seen as 'elite' courses. Universities were becoming driven by high-profile courses that students wanted to study:

For example, music is probably one [degree] where when you've got the Conservatorium here in Melbourne. But because that is an area that doesn't guarantee you immediate jobs, then it's one [course] which I think probably really struggles from a funding point of view.

Environment

Nancy had concerns about the environment, and felt that although Australians had improved their attitudes and habits, the damage was still quite evident. Nancy remained concerned about emissions being 'sky high' but she felt that it was industry that needed to improve their standards. Government was mentioned as needing to force these improvements.

On an individual basis in terms of recycling, garden waste and all that sort of thing, I believe that, yes, your average person makes a conscious effort and a conscious decision in their own home. It is more the work environment or industry environment that... lets it down.

Nancy believed the Australian people were not putting enough pressure on government to take a stance. She knew there were some efforts to campaign for the protection of the large number of 'pristine' areas that remained in the Australian environment.

On a daily basis you don't see what effects you are causing on the environment, so on a daily basis I can close my eyes so you don't notice if it gets worse or if it gets better. It's a silent issue... I can't touch it... I can't say 'Gee aren't I good, look at this'.

Security

Nancy did not believe safety in Australia was more or less of a concern than safety abroad. She noted that personal safety was good with the exception of a few behaviours that need to be modified, such as walking at night.

I suppose it's the same as anywhere, provided you exercise a few cautions, such as don't go walking down the back laneway at 3am... I don't think we're necessarily safer or worse off or anything like that.

At an international level, Nancy considered Australia to be 'extremely safe' because she saw Australia to be 'minute in terms of our influence'. She did not believe however that 'America would come running to our aid' if another country declared war on Australia, mainly because Australia has 'no natural resource that they [United States] desperately need for their own internal use'.

Politics

Nancy described Australia's political design as too 'complicated' and felt that the state tier was probably unnecessary. She thought if you had a problem that you addressed it to your local government who was 'concerned about your day-to-day needs'. Nancy believed the state government seemed to only make decisions about how to spend federal government funding on such things like roads.

Nancy felt it was 'easy' for someone to influence politics and began discussing the ability for someone to gain a role in government. Entry into local government which she termed 'grass roots' government was particularly easy, but to enter state or federal government, it would be best to stand through one of the main parties rather than as an independent to maximise your chances of election. This process of election in state or federal government she described as a 'game'. Despite the ease with which Australians could influence government, Nancy did not believe Australians had a culture of active involvement in politics. She believed the main interaction Australians would have would be through letter writing.

Nancy was pleased with Australia's voting system:

I think compulsory voting is fantastic... you may completely disagree with everything and think that nothing's going to change or anything like that. But even if it's only for two days it causes you to actually think about what you're doing or [at least] what your politicians are [doing].

Nancy's only suggestion with respect to compulsory voting was to lower the age limit: 'At 16 most people now have opinions and ideas and are educated to be able to form the decisions.'

Nancy suggested that few major changes occurred in Australia because the two major political parties were so similar.

That makes for very safe politics because neither challenges the other one on major issues. They'll challenge on minor details but in terms of major interpretations—the way we should be heading—there is nothing there.

People

Nancy aligned Australia's international image with the perception Australians have of Queensland, 'in terms of beaches, warm water, sunshine.' Another image people would have of Australia was Ayers Rock. She felt international visitors would be most surprised by Australia's 'urban sprawl' and Australia's vastness. She believed the perception of the average Australian was 'tanned, blonde, [and]... to a degree, relatively lazy'.

Nancy did not think other countries considered Australia in great depth: 'The majority of other countries can't get our prime minister's name right.' Nancy did not believe Australia was very newsworthy because Australia was not a leader in any area.

Nancy felt that some intolerance towards minority groups resulted from a negative perception of pockets of minorities. She thought this was unfair indicating that such clustering is normal—'It's a security blanket'—because of people's need to have support from a 'like' community and have the infrastructure in place for cultural practices. Nancy sympathised with this feeling as she had felt the need to reinvent herself in her various placements around Australia.

In Melbourne, there's a large Vietnamese population... friends or relatives will come here because at least they know it's safe for them, whereas for them to move, to say, Wagga, where once again you had to completely reinvent yourself and all that sort of thing.

Nancy believed that new Australians were generally good at leaving cultural tensions 'on their doorsteps', citing the minimal tension that arose between the 'Serbs and the Croats' when there was the conflict in Yugoslavia. She thought there was some tension but it wasn't too bad.

Direction of Australian society

Nancy could not say how happy she was with Australia but did feel we were at 'crossroads' in terms of how we develop as a society:

I feel that we have the potential at the moment to bury our heads in the sand in terms of not knowing what direction, who we are, what we want or anything like that.

Nancy had a sense that Australians 'constantly seem to be trying to please another country'. She described this outlook as a 'wanting to live up to a big brother' mentality. Nancy would prefer a future in which Australia became a leader in one or more areas.

I think that [living up to big brother mentality] fails us because we as a society run that risk of not being ourselves.

She believed that Australia was at crossroads because 'for the last few years we've had governments who have not challenged everyday people as to what we want and therefore go along with what's tried and tested'. She commented that Paul Keating had tried to do such a consultation but felt he 'spent too long trying to sell that to other people and not to us'.

In Nancy's ideal Australia there would be tolerance regardless of race, religion, age and so on. She wanted a society with 'equitable means for all people in terms of your education, your health, and all the rest of it'. Nancy did not identify other areas beyond education and health where there should be equity.

Nancy said she would like society to be more environmentally friendly, using technology to generate alternative power supplies and if not fixing the damage already done to the environment, then at least ensuring no more is done. Nancy suggested high-density living as a much more environmentally friendly means of living, particularly given the smaller families that people were now having.

An increased reliance on public transport with increased services ('running every five to ten minutes') would support high-density living and reduce the impact of cars on the environment. She felt it was more economical to rely on public transport than to develop the complicated road systems seen in America: 'When I went from San Francisco to LA and you see the road system there, you honestly hope to God that we never end up [that way].' She noted that unfortunately Australians were blessed with cheap fuel which made driving a viable option. She noted that in England fuel is approximately three Australian dollars a litre. Having cheap petrol meant fewer people travel on public transport which increased the cost of public transport, which in turn made car travel seem more attractive.

Nancy would like Australia to still have ‘that image of the laid-back sort of person’. Though she would like a shift away from a take-away lifestyle for health reasons alone, she felt it was too ingrained to change.

Employment

Though Nancy commented, ‘I’m not fully aware of the policies which is where I’m struggling’, she had a desire that ‘the system has to be full employment for those who want [to work]’. She thought an eight per cent unemployment rate was reasonable in the future, so long as the unemployment figures were ‘correct’ and not distorted by the inclusion of people who worked one hour a week.

Welfare

Nancy felt there was a need to revisit the issue of superannuation, particularly for people who did not work standard jobs or standard hours. She noted her friend worked in the arts and her superannuation was particularly low. She thought it was important to have an aged pension that did not exclude people with assets such as a house, but limited cash, to safeguard people who fall through the superannuation gap.

Ensuring support for families who care for people with a disability, or for people who experienced a mental illness were further issues that Nancy believed an ideal Australia would address.

Politics

Nancy would like to see a two-tiered government—federal and local—but thought the realistic political system was the ‘status quo’. The issues politicians should be dealing with include education, environment, health and economics, with attention to ways to increase funding.

People

Nancy would like to see regular youth forums as a means of capturing the concerns and intentions of the youth. The outcomes of these forums then must be implemented with greater speed. She felt work in this area was important to assist the youth in the future. Nancy felt the elderly should receive greater recognition.

Achieving change

Nancy believed it was the responsibility of politicians to guide Australia to a preferred future. She adjusted her comment anticipating a reply: ‘Ultimately you’d say well that’s our responsibility, because we vote for them.’ However she believed it was the politicians who signed the treaties and agreements that would impact, for example, on Australia’s environment.

Nancy felt there was a tendency for Australia to ‘point fingers at other people’ but not be prepared for those fingers being turned back on Australia, reflecting a tendency for Australia to react rather than to be proactive. Nancy did believe there were many Australians willing to accept the ‘fait accompli’ but that ‘there are enough people who do want to leave that comfort zone’.

Nancy felt that because Australians were so different that ‘someone else’s ideal Australia as compared to [her] Australia would be completely different... so it’s then [a case of] finding that balance’. The differing visions for Australia were seen as a barrier and therefore she was not sure her ideal Australia was very realistic. She did not discard her vision as being technically unachievable—the use of alternative energy sources was possible—but the barrier was that people would not share that vision. She also questioned human nature, suggesting tolerance might not be possible: ‘I’m just not sure how realistic that part of us is.’ She referred to one of her mother’s friends who ‘lumps all Asians together, even though they may be fifth or sixth generation Australians... they’re not Australian as far as she is concerned’.

Nancy believed one solution to many problems was to tax high incomes more heavily. She felt that Sweden's example suggested that higher taxation ensured the infrastructure is 'state-of-the-art' and also produced a 'more equitable society'.

The only way I can think of doing it [improving infrastructure and health services] is increasing taxes but making sure that the money goes into the systems to make sure the places [in hospital] are available.

She also mentioned Sweden's treatment of refugees, including them in the society whilst they were being processed. She noted that few people disappeared when using this processing system.

Similarly, mandatory sentences for juvenile offenders or sentencing for drug use were not the solution to the problem for Nancy, as the model was of punishment rather than dealing with the issue: 'In an ideal world we have a long way to go in terms of treating symptoms'. Nancy did believe a focus on causes rather than symptoms was a realistic objective for Australia to aim for.

Nancy remained positive that younger generations might adopt more tolerant approaches and might be the means through which an ideal Australia would be achieved. Education and family must be the means through which these messages were conveyed.

It comes in education but it has to... also be through the family. As a teacher you could stand and preach all day but if you [as a student] go home and the beliefs of your family are different then it's counter productive, which is bad.

When asked, 'What do you think your role is in achieving this preferred future', Nancy was reluctant to commit herself to an answer responding, 'Don't like that one'.

Personal values

Nancy described herself as a person who, once she made up her mind about something, became quite stubborn in seeing it through regardless of the obstacles in her way. Nancy enjoyed having her own space and being on her own. She did not feel she needed people, particularly when at home, describing herself as the 'aloof, leave-me-alone type'.

Around her family she saw herself as a 'pacifist' and tried not to upset anyone with controversial views. She felt having a dominant mother and sister created in her a personality that was calming. Amongst friends though, she would become more a centre of attention. She thought others would describe her as easy-going, lots of fun, though the 'boys at work' might describe her as moody.

Loyalty was a key ingredient in her long-term friendships, as Nancy commented that she didn't 'go into close friendships that easily'. Honesty was also important. Nancy admired people who 'do things with their lives, who do have a full life and do challenge themselves and do different things.'

Nancy was generally satisfied with her life though the absence of an intimate relationship might be the only gap: 'Predominantly satisfied with my life at the moment. Have good friends and interests and all that side of things. Probably only [unsatisfactory] aspect is love life because that's non-existent at the moment, but otherwise...' Her main challenge, she joked, was controlling her friends who were 'going on a manhunt' on her behalf.

She mentioned health, friends, time for herself as the key issues currently taking her attention. An issue she was avoiding—'I've very much buried my head in the sand'—was looking at her long-term economic security. She felt she was living for the moment and 'the future' was anywhere between one to five years. She didn't think she could answer questions about where she saw herself in 10 years' time.

Nancy attributed her outlook on financial decisions to the influence of her environment as she grew up. For instance, she described her mother as having poor money management skills, which might explain her own reluctance to plan ahead. She also felt that she played to her strengths, so she avoided areas where she feared failure.

Nancy felt sure that when she was older she would want to think she had 'lived her life to complete and utter fullness'. She would like to still be 'living for the moment'. She didn't feel she was doing that now because she 'hasn't taken responsibility for her life.'

Nancy did not consider herself to be religious. She said that she believed in an after life to a degree but felt the motivation for the belief might be that 'you don't want to think it all ends'.

Work

Nancy felt she would like her career to involve a managerial position though she was not concerned about the area she was in. Indeed the idea of someone doing the same job for 20 or 40 years was 'Oh horror!' In the next year she was expecting to move into middle management so she felt her career was on track with respect to that ambition. She was looking forward to the change of delegating work, since she tended to 'hold on to things'.

Nancy had just finished a graduate diploma in the risk and safety for her industry. She undertook the course to give her greater freedom to move into a related field but it provided an interesting addition to her work at present. Nancy indicated that she would like to do further study, possibly in the field of arts, and if she did, 'It's going to be for me rather than my career'.

Quality of life

Nancy would like to improve her health and fitness. She mentioned going to the gym each morning for a few weeks but commented that she was 'not a morning person'. She therefore needed to juggle her evening activities between socialising and going to the gym. She would rather her evenings be fun and admitted viewing the gym as being more of a 'chore... like housekeeping'.

Nancy was aware of the need to establish long-term financial security, which she felt meant having investments or 'at least putting your money in a place other than the bank'.

Nancy was considering moving closer into the city, though she wondered whether that move would involve buying a home or continuing to rent. She felt to buy a home would mean 'taking responsibility for [her] economics rather than just ignoring them'. She might also consider whether she lived on her own or not. She classified her home situation as being 'in the too-hard basket'. Later she confessed that 'To a degree you'd like the prince on the white horse to come and sweep you off your feet and sort it all out for you'. She felt realistically that she 'should be relying on [herself]' and felt the longer she 'put off doing anything about it, the worse off in the long run she will be'.

In relation to other standard of living matters Nancy was satisfied. She felt that she could do whatever she wanted on a daily basis, and had enough money to do what she liked.

Relationships

Nancy wanted committed relationships including genuine friendships. She associated commitment with honesty and openness.

Nancy did not think she had any community relationships mostly 'because you sort of perceive [community relationships] as being almost like church groups.' She admitted that this might be a 'narrow minded' perspective. She later mentioned a friend who was organizing a 'stranger camp' to which she invited friends who invited friends, 'as a way of meeting people'. This could be considered a community.

Nancy indicated that she was not closely connected to her immediate geographic community. Indeed she was keen to avoid those relationships because when at home she did want the pressure of being anything but herself: 'If I am at home or in the local environment, I just want time for me.'

Nancy had been involved in the past in helping out backstage of theatres. This was voluntary work, though having grown up active in performance arts it was of considerable interest for her.

Interplay between social and personal aspirations

Nancy initially commented that the society she would like and her own life are interrelated through her friends. She believed she would be with friends whose 'philosophy of life is the same'. Nancy thought she could achieve her personal goals even if society didn't develop in the manner she wished, though because her wishes were for a tolerant society, she would be conscious that the world was not quite as nice to live in:

I suppose it's that wanting everyone and everything to get along and to work and to be a better place type thing, that yes, you can personally get along without it, but ideally it would be fantastic if the two occurred.

Values

Nancy stumbled through a definition of values that could be deciphered to refer to the 'rules you live by that mean something to you'. Nancy believed her values included honesty, loyalty and commitment. She considered commitment to be following through on what you accept, including meeting deadlines and being involved with friends.

Nancy felt her upbringing had influenced her views though these changed across time. She believed as a teenager her Catholic upbringing had determined the majority of her views 'because it [religion] gave you something tangible ... gave you something to follow'. Other sources of values include education, the home environment and the media. She felt her friends were another influence on her outlook. She also commented that her first work colleagues had helped shape her work ethic.

Nancy felt that although her views were similar to her mother, father and sister, she was most like her mother in the passion of her opinions. She noted, however, that her mother had a different view of the environment. This issue had become important to Nancy when she decided 'If we don't start taking responsibility then it's lost further down the line'.

Living out values

Nancy believed she lived out her values: 'I try to practise what I preach.' She thought that someone could tell from her actions, even if they didn't know her, what her values were in how she was environmentally conscious, from her work ethic and because she sponsors a child.

I suppose it's in terms of public transport I mean I use [it] where otherwise I would drive to work and the majority of people I work with cannot understand that. I suppose in terms of ...on a daily basis ... your recycling and all that sort of thing, I've also just started ...through the Smith Family you can sponsor a child for education here in Australia

Nancy made some frank comments about why she decided to sponsor a child, which started a year earlier. She saw an ad in *The Age* and decided 'rather than think about and talk about it' she would take some action. She was motivated more to help Australians, because she thought Australia should 'fix our own backyard [before] can we really fix up someone else's'. In that way she thought her action made 'so much more sense than [helping] World Vision or something like that'.

Nancy felt her sponsoring of a child provided 'selfish satisfaction': 'Therefore I can turn around and be in an argument with someone and say I am actually doing something about it.'

Nancy knew she had received information that changed her views. She cited one example of her changing opinion in relation to immigration. Initially Nancy had been opposed to increased immigration, believing reports that Australia could not sustain a higher population. She later read more information including the 'facts and figures' about why Australia needed 'additional populations': 'I was very much a confused person'. She now endorsed more immigration.

Nancy placed greater emphasis on the information she read 'as being more responsible' and 'factual' than television and radio which she considered tended to 'play on emotion'. She mentioned the World Vision TV advertisements which 'make you mutter about how horrible it is' but she wasn't sure it made people feel like taking action. Rather they would tend to forget after a day. On the other hand, brochures Nancy would place 'straight into the recycling' as she categorised them all as 'catalogue type' information.

Final comments on poverty

Nancy believed there were a number of reasons there was poverty in Australia. She felt poverty was the lifestyle in which people are not able to 'make ends meet'. Nancy did believe poverty in Australia was real: 'There seems to be enough stories of people who are genuinely unemployed or who are genuinely below the poverty line, and it's not through lack of trying or anything like that.' She regarded poverty as having a 'downward spiral' that made it difficult to escape.

I never think it's their fault. To me it is the systems that once you get caught into that bind of, say, not being able to pay your rent on time, and you get further and further behind, then it may cause other problems such as increased drinking or drugs or something like that.

Moreover, poverty had multiple causes:

There's always a combination; it's never one isolated thing in which case. Yes, it is the structure that has let that person down, they may have lost their job and their partner left them at the same time, they start falling behind in their rent, they... tend to self-pity or anything like that and the structure is just not there at that time for them, you then get eviction.

8. Maggie: Female, 30-50 years, low income (<25K h/hold), ESB, outer Melbourne suburb, public and secondary education, youngest over the 5 years

Maggie was a mother of two with primary school aged children. She was raised in Melbourne as a second generation Australian. Her father and father were both European immigrants. She described her background as 'working class'. Her father had suffered a severe disability in the workplace, but was able to continue working because of the number of jobs available at that time. He did not go on a disability pension.

Maggie lived in outer Melbourne suburb. She was separated from her husband, who had moved out of the home one month prior to the interview. Maggie's husband business had gone bankrupt six months earlier. The income available to Maggie prior to the business collapse was quite different from the low income she was now on. She had saved the house for now, but she was not sure she would be able to afford it in the future.

Maggie reported some TAFE education and had been employed in the welfare industry for most of her working career. She had only recently started working at a charitable organisation. In addition to her pay, she received some family support payments.

Maggie reported fairly minimal travel experience in the past and expected to remain an 'armchair traveller.'

Social values

Maggie expressed positive views on Australia in comparison with other countries. She spontaneously mentioned our safety and affluence as characteristics that make Australia 'the best place on earth.'

One of the luckiest countries on earth... incredibly safe, but maybe that's because I live in a real community... We are a very affluent society.

Though a comparatively glowing appraisal emerged, Maggie was far from pleased with recent developments in society that reflected a more dog-eat-dog and materialistic lifestyle. The model she described as U.S. oriented: 'We are taking ourselves too seriously.' Maggie observed, 'We've lost our social consciousness'. She blamed the community fragmentation and what she ultimately regarded as growing selfishness on:

- Globalism – taking on other values and cultures, with society becoming broader. A sense of belonging was being lost; and
- A 'transaction-based' view linked to 'instant gratification.' Australia today is 'about doing' and not relationships.

We have become less tolerant... more selfish... much too focused on acquiring material stuff, on what we can get rather than give. We live in an instant society... It's this instant gratification stuff... we do lose that connection with people.

Maggie initiated a conversation about cultural change, community and the connection to political processes. She raised the issue of the War Against Terrorism as a war that developed because 'America's pride was dented'. She felt double standards emerged as 'no one stopped to ask about the other thousands of people dying daily everywhere in the world'. Maggie was concerned that Australia had 'just followed along' without community consultation: 'Bureaucracy gone mad... [You] can't even see egalitarianism any more.'

Maggie reiterated concerns about the fragmentation of society: 'I'm lucky, I know my neighbours.' The fragmentation she saw inhibiting the ability of people to relate to each other: 'We've lost the ability to talk.' Devices such as TV and Playstation were responsible for diminishing social skills. With her own children she had imposed a limit for TV and Play station, 'forcing' them to interact with friends.

Employment

Maggie made comparisons between the employment situation in Australia at present and employment in her father's day. Maggie believed a number of menial jobs which were suitable to people who have a disability and couldn't do heavy physical labour had been eliminated from the labour market. The decline in jobs meant that people with special needs would remain unemployed. Higher unemployment she associated with greater reliance on pensions.

Maggie also had concerns about the security of businesses in Australia and the higher unemployment that might occur as a result of business failure. As Maggie thought small businesses felt more obligated to their employees, rather than simply focused on profits, support of small business would assist the level of employment in Australia in insecure times.

Education

Maggie considered access to education as changing in Australia since she went to school. In Maggie's youth 'we could afford to go to uni. because it was free'. She discussed HECS as causing financial burdens on Australians as they emerge from university in debt.

With regard to primary and secondary school, Maggie felt there was a growing segregation between public and private schools. She perceived increasing class sizes in public schools to be driving this division: 'Schools are just too big... If you've got the money, you'd go private.' Maggie's own children had ready access to Catholic schools because of her religion. Whilst Catholic schools were not of the same standard as the wealthiest private schools, she did believe they were of a higher calibre than public schools.

Businesses

Maggie believed there was not enough government support for small businesses. She felt big businesses were consuming small businesses and that this process resulted in more layoffs because big businesses did not regard people as important. Maggie was quite angry at an apparent disregard for the individual in big business and a focus on profits only. She would prefer to see 'shareholders should take a cut rather than massive layoffs'.

The demise of Australian organisations Maggie saw as disquieting in the current climate and she queried the impact on Australia's economy: 'Corporate collapses are a significant deal for me. How is our economy going to cope?'

The sale of Australian utilities was another area where Maggie had some concerns. The critical issues she saw resulting from foreign ownership included the lack of accountability to the Australian people, as well as the loss of profits. The loss of profits, she stated, made Australia more reliant on other taxes as the main source of revenue.

On a positive note, she was pleased to hear that 'people like Murdoch are saying you've got to put more into education. That's who Howard will listen to'. She encouraged more of the influential businessmen and businesswomen to have a say about the progress of Australian society.

Welfare

Maggie highlighted housing as her biggest worry in the area of welfare: 'Rents are a problem.' She felt people were simply not able to cope because of the impact of rent on their lives. Maggie had

accepted that ‘there’s always going to be gaps’ in welfare and in wealth distribution but she felt housing was an area requiring greater attention.

Quality of life

Maggie felt Australian society was becoming more focused on getting things done rather than on having time for people. She regarded this shift as being in response to a society where gratification must be immediate and a cause of the long hours Australians were working. Maggie regarded the issue of long work hours ‘despite the rhetoric,’ as not being taken seriously by Australians. Maggie did take the matter seriously and would like to see Australians reducing their hours: ‘We don’t spend enough time smelling the roses.’

Apart from being work-oriented, Maggie thought Australian society was ‘affluent’, although not all Australians had this standard of living. She was concerned about the emphasis on material achievement, ignoring emotion connections in the community: ‘You’re not having a good time unless you’re spending money. [We’re losing] the ability to have a good time doing simple things.’

Environment

Maggie was involved in committees that addressed the conservation of the environment in her local area. She discussed with great concern the destruction of her local environment including the coast and the wetlands: ‘The environment really upsets me.’

Maggie went on to say that although Australia was not a religious country, Australians were spiritual in their connection to the environment. She described a culture that was strongly connected to the outdoors. Despite this spirituality, Maggie believed Australians ‘don’t respect it [the environment] enough’.

Politics

Maggie was generally pleased with the Australian system of politics, indicating that the decision-making process was sufficiently scrutinised—‘checks and balances’—and it was a process where people ‘could make a difference’.

Maggie’s only point of dissatisfaction was with the two major political parties. She believed that there was little that differentiated the agendas of the two parties, which undermined the power of the voters to select a direction for Australia’s future.

People

Maggie characterised Australians as ‘taking a risk’ and ‘having a sense of adventure’. She felt Australians were people who got along well with all other cultures. Maggie did not see Australia as being religious in the sense that Australians tended to belong to one or several religions. Rather Australians were spiritually connected to the Australian environment.

A concern of Maggie was inept parenting. Maggie made a number of observations about Australia’s youth suggesting that ‘the youth of today are so disenfranchised’. From the work she had done with youth in the past, she felt equipped to describe youth as disconnected and becoming angry. The cause of these feelings of disassociation resulted from social economic and cultural changes in the 70s that enabled people to be sole parents. She felt welfare responded to this change by providing monetary benefits, but did not consider the other assistance that was required to raise a child: ‘These kids are the product of people who had very poor parenting skills... we set up this whole welfare state without understanding what we were doing.’

Maggie alluded to a concept of a national and local identity as ‘vitaly important’ throughout the conversation. She felt she had been protected from social fragmentation because she had maintained a solid community connection with her neighbours. Maggie strongly endorsed a

national identity as a means of maintaining community cohesiveness. She felt globalism was simply too broad to endear a sense of responsibility and involvement with the people around you.

Direction of Australian society

Maggie considered her ideal Australia as including a healthy and native Australian environment, a tolerant and friendly community and '[though capitalist] the focus would be on the importance of people.'

People are not afraid to say hello to each other whether black, white or brindle.

In this society no one would need to be 'hugely affluent' and there would be 'menial' jobs to ensure high employment. She described 'menial' jobs as including tram conductors and the like, as these were jobs her father could have performed in spite of his disability.

In Maggie's ideal Australia children would be respect and treated with importance. She was concerned when people commented that school holidays were a 'chore' and 'something to be lived through'. Raising children in a safe and protected environment would be the responsibility of all people in Maggie's ideal Australia.

Australia was falling short of her expectations because of its 'selfishness'. Maggie believed the way out of this situation was to 'listen to our hearts and not compromise our values'. At present however, Maggie's forecast for the Australia of the future was pessimistic: 'The social fabric will break down—that's human nature.' She believed only major and devastating events would cause a change in perspective: 'Our selfishness has become a way of life. Once it's entrenched in behaviour it's much harder to change.'

Australia has some great characteristics but we still have a long way to go as we are losing some of the key attributes of a caring society.

She felt a connectedness to local business would ensure support for business and the Australian economy. Local business would in turn do the right thing with regard to employment. A business focus on people and not profits was essential: 'Profits need to be of secondary importance.' Maggie also wanted to see exports encouraged as a means of expanding the Australian economy.

Achieving change

Maggie believed that all Australians need to be involved to develop the desired Australia. Her own actions and involvement are evidence that she felt empowered to make a difference. On the other hand, her pessimism suggested that few others were ready to be engaged in making a difference.

Maggie emphasised that it was Australia's elected leaders that guided the country's future. Another consequence Maggie saw of the disenfranchisement of Australians was a disinterest in politics. The long-term impact of this disinterest was that 'you can't get depth and quality in our leaders'. Maggie was keen to see a reversal of this situation, with every effort made to convince young Australians they both can and should be involved in politics.

Personal values

Despite all the upheavals in her life, Maggie said she was fairly satisfied with her situation. She was pleased she had made some difficult decisions and was pulling through: 'I'm in control of my life.' The challenges had crystallised for Maggie the type of person she was and what she believed in. She was now 'comfortable in [her] own skin'.

Maggie described herself as caring, strong, loving, thoughtful and passionate. Maggie had an 'energy for life'. She hoped others would see her as someone who was involved and true to herself. She insisted on honesty in others and this was one of the reasons she separated from her husband.

She felt the easy path would have been to keep the status quo. Instead Maggie chose to start again but this option meant that she did not get ‘consumed by dishonesty’.

Though Maggie had a positive self-image, and felt proud of this image as being hard earned, she didn’t consider herself perfect. Patience was one trait she would continue working on. She would keep on learning from ‘life’s lessons’: ‘The day I stop learning put me in a box.’

Maggie was motivated for her family. She had pulled through tough times and was continuing to do so for the benefit of her children. Maggie also regarded her religion as an important driver: ‘My spirituality sustains me in my belief in God, whatever that may be, my friends and family, and my absolute power and strength.’ Her might was another reinforcer. Maggie firmly assumed responsibility for achieving her own aspirations.

Work

Maggie’s work was relatively new to her, both with regard to the organisation and the area. She was thoroughly enjoying what she was doing. The ‘real satisfaction’ came not only from a sense of achievement in her own skills but also a belief that she was doing some good.

Given her recent start, she had few long-term plans, but was keen to strengthen her involvement in the workforce.

Quality of life

Due to her changed circumstances, Maggie believed her standard of living would be reduced for some years to come. Though Maggie noted she had retained ownership of her house, she was hoping rather than confident that it would remain that way. She was particularly keen to stay in the house for the consistency it provided her children.

Aside from keeping the luxuries to a minimum, Maggie was focused on keeping fit and healthy. She enjoyed her local environment and would regularly walk and meditate on the beach. She loved camping and hoped that short trips away with the children could be maintained. For Maggie, ‘a change of scenery’ even if in country Victoria, assisted her mental well-being as much as her physical health.

Relationships

Maggie’s children were her main focus, particularly since her separation from her husband. Her only concern from the recent split in the family was the impact on her children and she was focused on ‘getting her [my] kids emotionally stable’.

As was evident throughout the interview, Maggie had an enthusiasm for community relationships. Nurturing relationships with family, friends and her community were important to her at the time and into the future.

Maggie described the way she and other parents combined to supervise the children so they could play in the street and in the local park in safety. Maggie felt safe in her community and left her windows open at night because of the faith she had in her neighbours. Maggie said she felt a part of her community and it would seem to have satisfied many aspects of her ideal Australia at this local level.

Interplay of social and personal aspirations

Maggie did not think she could achieve her personal aspirations without society developing in the manner she would like. She discussed the development of her children as a major aspiration, yet to raise happy and healthy children would not produce total satisfaction. That is because building a cohesive community was itself a personal aspiration for Maggie.

Values

Maggie described values as ‘the way that I live my life’. She nominated some of the values as including serenity, love, friendship, honesty, and integrity—‘the basic stuff that you learn at home’.

Maggie felt that the majority of people did live by their values but it depended on their circumstances. She mentioned that when in complete poverty, ‘you have no room for emotion... You simply live for the moment of survival.’

Though Maggie indicated that values were learned from home, she felt she had changed over the years. She thought she was quite ‘radical’ when younger, but her views on IVF and abortion are now more conservative and based on the circumstances. Maggie felt that her changing views reflected the wisdom one gains with age and from experiences such as having children.

Values for children

Maggie felt concerned that schools were not doing enough to encourage children to question. Maggie also discussed the need for greater discipline as a notable absence from the Australian education system.

Maggie also charged parents with the responsibility to instil positive values in her children. The notions of caring, sharing, honesty and community were all things parents should be giving their children and were the areas that Maggie focused on with her own children. She charged parents with the responsibility of encourage their children to question also. Maggie felt that if her children were able to question and think about issues then they would be able to arrive at informed decisions.

Living out values

Maggie felt she lived out her values in a manner that would be evident to people who didn’t know her. She believed her level of community involvement, her active engagement with people in her surrounding area and the lessons she taught her children were all evidence of her values.

Maggie was further proud of the separation from her husband because it allowed her to be true to her values.

Final comments on poverty

Maggie believed that people would be happy to blame the individual for their own bad fortune because if social factors were responsible, then ‘if it can happen to them, it can happen to you’. If you can ‘project’ a cause as being inherent in other individuals, you don’t feel as insecure, nor should you change. It was for this reason that Maggie thought the ‘dole bludger mentality... is going to get much worse’.

9. Larry: Male, 30-50 years, middle income (25-70K h/hold), Melbourne, Indigenous Australian, public/private and tertiary education, no children

Larry was a 34-year-old single male living in Melbourne. Larry's mother came from N.S.W. moving to Melbourne to care for her nephew and nieces when she met Larry's father. Larry was born in Melbourne, though his family—parents and sister—had regularly travelled back to his mother's homeland throughout his life. Larry now lived in Melbourne's north with a 'mortgage'.

Larry went to a local public school for the majority of his education. When he decided to change his subject selection to include academic subjects as opposed to trade subjects, he changed to a private school so he 'wouldn't get stirred by his friends'. Larry attended private school for one year after which he returned to his former school where he continued with academic subjects.

Larry spent a short amount of time working in trades before he started in the public service but he left within 12 months, describing the work as boring and the service as racist: 'All those rumours that you hear about the public service are quite true.' Larry spent quite a few years moving between jobs. A turning point for Larry was when he became involved as a leader of a cross-cultural camp. At the time of the interview, Larry was working in an Aboriginal advocacy; he had been in that role for a decade.

Through his work and his long interest in sports, Larry had been able to travel widely in Australia. Larry felt he was quickly running out of 'excuses not to go overseas', as his resume of Australian destinations became exhaustive.

Social values

If Larry were to describe Australia to a person moving here from overseas, he would tell them Australia is a 'colonial society'. Essentially this meant Australia was white and a western democratic society and that the majority of Australians had that profile. He believed that 'although multiculturalism has been pretty well plugged', Australia remained a white, western culture society.

Employment

Larry believed that there were enough jobs in Australia: 'I've never had any trouble getting work. If they're willing to work. Depends what they want to do...' He felt that there were jobs for the motivated and those willing to try new work avenues. He thought that the ease with which a person could find their ideal job was dependent on the profession itself, as some work had lower demand. Qualifications and relevant skills would maximise opportunity, as would 'connections': 'It's pretty much a 'not what you know but who you know' world.'

Larry mentioned that people who were disadvantaged might have greater difficulties getting work as they might not have the means to establish their own business. Larry was concerned that people on low incomes were becoming more 'segregated' from wealthy Australians: 'The rich get richer, the poor get the picture—I'm an old Midnight Oil fan.'

Just depends on how disadvantaged you are. If you haven't got too much money to set yourself up in a lawn-mowing business, or you've got six kids, it could be almost impossible. I think we're seeing a U.S. model economy here, where you can have really poor people below the poverty line... and then it jumps to your Packers and Fairfaxes.

Larry believed that the concessions given to the unemployed made it difficult for them to choose to work again since the concessions would need to be sacrificed. Changes to employment which required a tax file number and ABNs meant that cash work was more restricted which made it difficult for people to work two jobs, and for many of his clients to sell their artwork for extra cash.

Businesses

Larry believed business opportunities in Australia were mixed. He thought some small businesses were able to combine hard work with luck. Other small businesses were struggling under the weight of paperwork and costs. Employees too were insecure in their positions because of the struggling nature of business.

[Successful small business] That's wonderful. That's Australia that we all love and cherish... You think there's no better country in the world. But then you can drive another suburb away and a husband's bashing his wife, pissed, because he's just been sacked.

Larry also believed that workers had yet to achieve the perfect balance between good work conditions, good pay and a good boss. Workers should expect a mixed bag of relations with their employment. Businesses, regardless of size, varied in how they treated employees. Larry commented that the increased contractual work meant people lack the security to negotiate their conditions: 'You can get a job, but do you have control over your working conditions? There's no security so you can't stand up for your rights.'

Larry described the sale of Australian companies and assets overseas as 'rotten'. He thought there would be more 'security' if Australia 'didn't sell off our resources'. He contemplated whether media would be considered a multinational.

It would seem that it's not even in the hands of these Australians, the decisions that govern the standard of living and way of life... it's more to do with multinational corporations.

Welfare

Larry was generally concerned about the welfare system: 'It [welfare] should be something that lifts that person up and says "Let's work something out here".' Though welfare could be used as a backup, it was insufficient to assist the person who had not done well at school, had no skills and could not get a job.

What's there for them besides welfare. Welfare as we know it sounds good... but if you were to ask him or her, "Do you really just want be just getting this drip-feed existence?"... We have a system that doesn't promote... people to break out of the welfare mould.

Larry believed that few people who were on welfare wished to stay on welfare. Moves to introduce work for the dole were reactions to the 'Hanson section' of society who wanted to feel like they weren't just 'funding people's welfare'. Larry believed opportunities for some segments of the population were limited.

Say there are a hundred golden opportunities for disadvantaged people... there is probably a million disadvantaged people that are missing out. Who gets it? The best? The most qualified out of those disadvantaged or the lowest hundred that are the most disadvantaged? What's the selection?

Once again I should read the paper more often, but there's obviously some truth when you hear elderly people waiting three years to have an operation... It's [welfare] meeting everyone's needs.

Regardless of its problems, the provision of welfare was seen as important: '[Welfare services are] people's rights in this country and should never ever be violated.'

Quality of life

Larry believed that the quality of life in Australia was a subjective assessment based on individual wants: 'Like everything that we've said so far, it's all subjective to the individual's own values and ideals.' He believed there was general consensus about wanting a standard of living that enabled holidays, home ownership and meals on tables.

Larry did not believe all Australians are able to have their quality of life they desired. He attributed the differing standards to the 'gap' between those with wealth and those struggling on low incomes: 'I don't want to confess to being a communist but there's some value in [equality in wealth].' Specifically, Larry mentioned high interest rates and the difficulty of getting a bank loan without employment as obstacles to a satisfactory standard of living.

I really struggle personally with how people in this OK bracket have no empathy for those below it... And yet that very person may make donations to welfare on Royal Children's days... There can be sympathy and yet apathy.

Larry did have concerns about the health and well-being of Indigenous Australians and the impact of drugs and alcohol in the future. Larry felt that the predicament of Aboriginal people was 'annihilating' them and was set to get worse: 'I swear drugs, alcohol and mental health are going to be mega issues in the next 10 years.'

Education

Larry had positive comments about the quality of the Australian education system. Though he considered private education to be more 'demanding' based on his own experiences, he believed the public system was still quite good.

I think we have a brilliant system... Certainly private education has a very good standard. The general educational system... I think it's a good standard generally, you can read, write and add things up.

Whatever you're studying to do, if you were successful in completing that, you'd be confident to do that role. I think that's a good guide to what our level of education is.

Larry felt a positive attitude towards education at home was critical if the student was to gain the most from education. This was not a perception of education he thought many Aboriginal children had in the past. He thought they would perceive non-attendance at school to mean 'welfare' could be notified and you could be taken away from your parents. '[It's different] if that kid is brought up in a family with a priority on education, with knowledge and respect that school's important.'

He was concerned about access to education given restrictions imposed by the expense of schooling. He raised the issue of HECS debts as a concern.

Environment

Larry was concerned that Australia did not balance the environment with business needs. He felt the lure of money from industry tended to prevail over the importance of the environment. He believed that Australians were happy for politicians to 'tell us it's all right'. The presence of taxes and levies eliminated the responsibility of Australians for the environment.

We all love our country. Millions of acres of virgin soil. On the other side of that equation, it's rich in uranium and to get that we've got to pollute our water systems. But we need the money and we're in a global economy and we need to keep up to survive. If we sacrifice a little bit of that [environment] we can maintain our standard of living.

Politics

Larry was sceptical about politics in Australia, believing the politicians were in control of the decisions, and Australians generally had minimal influence: 'You'd like to think we're running the government, but it's the government running society.' Larry would advise a person moving to Australia that their influence on politics would not 'change in the world'. Rather, if they did get into politics they would 'only be going with the status quo' regardless of how radical they thought they might be.

He expressed some puzzlement about how some decisions are made. He raised the introduction of the GST and was sure he didn't know anyone who said they voted for it. This left him with the conclusion that 'maybe the only people who vote are retired, middle-upper class people'.

Every time you think people will vote for the sympathetic and compassionate line that wants to support welfare, ... offer concessions for small businesses. Who do you know that wanted GST? And yet, come election day we end up with what no one seems to want. Are we that irrational a country?

He raised suspicions that electoral zones might be rigged to influence voting results.

People

Identity was very important to Larry. He saw his own identity to be an Aboriginal Australian, as it was the culture that nurtured him, recognised him and to whom he is responsible. A national identity, Larry thought, was critical as providing people with a 'definition'.

Larry believed that Australia was 'always allied to someone' and he felt the 'boat' that we decided to be in was a reflection of where politicians considered the money to be. He queried, 'Where's the patriotism?'

Larry considered Australia's national identity to be changing. He felt that notions of mateship and egalitarianism were associated with 'working on the land' images which were outdated: 'I don't see the self-reliant, egalitarian, bushy, man. I don't know where he is today. The bloke!' Rather, a push for a multicultural identity had weakened a vision for Australians: '[Australia was a] powerful, well-resourced colony or country... that's all been attacked by multiculturalism. Now we've got to be tolerant.' To be told you're one thing then be told to change, 'I think that can be confusing.' Australians he thought would adopt a multicultural view in future generations:

Australians can struggle with difference. And yet I do see tolerance on some levels. And the next generation will be better and better and better.

Larry presumed that other nations would think Australia was pretty 'racist' because of actions he believed reflected an unequal regard for people. He believed there was great compassion in Australia and Australia would criticise other countries for their treatment of groups, yet at the same time, 'we can't see the apartheid in this land'.

We've just knocked back these refugees. We had the White Australia policy for so long... New Australians report back to where they come from and they would have to say [that] every now and again a politician gets up and says 'what about the white Australian?'

There has been plenty of media hype lately and probably a lot of truth in it, about how racist and uncompassionate we might be. But amidst that there's real compassion and charity and support. You get a sense of mateship and egalitarianism which we perhaps over romanticise but they are there.

Larry believed that Australia was a religious nation. He felt it might not always be evident, but in troubled times people's faith re-emerged:

Spirituality and religion in this land is big. It's not on the surface but it's there... While everyone's kicking goals they're fine, but the minute trauma, depression or something really bad happens...

Direction of Australian society

When asked if Larry was happy with society he responded,

The first thing that comes to mind is yes. This is my home, my country, my society, as much as I've argued about disadvantage. The problems that we have are my problems or our problems... and I think we'll deal with them'.

What I value is the idea that I can walk outside this house at 5 o'clock, and go to my house, go to the fridge and make a sandwich. Ring up my sister, go visit her. We might go shopping and pick up some Christmas presents. I've got four weeks' holidays. There a lot of things that I think this country provides that I'm happy about.

At the same time that Larry 'owned' Australia's problems, he also expressed anger at the problems that exist which result from other Australians' decisions: 'It seems like whatever problems we have we're [Aboriginal Australians] are not responsible for. These are all things imposed on Aboriginal society.'

Larry felt his perception of Australia depended on what mood he was in. For instance, seeing his elders, whom he equated in status with the governor-general, in a park in Melbourne with only a shirt on their back, and not passing on wisdom and culture in their homeland, 'brings a lot of dissatisfaction'.

In a perfect Australian society, Larry would have 'the environment go back to how it was two hundred years ago'. Larry wanted a safe, caring society where all people are welcomed—'the more the merrier'. Larry believed Australia was sufficiently resourced to share Australia's fortunes: 'We have a world of surplus... We might think we haven't got enough to go around because times are tough but I think we can [look after these people].'

It's the Bob Hawke speech. You'd like to wave your wand and have no child in poverty. Proper education, no homelessness, no domestic violence, no child abuse... There'd be a lot of 'no's.

If Larry had a concern about future directions for Australia it was that different groups might be segregated on the basis of their culture. He would be dismayed to see the work done so far to provide equality to Indigenous Australians taken away and Aboriginal people once again 'being disenfranchised from Australian society'.

Larry would like the characteristics that are considered 'typical' to Australia including charity and goodwill to resurface. He felt that these traits were less evident when times were tough and employment was tough.

Achieving change

Larry had difficulty reconciling negative human emotions—greed, angry, hatred and spite—and positive human emotions—love, caring and nurturing: 'I've met some real ratbags... [yet] they've turned around and done the most amazing thing.' It was because of these two opposing forces that Larry was 'struggling with that question' about whether Australia could become his ideal society.

[The concept of] A better world is also a very human need or want or dream... Heaven on earth... it's a bit naïve of me to say we can't achieve these things when so many people want to have that.

Though people might idealistically want a better world, Larry also felt people were trapped in a culture of complaint that did not promote action or responsibility. He felt people would be pleased to sit back and 'fire shots' at institutions such as multinationals, the church and government. If these institutions placed responsibility back on the individual—if, for example, the church said, 'Do what you want to do about abortion'—Larry believed, 'society would fall over and cry for a month because they don't want that freedom. They need someone to say this is right and this is wrong'.

Is that human to have a vision that's probably not even unrealistic but within reach but you never take it? It would seem that we have the means to fix a lot of problems and yet we don't... People maybe more focus on the dream than the actual reality. And there's a fear, do people really want to be self-reliant and equal and free?

Larry questioned the ability for Indigenous Australians to play a role in shaping Australia's future given their lack of power in the political system.

Maybe I should read the papers more often. We're lucky we're not in Afghanistan or war-torn European countries or in the Bronx of America. And apartheid, that's just yesterday. We're lucky for a lot of things, but an Aboriginal perspective is we've recently had to tolerate mandatory sentencing which only seems to affect 99 per cent of the Aboriginal population. Are you lucky as a people that you're not in control of your own destiny? Aboriginal people don't have self-determination.

Larry believed in 'realistic' programs for individuals who are disadvantaged that would get them out of poverty. These would foster a society where all people feel 'that they can contribute and feel a part of it'.

Personal values

Larry struggled between his aspirations which he thought were 'just what everyone else wants' and a feeling that he should be rebelling against conformity with western principles given that so many of the Australian Aboriginal people might suffer as a result of these aspirations.

Why am I climbing that social ladder... and economically separating myself from the rest of my people? I'm getting an education. I'll have more opportunity. I don't want to be climbing that ladder when it's going to get worse for 90 per cent of Aboriginal people.

Larry talked about paying off his mortgage, his study and work, and having a family. If possible he would achieve these dreams 'without having to sacrifice his beliefs, values and identity as an Aboriginal person'.

Work

Larry had been working at the advocacy agency for the past 10 years and was about to go on long-service leave. He hoped to shift his study pace up a level moving from part-time to full-time study. He eventually hoped to work in the legal arena.

Quality of life

Larry felt lucky to have experienced a life in which he could know his mother's culture as he grew up. School, he remembered, was a difficult time for him and he was alienated by students and teachers alike. Teachers would make him stand in bins with a dunce's hat on or 'get cuts'. He described primary school children as being verbally cruel, calling him 'the blackie, the darkie, the nigger', but it was at secondary school he received 'proper hidings' from the bigger kids. He noted that as the only Aboriginal person in a school, 'You're so alone'.

Returning to his mother's 'country' during school holidays provided anonymity and acceptance. The contrast between Melbourne and his mother's homeland was extreme. He felt many stolen children were not given the appreciation and understanding of the Aboriginal culture that he was provided.

Larry 'owned' his identity as an Aboriginal man in Australia. He felt his identity had considerable consequences for his life: 'I can expect to die violent death before I'm forty, statistically. That's my identity in this country, the lucky country.'

Relationships

Larry's identity was further raised in the context of relationships. He discussed some confusion about the changing male role. In his generation, boys didn't cry and didn't show compassion for the weak. He mentioned that he would feel 'guilty' kissing and hugging a child in public 10 years ago. While the feminist movement made it acceptable to show emotion, he was confused about male

identity: 'Do women really want the S.N.A.G. [Sensitive New Age Guy] snag or do they want the competitive guy that's going to meet all these needs?'

Larry had the hope that he would 'meet a nice girl, get married and have lots of kids. Lots of kids.'

Values

Larry defined values as 'what identifies a person. I highly value charity, though charity's probably not the best word for it. I value caring'. Other values included sharing, liberty, security and privacy.

I value privacy. I hate to sound so liberal but I think the individual has the right to be a big 'A' if they want to... As long as it's not harming anyone else.

Larry felt his values were gained 'from [his] life experience growing up and from [his] parents, of course!' He felt there was a 'trans-generational' aspect to values as you could look back through history and see compassion and see a large emphasis on family.

Larry mentioned a value common to Aboriginal Australians would be to 'uphold' disadvantaged people as having the most difficult journey: 'The most disadvantaged is the person that we uphold in our community because that person has suffered the most, suffered the hardest, suffered the longest.' He felt this would be a point of discrepancy with western culture that might view this as 'condoning' the 'kid on drugs'.

Values for children

Larry would like to see education that is community based and about leadership rather than being individual and competitive. He expressed concern about his nephew who he regarded as becoming competitive at the expense of others: 'that... is not aboriginal. It should be a community-based thing.'

He hoped that values, or morals, were nurtured by your parents through example.

Living out values

Larry did not feel that he had done too many things, since becoming an adult, that he felt bad about: 'I hate to admit this but I'm a bit of a "goody goody".' He felt there had been times when he would have liked to have been more helpful and helped out a stranger but he hadn't: 'I've certainly gone against my own values. I'd have like to be more compassionate at times.'

When Larry was younger however, he had bumped into another car and after waiting a few moments left the scene. He knew he shouldn't have but fear and confusion made him act differently. A policeman came around the following day and he thought, 'I'm gone'. This person—a person in authority—showed Larry a lot of compassion and had a big impact on him. He is now a bail justice: 'It's not us and them, but there are people battling for them.'

In general, Larry did not believe people lived out their values: 'Nah, people are hypocrites.' Larry believed people assessed how convenient each action was, regardless of right and wrong.

Final comments on poverty

Larry considered disadvantage to mean 'being born into environment where there are a lot of obstacles preventing proper health, proper education and therefore proper opportunity'. When people have support 'you can take a few punts or risks', but the disadvantaged don't have that backup. Larry believed that even people with support could also fail for a lot of reasons, including marriage breakdowns, drugs and alcohol.

I've met a lot of poor people that I would classify as being below the poverty line, and none of those people said that 'It's my decision'. No one wants to live like that. If not for

themselves, they want their kids to live longer... have a better education, higher standard of living, better opportunities.

Larry defined poverty as an 'equation' which is out of balance.

Poverty is where the cost of life is say 10... and your income for that year is anything less than 10. And that's so stressful because the way Australia is you can still be around the 8 and 9 mark and look like you're doing all right. You're surviving. But that's not good enough for me.

In reflection on the interview Larry commented that, 'These are questions that you don't get asked very often... what would be good and what would you hate to see. [This] is probably something that you think about a lot.'

Upon learning that the Brotherhood of St Laurence was conducting the research, he observed that the Brotherhood would be associated with churches and that people now associated with orphanages where children had been molested.

10. Paul: Male, 30-50 years, high income (>70K h/hold), NESB, Melbourne, public and TAFE education, youngest dependent child over 15 years

Paul was 39 years old, married with three boys; two teenagers and one aged eleven. He worked buying unusual cars for special, influential customers. He named several public figures amongst his customers, but said that he sourced cars for 'lots of ordinary people' as well.

Paul's parents were European and he spoke fluent their native language, but was not proficient at writing due to lack of formal training in grammar. He grew up interstate and claimed to have travelled a lot with his parents as a child. His family still lived in interstate. Paul left school at 17 to travel but later returned home and gained a TAFE qualification in drafting. He had a variety of different jobs, mostly in sales, prior to starting his own business.

He was very interested in sport and had been involved in professional sports when he was younger. He also loved water sports and was a collector of cars: he described the different occasions and moods in which he drove each—the station wagon for going off with the boys; the car he drove when alone.

His current marriage was his second, with two of the boys being his stepsons and the third his natural son.

Although Paul was now quite affluent he had been through hard times. Some years back he had to live on sickness benefits for a period, which was a financial struggle for Paul and the family. This time had left a mark upon him in terms of awareness of what it is like to struggle to make ends meet.

Social values

When asked to describe Australia to a person from another country who was moving here to live, Paul spontaneously mentioned the scale of the continent—'You travel 6,000 km to cross the continent'—and distribution of the population: 'Only one city in the west...Everyone lives around the coastline.'

He described the typical Australian as 'someone who loves the sun and the beach, [for whom] water is an important part of life' and explained, 'We love the ocean, swimming, boating, sailing—Australians are connected to the ocean'.

He described the Australian people as relaxed, laid-back and easy-going—'[We] only make an appointment to see the funeral director and the tax man...Even refugees chill out after a time.'

He also felt that Australians could be passionate about their country when they wanted to be.

Employment

Paul felt that jobs were available for those who are willing to work:

If you are reticent about doing things you're not going to get a job but if you've got a 'can do' mentality you'll get a job. If you want a job, you'll get a job. But some people want to sit around.

He believed that if you fell into one of two categories then getting a job was easy—if you had a 'top-notch' education or if you were a jack-of-all-trades and willing to turn your hand to anything. He acknowledged that it might be difficult to get jobs within specific professions from time to time but felt that it was always possible to get some job. This view seemed to be partly based on his own

experience, as he recounted having worked on building sites when he needed work, as well as working in professional basketball and sales.

Also based on his own experience, he felt that employees were often not treated well by employers. He was particularly thinking about lack of appreciation for effort expended.

Businesses

He felt that it was relatively easy to go into business for yourself but would not recommend any new arrival in the country doing so at once as he felt that it was essential to have good contacts and local knowledge before taking that step.

Welfare

Paul believed that 'people who need help get it though they may have to go through a lot of bullshit to get it.' He felt that it could be difficult to access support unless you knew your way around the system and knew whom to ask.

He felt that Australians did care for their fellows and were open to helping those who will help themselves: 'If you are willing to have a go, others will support you. If you just sit back you won't get the same level of support.'

At this point Paul spontaneously switched to the topic of asylum seekers. He returned to this topic frequently, making it clear that this issue was touching him at a point of some emotional depth. When he talked about it he tended to raise his voice to almost shouting, and become agitated and red in the face.

The refugees' actions are crap. You see Australians who are homeless and there is the aged and the government does nothing for them. But there are lots of Asians that get hand-outs.

Quality of life

Paul saw Australians as currently enjoying a high quality of life:

There's lots to do, you can buy good food at a reasonable price, even if you are struggling you can live OK. You can always get food even on a pension if you are clever and hunt around.

The basic things, the essentials—food, water, a roof over your head—even if you are unemployed you can get these things, enough to keep you alive and healthy.

Paul stated that he knew some people were struggling but felt that they were surviving and would get through to better times.

Paul believed that you could own your own home as long as you were willing to work. He quoted his own case: 'I'm in my fourth house and it's a mansion.' Paul saw the housing situation as acceptable and believed that even those at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum could buy a house, albeit in the outer suburbs. He did note that he was aware that it could be a struggle for people on a low income and one wage.

Education

Paul believed there was a choice of education available in Australia and described his choice of schools for his three boys. His approach had been to send his boys to a Catholic primary school because he wanted them to be encouraged to be 'kind, considerate and courteous'. He also wanted them to have some exposure to religious studies to open their minds to the spiritual side of life. He felt children needed to be exposed to these values early and that by 12 years of age they would have gained what was necessary.

His eldest boy was at a state high school and the middle boy would start at the same high school next year. He was choosing to place his boys in the state school secondary system because he ‘wants them to encounter other children from a mix of races, religions and income brackets—the have-nots as well as the haves’. He also felt that they would have more choices and opportunities in the state school system than if they had remained in the Catholic system. In particular he wanted them to have the opportunity to do trade subjects and different languages.

Environment

Paul believed the environment had improved over the last 20 years—for example there was less rubbish in the ocean.

Politics

Paul believed that there was opportunity for ordinary Australians to influence politicians: they could form a group with others of similar view or personally petition the government.

People

Paul believed that other nations viewed Australia as a ‘soft touch’: ‘We have the golden glove – so tough on the one hand but here’s some more money, except if you are Australian.’ Paul saw Australia taking a firm stand on the asylum seeker issue with its policy of not allowing boats to land people in Australia, but at the same time Australia was handing out money to Pacific nations to care for these people. He believed Australia’s resources were being overtaxed by the demands to look after asylum seekers.

When I heard about that \$10 million going to Nauru I said to the wife, shoot them all. You have to teach them not to come. They have the money to pay to come here. I can imagine where they come from but I wouldn’t go to their country and expect them to look after me.

Paul considered that the treatment of indigenous Australians was disgraceful and believed that there was urgent need to address equality issues and highlighted education as an example.

Direction of Australian society

When asked about how satisfied he was with the direction in which Australian society is headed, Paul quickly expressed concern about ‘the need to have more equality between the haves and have-nots’. He felt that the government was not currently addressing the ‘gap’ and that there was particular need in areas such as education.

Paul felt that the population broke down into four groups: the super-rich; the comfortable; those who try hard and struggle and don’t get much of a ‘break’; and the poor battlers. He would like to see more support going to the poor.

Education

The issue that was upsetting him at present (and again he tended to get red in the face and raise his voice when talking on this topic) was the funds allocated by the present government to elite private schools. Paul was passionately against government funding of elitist schools and would like to see the equality of services and facilities in schools:

There are schools getting government money to put in a pistol range when, Christ Almighty, there are other schools who can’t afford to put goalposts on their oval. You can’t tell me that’s fair.

Paul’s view of the world finished at the Australian coastline. He acknowledged that there were people in other parts of the world who were much worse off than Australians but he was adamant that government funds should be directed to helping Australians, not channelled into overseas aid nor given to Pacific nations to process asylum seekers.

Employment

Paul expressed some concern that more illegal immigrants coming into Australia might make it harder for our own unemployed to find work. He felt that the work for the dole scheme should be extended and projects created to improve community assets (e.g. roads, verges). However, he was adamant that the amount of work demanded of the unemployed should be fair in terms of the money they received—he did not approve of people working for low hourly rates. He also felt that if they worked extra hours they should be paid accordingly.

He would like to see lots of government projects set up to help the unemployed develop skills. He felt government funds should be spent on schemes to help the unemployed rather than directed to overseas aid. Paul said he had read that ‘\$213 million’ was spent on overseas aid and this figure appalled him.

Welfare

Paul felt that there was more money needed for aged care and specifically quoted the need for occupational therapy (he was thinking of his grandmother). He felt that it was important to care for the old: ‘They are our wisdom.’

Politics

Paul thought politicians needed a good lesson in reality or alternatively that politics needed more people ‘who know what it is like to struggle’. He would also like to see more honesty in politics, more promises kept.

At this point Paul again raised the issue of asylum seekers and rhetorically queried why politicians were giving away our dollars to everyone else. He had the ultimate solution to the asylum seeker problem:

Shoot them all as they come on shore, then after that’s happened to about four boatloads, there won’t be more coming.

Achieving change

Paul believed that the changes he would like to see made to Australian society could be achieved if there was political and public will to achieve them. The solution would be higher taxation of those who were rich and comfortable in order to source more funds for areas such as education and family support. He stated that he would personally be happy to pay more tax if this was the end result.

Personal values

Paul saw himself as someone who put his family first—‘Without them, there is no me’—then his living, then his enjoyment of recreational time. He stressed that his recreational time was very important to him and pointed out that he had his work organised so he could come and go as he liked. He saw himself as a good, ‘fun’ person, someone who would avoid conflict if possible, but not a ‘yes’ man. He believed that he was blunt and said what he thought.

Paul likened himself to a lion and a Tasmanian Devil. The quality that he saw in himself and matched with these animals was the determination to fight when there was a need to defend his family, to fight to get his customers what they want: ‘[I] try hard even if I’m not the top dog. I never sit back complacently.’

He thought his friends would describe him as outgoing, a sportsman, who loved his wife and kids, loved his home, loved his ‘toys’ (cars) and loved life.

Paul had been brought up a Catholic and considered himself ‘a believer’ who had managed to meld the theory of evolution with the notion of divine creation. He only attended church ‘at Christmas, Easter, for weddings and funerals’, but stated that he did pray daily.

Paul said he hoped to give up smoking; to own one GT (Ford) of every model and a Mustang; to retire by 50 and have the business leased out, or still have the business if the boys wanted to run it. Giving up work would allow Paul more time to enjoy his ‘toys’.

Paul believed that he would achieve these goals and, given their personal nature, no social change was required for him to achieve them.

Work

Paul was content with his job:

It pays the bills, pays for the ‘toys’ (the three cars), pays for the family, gives me satisfaction and surrounds me with the ‘toys’ I love. It gives me time to do other things, spend time with the kids, family.”

Quality of life

Paul felt that he could say ‘all the things that people always say’ about what more they would like in their lives—more money, a house on the beach, more time with the kids, more time alone with his wife. Still he acknowledged that he was basically happy with where he was in life and really had enough.

Paul admitted that he was currently experiencing some financial concerns but that these were not serious and were short term, related to accessing more cash from his business for the family over Christmas and holidays.

Paul felt that he had reasonable control over his work and could allocate time as he wanted. He might have to work for long hours in short bursts, but even so could always find time to attend the boys’ sports days or participate in family activities.

Paul would like to move to an outer Melbourne suburb to be closer to the water and surf beaches and thought the family might move next year. Paul already had a half-share in a holiday home in regional Victoria, but this did not satisfy his desire to be near the water.

At 39, Paul was not thinking about getting old or about what old age would hold for him.

Relationships

The principal relationships in Paul’s life involved his wife and three sons. Also important were his mother and grandmother who lived in interstate. He had five very close friends and a greater number of other friends.

He wanted his sons to be healthy, happy and graced (i.e. blessed with longevity). His one fear was that he might outlive them. He didn’t mind what work they chose—‘whatever suits them as long as they are working’.

Reflecting on his first marriage, Paul felt that he had let his first wife down, hadn’t been ready for marriage and had continued to act as a single person.

Paul saw himself as part of his local community, though his definition of this was at first limited to the fact that he knew some of the local shopkeepers to say hello. He continued to play sport once a week and trained once a week so had contact with his team on a regular basis. He coached a sports

team at his sons' primary school. He felt that qualified him as someone who contributed to his local community.

Values

Paul defined values as 'what I live by'. He listed some of his personal values as:

- 'My word is my bond';
- Honesty;
- 'Trying not to tread on others' fingers as I climb the ladder';
- Taking others into account.

He saw his values as coming from his parents and grandmother, two friends with whom he grew up and his school.

Values for children

Paul wanted the education system to provide his boys with the basic commodities of knowledge they would need. In addition, he believed that school should be imparting to them the concept of equality, how to build a better Australia and tolerance. He also saw school as important in helping kids develop direction for their lives which was consistent with their unique abilities.

Living out values

Paul considered that his Christian beliefs had influenced his behaviour – he saw himself as considerate and understanding of most people and their needs, accepting people for who they were. He believed that God made all humans equal and our differences arise from how we use our minds and our gifts. Paul believed that he lived these values in his day-to-day life.

Paul stated that he would not change his opinion as long as he believed that his opinion was right. If it could be demonstrated that he was wrong, then he was willing to change.

Final comments on poverty

Paul strongly believed that structural issues cause poverty. When it was put to him that some people believed that those living in poverty were themselves responsible for their plight, his response was:

Pig's arse. [It's] not their fault if they are born into a poor household and suffer lack of opportunity.

He would like to see every politician live in poverty for a month or work with people who dealt with the poor for a month.

11. Sam: Male, 30-50 years, income [unknown], NESB, Melbourne, tertiary education, no children

Sam lived in Melbourne with a girlfriend. He had been raised in China and lived for some time in Japan where he studied and worked. He had received primary, secondary and tertiary education before migrating to Australia. Since moving to Australia over a decade ago, Sam had lived in interstate before moving to Melbourne six years ago. He had completed a graduate diploma in interpreting in Australia.

Sam had had success in Australia where he had his own internet business listed on the stock exchange. Then the business had failed with the recent stock market collapse. Since that time, he had worked as an interpreter for varied government departments including the police and court systems.

Sam was single with no dependants. He owned his own home, and had been able to make several property investments with the profits from his business.

Sam travelled extensively within China before moving to Japan. He made the decision to move to Australia to live in a society that was 'more relaxed and also more tolerant, compared with Japan'.

Social values

Sam felt there were some marked differences between the perception he had of the west before leaving China and his perception of both China and the west now. The media had formed his views and now he comments 'that both media [in China and the West] were not telling the truth'. It was those disparities that Sam would mention to people coming to Australia from China.

Modern capitalism... it allows people to think whatever, to say whatever he believes and think the way he likes and do whatever he or he likes to do... if you don't hurt people, the whole community... From my childhood I listened to western broadcasting every day, bombardment every day and that's what the U.S. taught us, ... that evil communism restricts the individual's life... People gradually accepted it... But now after so many years of China opening up its doors, people learn about the West more and more, then we realise they lied. That's why people are so angry at the U.S... they lied to us and they are doing exactly what they criticised.

The main difference Sam noted was the extent to which 'the western countries criticised China.' Sam felt western countries are 'very politically motivated' in this criticism. This perspective of the West he believed would be surprising to people who grew up in 'the western culture', who he thought might not see the politic influences.

Sam felt his general outlook was still aligned with Chinese culture. He would tell a Chinese migrant that though their perspectives and opinions might alter, their philosophy would be Chinese.

I think that even though I have been here for so long, when I read the Chinese newspaper or when I read the articles from the Internet from China, I'm surprised that my thinking, my method is so much closer to the people there.

Sam felt the opportunities for new Australians depended on their background—Asian migrants would find a very different welcome from that experienced by British migrants. In general he felt there was a deep-seated racism in Australia and he was sceptical of the desire for a multicultural identity. He felt the difference in treatment was natural, given the difference in people's background: 'We accept that.'

As Sam talked about Australia he frequently referred to it as 'your country'. He would pick herself up on this point occasionally: Sam did have an Australian passport but he felt this was not what made him Australian: '[Australian passport] is just something on paper, nothing to do with reality'.

Sam did believe however that the Australian way of life was an improvement on China's, with a more 'open' and 'honest' approach: 'I'm not saying it's perfect but people are more honest and probably more open.' However the flavour of Sam's discussion would refute this comment.

Businesses

Sam felt that it was easy to be self-employed in Australia but not in professional arenas. He felt 'opening a grocery, bakery or take away shop', was more achievable than other, white-collar pursuits: 'If you sell things cheaper, people still come to buy your products. They don't care who own the shop.' Though the opportunity to start a business was available, Sam did not believe it was easy to find salaried employment in Australia.

If you want to do business probably I would be in a better position than just to simply find employment.

Sam gave examples of businesses doing the right thing including paying people well and taking care of employees despite added costs:

[Victorian manufacturer] He's very rich. I said, 'Your factory employ many Asian workers there', and he had to pay the wages to them in Australian standards. Why doesn't he set up the factory in China, they can pay less and reduce your costs?... but he said, 'I'm Australian and I want to keep the business here. I want to do something good for this community'.

When Sam started his own business he went to the Australian Export Association who were happy to give assistance. He expressed a view that Australia's alliance with the U.S. and becoming involved in wars was planned to create commercial opportunities: 'I believe the real motivation behind it is economics, interest of profit because the world no longer accepts colonialism.'

Welfare

Sam believed Australia was a society that cared for the disadvantaged. He benchmarked Australia's community service performance against other countries with positive outcomes for Australia: 'The society looks after those who are sick, who are old, who are younger but disabled.'

The health system's definitely better than any other country—at least, I haven't been to many countries, I can't compare with them but I definitely understand it to be a better system in Australia.

Quality of life

Though Sam believed this was a society that did help people who were disadvantaged, specifically the sick, elderly or disabled, he believed there was opportunity in Australia but it was modest: 'You can't be ambitious in this society.' He felt Australia has a 'community' that does not 'encourage that kind of thing'. He linked Australia's high taxes with his view that opportunity was moderate, mentioning lower tax rates in China and less tax evasion in the U.S.A.

Opportunity was further limited for people of non-English speaking origins as people would prefer 'white' Australians to reap the benefits of success. Nonetheless, Sam believed a migrant could own their own home: 'It's easy... working for a couple of years, no problem.'

Education

Sam's only experience with education in Australia was at the tertiary level. He noted that his comments were directed to tertiary study in general and not specific to his own course. Sam's

criticism of education was that it endorsed a western philosophy which was ‘commercialised’ and which compromised the quality of the learning and teaching.

People just want to sell their course... it’s the western philosophy... I can’t understand why you keep telling people that your course or your teaching is perfect simply because you are employed by that university. You are taking salaries from that university... it doesn’t mean that person believes it.

Environment

Sam described the Australian environment as ‘world class’. He went on to discuss his perception of varied standards in Australia’s stance on the environment, suggesting Australia’s reaction to U.S. nuclear testing was very different to its reaction to China’s nuclear tests, reflecting prejudice:

When China conducted nuclear tests Australia criticised that very much because it damages the environment, it’s not good for peace and it’s war-loving. When George W. Bush gave nuclear tests nobody made criticisms in Australia. John Howard just said he understands it, it’s natural, and it’s essential to keep all other security. You can see the difference and it’s very difficult for ordinary Chinese to understand and accept that the West is doing the right thing and the Chinese government is doing the wrong thing.

Security

Sam discussed concerns he had as a newly arrived Australian about safety but that these concerns disappeared with time. The interviewer prompted a comparison of countries, in which Japan fared better than Australia, though China’s security varied depending on the area. Sam did not have any safety concerns in Australia.

For newly arrived they worry about this... they are not familiar with this country, people feel nervous here. But after any years I feel more confident. I no longer worry about my personal safety.

Politics

Sam was critical of the contradictions he saw in politics in western society. He believed that Australia could be included in a generalisation about the West and western philosophy. He felt that people had the freedom to have their own convictions and beliefs yet these beliefs and convictions would be quashed in certain circumstances. He provided two examples of his thinking, including a person going into politics conforming to the party’s stance, and lawyers defending or prosecuting a person regardless of what they think of the person.

He commented that it was the Chinese belief that you stand up for what is right or wrong. He was proud of his heritage in this respect: ‘That’s why 10 years ago, 20 years ago people were demonstrating in Tiananmen square. They believed, like the U.S., the Chinese Communist Party was wrong.’ Sam now feels that was one of the few occasions when the Chinese people and the U.S. agreed but he was now sceptical of whether they were fighting communism for the same reasons. He tended to view the U.S. in particular, and the West in general, as being power and money motivated.

He believed that what defined democracy had been twisted in the modern West to the point where democracy was in fact dictatorship and no one recognised it:

John Howard can decide to send an army or not, without asking other Australian people, any of the parliament or his cabinet. Just one person can decide everything and you call that kind of thing democracy. The West calls that democracy!

People

Sam felt the Australian government was motivated by a desire to 'fit in' or be 'endorsed' by the U.S. or U.K. Because of this perceived need to be endorsed, Sam thought other countries would see Australia as a 'second class western people'.

From one side it's good, people are polite, very good... people respect each other ... but on the other side...as a country, as a society, people don't want to stand out as their own people. I think people just want to have their thinking, their behaviour endorsed by U.K. or the U.S.A. If the U.S.A. say yes, then people feel happy, it's good.

[If] the prime minister does something which is endorsed by the U.S., people feel more relaxed, more confident. If he does something which is ... criticised by Tony Blair or by George W. Bush, people feel nervous. It's something wrong when people don't think independently.

Sam had more respect for New Zealand because they were willing to take a stance and think differently from other countries. He would like to see Australia make a stand and think about what Australia would like. Sam presumed that most Australia people would prefer would be quite different from the one he imagined because he belonged to a minority in Australia, but he would at least feel more pride in Australia being its own country.

Whilst Sam believed Australia to be similar to the U.S.A 'in almost every area' he felt Australia was more peace-loving: 'Australia is not as militant as the U.S. The Australian people are peace-loving people definitely. I believe that, but they just trust the U.S. more than themselves.' Sam still believed Australia to have racist views, shown through its differential treatment of whites and blacks.

Sam believed society was generally 'good', though he felt multiculturalism had been forced onto Australians without real acceptance. Sam had accepted he was not mainstream Australian, that his role was always on the outer: 'Generally the society is civilised and tolerant but ... because this is basically a white country ... it's different from people like me and so that's natural.'

This society is not very willing to accept things from other cultures... such as, I believe [the fact that] Australian society is multicultural society, it's not because they want to be a multicultural society, it's only because they have to because of the international situations. It's because of an economic situation... frustration in the mainstream community here because on one side they have to be multicultural, at least they have to be with Asian countries, but on the other side they don't want to.

An example of how Australia was not truly multicultural was Australia's openness to white farmers when some were being killed by black people in their country. The immigration minister said 'They could come to Australia, we can protect them'. Months earlier than that event he noted Chinese business men were being killed in Indonesia. These business men sought asylum in Australia and 'Australians said no because we have got enough burden here'. He believed the government's policies reflected 'the resentment of the mainstream community'.

This kind of thing appeared on Chinese newspapers ... when the government claim that it's an equal opportunity country, it's a multicultural country ... Whatever people say, people will no longer believe them if they see that reality.

Another example of the racism Sam observed was when he was worked as an ABS interpreter during the Census in 2001. Because few calls came in from people needing a bilingual person, Sam and his fellow bilingual interpreters would answer queries in English. He felt there was less racism in Melbourne and Sydney but comments 'people from Queensland or from Western Australia from the rural countryside were surprised when they hear my accent. Some people just don't like to talk to me, they say, 'Can I speak to your supervisor?' He mentioned some colleagues took it quite badly: 'She just cried, she doesn't want to do the job any more because she doesn't want to be

abused on the telephone line... Yeah, that very much reflected the resentment of the mainstream community here towards the world outside the English-speaking background.'

Direction of Australian society

Sam was not satisfied with the direction of Australian society primarily because he felt the direction was being determined by a small number of 'power-loving' people who were mostly American.

No I'm not satisfied. I think people just worry about his own business, security or doing their business, making profit. But as a whole society they just hand everything over to the U.S. and let the president decide everything. Let them put so many military bases here ... They believe George W. Bush is okay, that he can decide everything. But he's not God. If a society put so much power into some small group of people, not God, in the long-term future we get into some trouble. If we go back through history, first World War, second World War... no one can keep power for so long.

Sam still believed 'modern capitalism is almost perfect'. But he wanted the West to live up to the capitalist ideals he had heard when growing up, not the political system that he found when he moved to the West: 'We [now] believe that most of what the West is saying to people outside of the West is for propaganda, not genuine.'

Sam was asked about fears for the future and he said he did not have any personal fears. Rather if he lost everything tomorrow, he would feel like he could be taken care of. The worst case scenario that he could imagine would be if a similar anti-Chinese sentiment emerged in Australia as it did in Indonesia. Sam didn't 'believe Australian people would allow that to happen', though throughout the interview he questioned the concern for non-white Australians by mainstream Australia.

When you are poor the society will say you are [good] for this society, like the boat people from Afghanistan, because they will be a burden for his society, people say that and we can't afford to feed them all. But when you get rich they would say you have been too much power here. You can't win.

Finally, Sam wanted a society where people who were disadvantaged were protected. He mentioned single mothers who were in difficult situations, but he did not want dependency on the system: 'We shouldn't encourage people to not work.'

I believe as a responsible government we should look after those who really can't find a job or can't look after themselves and they are in difficult situations.

Achieving change

Sam wanted Australia to think independently, a principle he believed underlay western philosophy but was not being played out in Australia. He did not think Australia was a 'player in the world' at present, and it was not an 'independent thinker.'

Australia should be more confident, should say its own voice. It doesn't matter whether I like it or not, because the reality is the mainstream community is different from what I am, from my skin colour... but that doesn't matter but I hope that ... the people can say what they believe and not what George W. Bush believes.

Sam believed it was a cultural cringe that stopped Australia from achieving its ideal. He did not want to become political himself, but he would definitely share his views with others

Personal values

Sam considered herself to be analytical of society but also a person who was willing to accept the current situation and just get along peacefully in the society provided. Sam believed thinking was more important than action or behaviour.

Sam believed some people might say he was too stubborn whilst others criticised him for talking but never doing anything. Sam admired moderate views: 'I would admire those who are moderate, not too militant, and more tolerant, tolerant to people with different opinions and more relaxed with other people together.'

Sam noted that what he wanted from life in Australia was changing over time. When Sam arrived in Australia he had envisaged a life that was 'simple', and 'without bothering to worry too much of the outside world. But after many years I realised that it's not easy'. Lingering racism in Australia had prevented him from gaining the easy life he sought.

You have to struggle to fight for the basic things you want... and I realise that finding employment is not easy here, the same position as other Australian counterparts... It's natural, Australian employer not very happy to employ someone like me if they can find other people... so I decided to do something which is unique, for example translation.

Sam was generally happy. He felt that society was peaceful and that he had all his basic requirements. 'I believe at the least I have very basic needs, probably 80 per cent of my satisfaction. The other 20 per cent is just not so important for me.'

Sam believed in God and Christianity, though he thought his views might differ slightly from western perceptions of Christianity. Sam had experienced many different churches with the encouragement of his friends, starting with an Anglican church, followed by Baptist and Uniting churches. He did prefer the latter-mentioned churches because they were less ceremonial and placed less emphasis on formal prayers and Bible readings.

Sam also felt his trait to be an individual thinker helped his through difficult times: 'I don't have to follow anyone else and I feel confident.' He felt he had a fortunate lifestyle in comparison to many others and that belief kept him optimistic.

If Sam could change anything, he would want to be more 'powerful'. He regarded business and financial strength as a means to gain that power.

Work

Sam pursued the additional study to become an interpreter, so he could make a career in an area where he thought there would be less competition from white Australians who would have the upper hand in an employment decision. He was now working in translating but though there was plenty of work the pay was very limited and he saw translating as 'only a job'. Sam was researching another business opportunity, like the Internet business he had before.

Quality of life

Many Australia-based and China-based friends encouraged Sam to return to China, indicating that China had changed considerably and he would be happy there now. Sam indicated that he lacked the motivation to return.

He preferred the life offered in Melbourne. He thought Melbourne offered a slower pace of life and was cleaner than Sydney, at least it was at the time he moved. Later comments clarified that dirty neighbourhoods were linked to certain groups:

I'm sorry for saying that here, I apologise, but in the Redfern area, a lot of Aboriginal people are there, and they make the area very messy and very bad. After dark time they just go out and stop whoever they like to ask for money.

Relationships

Sam mentioned that he had few relationships with English-speaking Australians. Hence, the idea of community had limited meaning. He tended to form relationships with people who were of non-

English speaking, minority backgrounds including Russian, Serbian, and Asian countries. He met these people through his interpreting work or study. He had not attempted to form relationships with the church congregation. Sam felt his friendship would not be wanted by white Australians, even after 11 years of living in Australia: ‘Australian people don’t like to have their close friends with other people from other cultures.’

Despite strong beliefs about politics, Sam was not interested in getting involved in politics at any level.

Values

Sam mentioned that ‘values’ was not a term used in Chinese society but he understood that it meant ‘what you believe is important for you’. He mentioned his values include the ability to think independently. He qualified that it was OK to be influenced by people, politics, media, but people should be able to form their own opinions.

Sam believed his values came from his society or environment in which he grew up: ‘You can’t isolate my opinions from that environment.’

Sam discussed social issues with his friends, but probably less with his family. He felt everyone had some slightly different views but in general they tended to hold a similar outlook. His views were changed by what he saw and heard. For example, his views on the U.S. changed drastically after the bombing of Yugoslavia. He felt Yugoslavia had not started that conflict—unlike Iraq. It was this action that made Sam view the West as wanting to dominate the world.

Values for children

Sam felt children were being well educated and well informed but they were not taught responsibility. He gave an example of a friend’s daughter for whom he cared while his friend returned to China to recover from severe sickness. For two months his 16-year-old daughter was absent from school, writing notes to the teachers to excuse herself. When her father returned and her marks were low, they argued and she left and moved in with her older boyfriend. Sam was concerned at the grief caused to his friend because there was insufficient discipline. In China he said no child would miss school.

I hope that school should teach them to be more responsible, not just enjoy your freedom, enjoy their own life. Talk about their rights, yeah it’s good, it’s good, but meanwhile you should teach them what’s their responsibility towards their family towards the society towards the country.

The schools here are very relaxed for kids and they don’t teach too much like maths and science compared with Chinese schools. It teaches a lot about humanity, society, environment—that’s good, that’s good, I’m not saying it’s not—but it [also] respect kids more, give the kids more choice and more power.

Living out values

Sam associated living out his values with ‘thinking independently’ rather than accepting messages uncritically. He was proud of times when he had thought independently but regretted occasions when he had believed western media.

Final comments on poverty

Sam believed there was poverty in Australia but placed the responsibility on the individual for being impoverished: ‘It’s not the responsibility of the government or the society. I think it’s the responsibility of themselves. They choose to be like that ... no one can help them unless themselves.’

Sam believed there were more difficulties for people from non-English speaking backgrounds. He believed 'native' or 'white' Australians found life easier:

Sam didn't believe a campaign to eradicate poverty could succeed 'because the problem is deep-rooted in people's heart, in people's mental [attitude]'.

12. Alan: Male, 30-50 years, income [unknown], ESB, Melbourne, public and special education, no children, individual with a disability

Alan was a 41-year-old male who was born with a disability which affected his mobility and speech. He had attended Yooralla, a government school specialising in the education of people with disabilities. He had always lived in Melbourne's north. He was active in the disability and other minority rights movements.

Before committing himself to activist work, Alan had worked in 'workshop' employment that involved menial tasks 'day after day'. The need to be mentally active and make a difference motivated Alan to be involved in the activist work that had engaged him for the last 10 years.

Alan had travelled to Sydney on a few occasions.

Social values

Alan described Australia as having a 'friendly culture.' He thought Australia 'takes the best of the world'.

He further commented that, 'We've got a pretty good system'. If he did have a criticism of the system he felt it was too 'conservative' and this was a consequence of having a 'conservative' government. With a less conservative government, Alan thought that lobby groups would be 'more able to put disability on the agenda'.

Alan was able to offer in-depth discussion of areas where he had personal experience. For instance, education and the integration of disabled people into the mainstream system were pet issues for Alan, who felt the negative impact from attending a specialist disability school. Alan's experiences clearly dominated his thoughts, limiting his ability to discuss the situation of other minority or disadvantaged groups.

Employment

Alan believed the employment market in Australia favoured individuals with 'qualifications': 'If you're not qualified, forget it.' He described the type of work that was readily available as being in the 'education', 'medical' and 'academia' sectors.

Alan believed that most people without qualifications 'end up on the dole' and that most people were unqualified. Alan expressed negative opinions about the ability for Australians to get labouring work in Australia at present.

Education

Education was an area of specific concern to Alan. He had lobbied hard for access to mainstream schools for disabled people. He felt that people attending specialist disability schools 'miss out on opportunities', particularly socialisation skills with the general community. Alan also argued that it is important to overcome prejudices about disabled people by getting them involved through integrated schooling, where misconceptions could be challenged.

Though Alan considered the overall quality of public schools to be satisfactory 'he hated to say it', but he did believe private schooling would offer a higher quality education. He believed that private education produced students that were 'more able to take the world in hand'. Alan was unable to pinpoint the difference between the public and private schooling systems that caused private school students to be more prepared.

Businesses

Alan expressed some concern about the level of foreign ownership of businesses in Australia. The primary reason Alan considered the growing trend of international ownership to be a negative was the loss of profits to foreign shores.

Alan believed that employee–employer relationships in Australia were generally good. He also believed Australians had the opportunity to pursue their own business ventures. Both these areas Alan was unable to talk extensively about.

Welfare

Alan believed that the support services for disadvantaged Australians to be generally good. He commented that in the area of disability, the services were good ‘but not perfect’: problem areas included employment and education initiatives.

Limited access to knowledge was identified as another major concern in the area of disability services. As a result disabled Australians were often unaware of the opportunities available to them. Alan felt one major barrier in this regard was in fact the attitude of people with a disability in that they are not seeking information: ‘Most disabled people are still stuck in their own little world.’

Quality of life

Alan believed that Australians had a lot of recreational outlets. This made for a high quality of life, though increased work hours were affecting living standards. He would like to see people working only five days a week, with work hours restricted to 9.00 to 5.30.

He felt Australians could not expect to own their own homes in Australia today and blamed the introduction of the GST as putting home ownership out of ‘most people’s price range’. Public transport was an area that impacted on the quality of life of disabled individuals. Though he regarded the number of taxis as adequate, reliability needed to be improved.

Alan believed there was no extreme poverty in Australia. In Australia you did not ‘see beggars on the streets’, though there were parts of some suburbs ‘like Werribee and Footscray’ where the conditions were of concern. In general, however, Alan was more likely to consider disadvantaged Australians to be disabled Australians and the gay community. He noted however, that ‘gays and lesbians could fight back’, whereas disabled Australians faced more barriers.

Environment

Alan considered the attitude of Australians towards the environment to be ‘pretty bad’. When asked about the major problem areas, Alan noted ‘trees... infrastructure... nuclear waste.’

Security

Until three months ago, when the September 11 terrorist attacks occurred, Alan believed that the world was safe, or at least was under the impression it was safe. Now Australia, along with the rest of the world, could not regard itself as safe internationally anymore.

At a domestic level, Alan mentioned train level crossings as being dangerous and due to poor infrastructure, people were being killed. Changes were needed.

Politics

Alan believed Australians did have an opportunity to make a difference at the political level, but they should not ‘think it will change overnight’. He talked of the changing manner in which Australians could make a difference: ‘the days of marching down the street are over’. Alan mentioned the protecting was necessary but you ‘must pick the right ways’. This area was not explored in greater detail.

People

Alan saw Australia as a country that 'did not have much in common with our regional neighbours' and thought the culture remained more similar to England. He believed that the fact that Australia was not a republic impacted negatively on national pride. A national identity was important but should not deter Australia from a global perspective. Alan believed that if there were a negative other countries would see regarding Australia that it would be Australia's 'refugee policy'. He advocated that all boat people be processed and that genuine refugees be admitted. The remaining boat people he thought could be returned to Nauru.

Alan believed Australia was a diverse society, citing the Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras as 'a prime example' of the diversity.

Direction of Australian society

Alan felt his satisfaction with Australia was mixed. When asked where Australia was failing Alan's expectation he responded, 'Disability rights'. When asked what Australia did well, Alan mentioned sport.

To create an ideal Australia, Alan wanted to see the profile and attention given to disability issues raised, improvement on the 'greenhouse' front and Australia emerge as a republic. This last point was important for Alan as a means to ensure Australia 'won't be dictated to by America and England. We can finally make our own way in the world.'

Alan believed there could be better pensions to help out people who are struggling, but he did not feel this would solve the problem of disadvantage: 'We'll always have some disadvantaged people because that's part of human nature.' He did believe 100 per cent employment was something that could be achieved and should be a target for Australian society.

Achieving change

Alan considered both the individual and government had a role to play in achieving an ideal Australia. Government could improve infrastructure whilst the individual could make an impact at the local community level. Both could be working to improve conditions for disabled Australians, improve the environment and address employment concerns.

Alan considered barriers to achieving change also existed at both government and community levels. He noted that 'we're being pushed around by too many restrictions'. He did not elaborate on this point. Alan also felt that the attitudes of some people were not conducive to change. He felt those attitudes resulted from too many people believing messages in the media and from multi-nationals: 'We believe everything that Kerry Packer says.' Alan stated that the 'everyday person cares a lot more about what's going on in the community' but 'people are becoming very cynical'.

Alan considered his own role in creating his desired Australia was to 'just be out there and say what I want to say'.

Personal values

Alan thought others would describe him as a 'bit of a rabble-rouser' but also, in contradiction, that he was 'very easy-going.' He thought he was outgoing, compassionate and did not get upset easily. He was a 'person who knows what he wants.'

Alan looked to make relationships with people founded on respect and dignity. Having similar interests was also important. Alan felt he was attracted to passionate people who knew what they were talking about.

Though Alan was keen to build his relationships, he was devoted to his cause. His primary aim was 'trying to make disability better for the next generation'.

Alan also cited improving conditions for disabled people as his motivation to get through tough times. He was encouraged by 'seeing the next generation of disabled people who make me feel it's worth fighting the fight [and by] the faith that I am here to make the world a better place'. Alan considered himself to be spiritual but did not believe in an organised religion. Alan went on to state that 'people's bigotries are too much a part of organised religion especially the Catholic Church'. Alan considered the church's position on homosexuality and abortion to be evidence of these ingrained bigotries.

Work

Alan was keen to continue his work lobbying for the rights of disabled and other minority Australians. He wanted to become more involved in public speaking. He would also like to improve his computer skills for which he might pursue formal training.

Quality of life

Alan felt that financially he wanted for nothing and had a satisfactory standard of living. The only change to his living circumstances that he would like would be to live closer to the CBD where he 'wouldn't have to spend half your life travelling around'.

Relationships

A key wish for Alan was to find 'someone who has the same interests to spend my time with'. Maintaining the close relationship Alan had with his family and friends was 'very important'.

Interplay of social and personal aspirations

Alan did not believe that his social and personal aspirations could be separated. He felt the social treatment he had and continued to experience because of his disability restricted his personal development: 'I think they're one and the same. When people are accepted for who and what they are is the day I will be happy.'

Values

Alan considered the term 'values' to relate to education and social values and principally meant 'having a social conscience; not looking at materialist things'. Values are 'in our hearts... it makes you what you are'. Alan believed as a society, Australians did tend to take a materialistic perspective too frequently. His own values he described as a belief in caring and social justice.

Alan also thought values were shaped by the environment where you were brought up, which included the influence of parents and schools. He thought he would have similar values to his brothers, but he would differ from his mother who he believed had quite materialistic views. Alan did not think his values would change in the future.

Values for children

Alan felt it was important that parents teach children to 'accept people for who they are'. He felt that Australian society had lost the value of caring. This value, he considered, was lost 'back in the 80s when Gough Whitlam was turfed out... he really was committed to social justice.' Alan went on to say a society under Gough Whitlam would have put 'people first' and this would have allowed 'the opportunity to develop people's inner self'.

Living out values

Alan believed a stranger would know his values from his behaviour and the passion with which he pursued his causes, from his presence at protests and in the community. Alan thought people might not live out their values because they don't want to get involved but Alan 'cares too much not to get involved.'

13. Catarina: Female, 30-50 years, income [unknown], NESB, regional centre in northern Victoria, public and some secondary education, youngest child over 5 years, carer of a child with a disability

Catarina was a forty-something female living in regional Victoria. She was born in Australia though her family returned to Europe in her pre-school years. Catarina's father died a few years later and her family moved back to the same regional centre where she still lived.

Catarina and her siblings grew up living on her mother's pension. Her mother never remarried. Catarina married when she was 20. When interviewed, she had a teenage son and daughter, and two younger children with intellectual disability.

Catarina achieved some secondary education and was involved in a variety of jobs before marrying and having a family. Though she still spent a lot of her time caring for her family, she recently started work with advocacy organisations. Catarina also assisted her husband with the 'books' for his business.

Catarina noted early in the discussion that she and her family were Jehovah's Witnesses, as she explained that a number of her beliefs and her behaviour reflected her religion.

Social values

Catarina was satisfied with Australian society:

Looking through my eyes I'm quite happy with it as is. If it has to be improved I don't know.... I'm just quite happy with it and would like it to continue as it is.

She considered the working opportunities to be good, as were the prospects for newcomers to Australia to establish a financially secure life.

I believe it's a great country. I believe anybody can work here if they want to. I believe the people are fine. We have a lot of different cultures and I feel that they have brought different things to Australia and I think that has been good.

Catarina spontaneously mentioned that she 'likes the fact that we've got freedom'. Quality of life issues further emerged, including the ease of owning a home, the ability to have good cars, good standard roads and a standard of living that was generally comfortable. Australian society was not failing Catarina's expectations. She did however express some concern about future directions for Australian society. It was Catarina's disillusionment at the human condition that drove her fears for Australian society. Catarina felt the breakdown of the family unit, which she believed was becoming more frequent, was the final step towards a selfish society.

I would like to believe it will only get better... you can't predict what's going to happen and we saw that a few weeks ago with America. Man's selfishness causes problems... the environment isn't going to improve. Really, going on all the studies and whatever we're not in for a good time.

People don't want to put themselves out for their own family anymore... People are getting busy and not spending time with each other and become more self-centred. The consequence is that values and caring goes out the door.

Catarina believed there was a tendency for people to become selfish and protective with their money once a sizeable wealth had been accumulated. This tendency, in addition to media messages encouraging self-interest, Catarina believed was responsible for an increasingly selfish society.

I find that people that live in lower income areas tend to be more people-oriented... the kids are on the streets more and it's like a big family, whereas the more money there is, the wealthy tend to keep to themselves. The more you've got the more you protect.

Catarina spontaneously discussed the inclusion of cultures in Australia. She agreed with the notion that people moving to Australia should work hard to live as the locals do: 'What a lot of people say is that if you're going to come here you try and live like how they live here. Otherwise you should go back to where you come from'. She believed government initiatives, such as English lessons, were readily available. Therefore newly arrived Australians had no excuses for not making an effort to fit in.

She commented that Indigenous Australians are one group that she considered not to live up to her expectations.

I won't say I'm prejudiced but there are some nationalities...and I haven't had a lot to do with them... indigenous, they have a bad name. I don't have a problem with them in myself but you are wary of them... it's what you see as well. The fact they don't look after themselves up to what my standards are. Their homes aren't to my standard. I just think it wouldn't take much to have their house look respectable and tidy... there really is no reason.

Employment

Catarina attributed a large proportion of current unemployment to a shifting social attitude that endorsed selfishness and a lack of responsibility. She identified the education system as providing children with too many options that confused children as to which career they desired. Catarina blamed parents for not forcing children to go to school or to do chores, reinforcing a belief that young Australians didn't have to work if they didn't want to.

A lot of that [unemployment] is choice... you don't just come out of school and decide 'I want the best job and until I get the best job I'm not going to do anything'.

Catarina felt having unemployment benefits encouraged roting of the system. She favoured the removal of support benefits as a means of forcing people to be responsible and motivated to be working. She cited the lack of employment benefits in Italy as an example of an effective system.

Business

Catarina felt that there were systems in place to assist emerging businesses though she was unsure of the details as her husband had not used them for his own enterprise. Catarina also believed business in the future would be dominated by big business with the smaller milk bars and similar operations phased out. The GST was also mentioned as an additional concern increasing the troubles of small business. In general, Catarina wasn't overly concerned about the transition to big business: 'To me it's progress and it's very convenient to have a supermarket open 7 days a week and 24 hours a day.'

Catarina believed employees were well cared for in Australia's current business environment. In particular, she felt laws made it difficult for workers to be unfairly dismissed and that there were advocacy channels if they had been poorly treated: 'In Australian I think now with the way laws are, workers have it pretty good... it's not easy to sack anybody... I think these days if they [employers] are not fair you've got places you can go.'

Welfare

Catarina's knowledge of Australia's welfare system was largely based on her experience with the public health care system, dealing with the numerous medical complications that emerged with her children. She presumed that the general welfare system would be adequate to ensure people who are struggling are taken care of: 'Government is able to help people that aren't financial.'

She again returned to the issue of raising children without instilling a sense of responsibility as a problem for welfare in the future. Catarina felt that the younger generations would be more demanding on government resources as they would expect to be cared for.

I think more and more people will have to rely on government and what they can supply for the elderly and sick people because people aren't going to be able to do that because they're not going to be brought up with that respect and commitment. Everybody feels they have a right to do what they want to do and it's not going to get any better because that's the attitude that comes across TV, media...

Catarina was advised by doctors to use the public health system because the children's special needs would gain priority. The Royal Children's Hospital would ensure the care for her children would be first class. Catarina found the public system to be easier than private in many regards—the least of which was fewer forms that need to be completed.

It is interesting that Catarina generally considered it unfair to accept government assistance when not needed: 'If I need something I'll ask for it, but if I don't why should I take it away from someone else.' Indeed she and her husband had never accepted business support or sought other forms of welfare assistance. Her use of the public health system, when she acknowledged money was not a major concern, is an interesting one, and one that seems to be driven by the advice of experts (doctors).

Quality of life

As mentioned previously, Catarina was quite satisfied with the quality of life she perceived Australians to enjoy. Catarina conveyed a strong sense of individual responsibility for one's own life circumstance. In particular, she referred to her own upbringing on her mother's pension as being adequate without being pampered. She believed that Australians, if they worked hard, could expect housing and food on the table.

There is [poverty] but probably money that hasn't been managed well... I know some aren't as lucky as others, but it still comes down to how you manage and self control and priorities. My mother brought four kids up on a pension back in [19]68-70 and she did fine... We had what we needed. We didn't look like we were poor.

Catarina was concerned about the level of alcohol consumption in Australia and how it was an acclaimed aspect of Australian culture: 'I guess if I had to say there was a problem in Australian I would say it is alcohol.' In particular, Catarina was disappointed with the effects alcohol had on social interactions, particularly as a distraction from genuine conversation. She blamed parents and role models for the fact that drunkenness was an acceptable, even an appropriate, form of celebration in today's Australia: 'You look at all the sports stars. They win a game or they win something and they've all got to be drunk that night. What sort of example does that set for young ones?'

Catarina felt the distribution of wealth would remain the same in the future: 'Not everyone can be rich. There will always be a middle class and lower class and that's always going to be there... People don't really alter.'

Education

Catarina identified a separation between public and private schools but she did not feel this was inherent in the schooling system. Rather, children attending private schools had a number of factors assisting them achieve higher grades, including supportive parents and an expectation to do well. There might also be a genetic or environmental advantage of having intelligent parents who had done well themselves and could afford to send their children to private schooling.

[Kids going to private schools] may achieve more but maybe they were going to be high achievers anyway because of their upbringing... brought up with encouragement... The parents themselves obviously had goals and have got maybe higher standards.

Catarina was not convinced of a sizeable difference in the calibre of teaching in public versus private schools: 'I don't have a preference to private I think that's... just another statement about yourself: trendy and better off than someone else'. She did feel however there was room in Australian education to provide greater individual assistance to students who might struggle. She also believed that large class sizes in public schools did place extra strain on teachers trying to provide individual attention. She felt one of her own children would have benefited from more individual assistance from teachers at an early age.

I still feel with public, and especially primary [schooling], that a lot of problems aren't picked and aren't dealt with for children that might be a little bit slower... because one teacher might not have the time to do anything about it.

Catarina was unsure about the level of financial assistance provided to students. She felt this factor alone would limit access to education: 'I don't know how much help there is money-wise... costs are very expensive so I think that's one thing they could probably look at, making it a little bit easier.'

Security

Catarina said that safety was once a major concern for she was assaulted as a child. She recalled being fearful for many years yet now she described her safety concerns as being minimal. Though she would think twice about walking alone late at night, she was rarely in a position where this would be a necessity. She did not fear for her children.

When asked about safety Catarina initially raised the issue of drugs, suggesting a perception that drugs lead to violence. However, she was unaware of a drug problem in the regional centre where she lived: 'I might be a little naïve anyway. They tell me there are drugs everywhere. I've never seen them.'

Environment

Catarina felt Australians had a responsible attitude to the environment, though she noted that she based her view on her own behaviour:

I can only go on my standards, and they are... that I don't litter... and I think most Australians aren't too bad. You're always going to get the odd one. You only have to drive down the street to see that most places are quite well kept.

Catarina reported herself to be an active recycler. She noted that they don't have a compost heap because they don't have space for it. This last point was expressed with some regret and a hint of underlying guilt.

Politics

Because of Catarina's religious beliefs she reported limited involvement in elections and other political processes. She did however feel quite empowered to have an influence on politics if she desired. She considered her situation as carer of two children with disabilities to place her in a group that would have some political weight. At the local level, Catarina had occasionally exerted her influence:

I could have [an influence on politics] especially with the [children] and their disabilities. I've been involved with city council and I know I've had an influence there. I've been to my local member... to get my point across. It doesn't mean I'll always be successful but I can do it.

Catarina felt that someone determined to make a difference, with sufficient time, could impact on political decisions in Australia: 'People still have power... if people make enough noise about something things will be changed.'

She expressed some cynicism about politics and had limited respect for politicians: ‘They pick on the other person over the most stupid [things]... it’s just childish. How much respect can you have for someone that does that?’

Regional

Catarina was asked whether there were any issues arising from living in regional Victoria. The lack of services and the limited number of doctors were identified as being problematic: ‘There are too few doctors... they just run it, they have a monopoly.’ Catarina noted that many people travelled to the city where they received quality assistance rather than settling for the care available in their local area.

Achieving change

As Catarina discussed the role of the general community and government in maintaining the society that she was satisfied with, she distinguished between the type of tasks allocated to each. For instance, Catarina entrusted the general community with ensuring basic values were taught to children: ‘As far as people go it’s in the power of people to try and keep the values in families and try to keep teaching values.’

Government was discussed with respect to its spending. She considered a link between government and big business as a reason why decisions about how Australia is run did not always reflect the view of the general population. Government must be responsible for dispensing money in the right manner. Gambling was the example used of a behaviour endorsed by government which was not beneficial to the average Australian, but was to big business.

Personal values

In striking contrast to her optimistic observations on wider society, Catarina presented as an individual with very low self-esteem. She was open and aware of her poor self-identity. Much of her self-dissatisfaction was attributed to her upbringing: ‘I’m only starting to now realise a lot of the problems I’ve had for so many years... where they stem back from... my childhood. I’ve never been happy.’ Caring for the two young children simply created greater stress that enabled some self-esteem issues to emerge.

When Catarina moved to Australia she was behind in her schooling, due to the later age children in Europe commenced education, and because she lacked English. The effect of this late start was to make her feel ‘dumb’, a reaction which caused Catarina to plan January babies. This ensured they started the school year without any concern about being behind the class.

Catarina saw herself as a perfectionist. She also saw many faults in herself. She reported that she avoided criticising others because they could criticise her too easily. Catarina said, ‘My main concern is that people aren’t going to like me.’

Catarina described herself as a person who disliked making decisions and preferred others to make decisions for her. For many years her mother had strict control over her life:

I would have liked to have done hairdressing but my mum wouldn’t let me. There was no way I was going to be allowed to go and travel and be away from home.

Having disabled children exacerbated this trait, because their frequent sicknesses meant plans were often upset. As a result, Catarina had difficulty speaking about aspirations:

I am very good at pushing it all back and not facing anything... It makes it difficult because I can’t make decisions, not about anything important... It’s good because I cope with everything, but it’s bad because I don’t solve anything.

Look, as far as everything goes I don't like to think of the future because I don't want to make any commitments. I don't know what's going to happen until tomorrow so I just wait until tomorrow and have hope that something good might come out of it.

The role of carer

Though Catarina struggled to identify clear aspirations for herself, she was able to talk about the quality of life she desired for her children (though this again tended to be short-term in nature). The inclusion of her disabled children in mainstream schooling, in preparation for life beyond school, was critical to Catarina: 'I just want them to fit into society where even though they're different they're not looked at because of their disability, they are just another person.'

Catarina felt she was battling a prejudice which unfairly judged the behaviour of people with a disability: 'Another person could do it and if they're normal then it's acceptable, but [for a] person of disability it's not acceptable... that's how I feel.' Catarina was concerned that the prejudice would be greater if her children were sent to a special school where a stereotype could be applied to the entire group. Catarina acknowledged her prejudices before having her children:

I had never had contact with a disabled person. I remember at school if a person had a disability of any sort you were really scared of them because you also had this thing that anyone with an intellectual disability is violent or would hurt you. So you were scared of them.

Catarina was devoted to ensuring her children were treated like other children. Hence in a classroom they worked while the other children worked and at home they were expected to know that 'yes is yes and no is no', like her other kids.

As far as their intelligence, they're not going to be up there with them. We're just happy if they can sit in a classroom, socialise, not be disruptive and do their little bit. Even if on their paper they're just doing scribbles and the other kids are writing at least they know what's expected of them.

Catarina reflected on her life changes. Support services caused her life to be regimented. Because of respite carers, Catarina did the groceries between 10 and 11am on Thursdays:

My weeks were so routine to everybody... that's what I missed the most from having the [children]—my independence. Having control of my own life... and [then] feeling like you are trapped.

She regarded life as tough. She had received some medical assistance for depression. She commented that she nearly had a complete breakdown but didn't realise what it was. More difficult was when she had to face her own personal battles once the children went to school. Catarina didn't know what to do with herself. Her husband did not favour her getting a job and in the past she had not done so.

Employment

After the children started school, Catarina had begun doing some volunteer work. She saw a need for providing a break for parents whose children were in hospital. She recognised the guilt felt if you were not by your children's side at all times. Catarina then started responding to advertisements requesting volunteers and paid workers. Her volunteer work led to a part-time job with a disability advocacy organisation. She had only been working there for a short period of time but so far was enjoying the human contact and work. In the absence of children to care for during the day, she regarded work as providing her with something that let her feel good about herself.

Quality of life

Catarina did not elaborate any further about quality of life factors. Her satisfaction with her material situation was evident.

Relationships

Family was the hub of Catarina's life and she acknowledged that, because of the children's disability, she would continue to be mainly occupied as a mother for a long time. She discussed regular contact with friends though she noted feeling quite powerless in these relationships. She felt her friends determined when and where they would meet her and Catarina could not refuse. Again this suggested dissatisfaction with herself and a lack of empowerment, though Catarina was fully aware of the situation.

Catarina's relationship with her community was through her work. She discussed wanting a good relationship with her neighbours where you could go over for a quick 10-minute chat when needing some company. She was dismayed with her last neighbours who indicated that they were private people, which, to her, suggested they were not interested in a nice neighbourly association.

Interplay of social and personal aspirations

It was difficult for Catarina to discuss the interplay between social and personal aspirations given her resistant to articulate personal aspirations. She appeared to have limited power in the relationships around her, though there is a sense of increasing power, particularly in action-oriented areas of her life such as work. When asked who was responsible for her future, Catarina was quite assertive:

I should still be able to achieve what I want. Regardless of what anyone else does, I have to make those opportunities and I can do that. The only thing I can't help is if a bomb landed here or earthquakes, things like that... I think we all have control over the things we do in our life.

Values

Catarina ultimately expressed her understanding of values as being related to the things she regarded as important, including family and a caring attitude.

Values are what you value in your life and what should be of value which is your family, showing love towards any other person... and concern and wanting to help people... all those type of things.

As would be expected Catarina's family featured strongly in her value system, particularly her role in supporting and unifying her family. She put her family first 'but I like helping anyone out that needs help'.

Catarina's religion featured strongly in her value system, assisting her to determine what was important and dictating her behaviour. Indeed religion played as important a role in Catarina's life as her mother and then husband played as key decision-makers.

Catarina attributed the upbringing of her children in a disciplined and respectful manner to the doctrine of her religion:

Because of that [her religion] our kids have been brought up like that they have to decide things for themselves, but at the same time we are fairly close as a family.

She linked the quiet disposition of her children to her religion.

Catarina reflected on the impact of religion in her life, and indicated that she had grown to disagree with some aspects of her religion. In particular she felt a focus on guilt as motivating behaviour was a negative component:

Guilt makes you act and makes you do something that you don't really want to do but you just do it out of guilt because that's what you're supposed to do and I don't know if that's always good.

Living out values

Though Catarina said she did not stand in judgement on people, there were certain areas where she regarded her advice as expert. Hence, Catarina regretted not acting in accordance with her values. As a mother of children with disabilities, she felt other people often had no idea how their life could be changed by an accident causing brain damage. The example Catarina provided was regretting not expressing her concern to a driver whose daughter wasn't wearing a seat belt.

Having felt sufficiently bad about doing nothing in that instance, some time later Catarina approached a mother whose three children were standing on the back seat of a car without restraint. The lady ignored Catarina, who promptly called the police. She noted she couldn't avoid being involved, 'if I see something unjust'. This was a source of embarrassment for her children.

Catarina considered her safety before becoming involved on such occasions. For instance, she was more willing to approach a female than a male.

Catarina believed people would know her values from her actions, including her ability to accept others:

They'd have to know [my values from my actions] because I don't drink, I don't swear, I don't have problems with people... I don't try to push my viewpoints and I try to be happy and helpful.

Final comments on poverty

Given the additional scope this interview covered and Catarina's clear view that disadvantage was a consequence of poor individual decisions a discussion about poverty was not explored further.

14. Peter: Male, over 50 years, low income (<25K h/hold), ESB, regional Victoria, private and secondary education, married with no dependent children

Peter was born in England. He came alone to Australia in the early 70's and lived in Sydney and Melbourne before moving to regional Victoria in the 90's for work reasons. Peter had moved around in regional Victoria before settling in his current location so his current wife could be closer to her children. Peter was 51 years old when interviewed.

Peter had been married twice and he had two daughters from his first marriage. He now had stepchildren from his wife's previous marriage, and was a grandfather (or step-grandfather) to more than ten. He maintained communications with his brothers who lived in overseas.

Peter described his employment background as a case of 'don't ask me what I can do, ask me what I can't do.' The bulk of his employment was in the insurance business. He had also worked in government departments, Trades and Labour unions, as well as in labouring and factory work. Due to injuries, Peter was now limited to clerical work. Peter had been retrenched from his last position and had not been able to find work for over two years.

I actually used to work for the [government] and I used to find people jobs. I used to find apprenticeships for young kids, jobs for young kids and jobs for people my age. Trouble is that I can't find one for myself.

Peter had participated in a number of short-courses, but had no formal qualifications. He was educated in a private Catholic grammar school.

Though Peter had owned his own home in the past, the combination of divorce, relocation and his current unemployment meant he had to rent, though he would like to own his own home again.

Peter had travelled widely, visiting most of Europe and South Africa, and much of Australia. Peter remained a British citizen and regarded himself as English: 'I was born in England so I'm English. But I love being in Australia.'

Social values

Peter was satisfied with a number of aspects of Australian society: 'It's a great country.' He commented that in spite of his own difficulties in finding a job: 'It's a great land of opportunity.' He described a culture in Australia that was 'vastly' different from other cultures he had observed in the UK, South Africa and Europe. Whilst the UK had an influence of Indian, Sri Lankan and Pakistani cultures, in Australia there was a stronger Oriental-Asian presence. For Peter, who also listed chef in his resume, the food was a real benefit of a multicultural society: 'Your country's multicultural as well in terms of the Vietnamese, the indigenous people, Italians, Greeks... I reckon you've got the best food in the world.'

Peter's spontaneous comments homed in on opportunities for work and for a high standard of living. These opportunities were available for anyone who made the effort, 'if you want to get off your backside'. Peter was concerned about the 'values', or lack of them, in young Australians: 'Values worry me. Kids don't seem to have values these days...' This Peter confessed was his biggest fear for Australia's future.

He believed the lack of discipline from parents, and a focus in schools on the rights of the individual, were the cause of declining respect for themselves, the older generation, and respect for Australia. Young Australians, he thought, were unaware of 'how lucky they are' because 'it's all on

a plate'. Peter felt his experiences in other countries had made him 'cherish what we've got in Australia'. He felt that the declining discipline and respect would lead to problems already visible in places like Cabramatta where maintaining law and order was a problem.

Peter talked with great fondness for Australia but he would frequently refer to Australia as 'your' country. It was clear however that Peter was keen to live the rest of his days in Australia.

Employment

Peter believed there were jobs available for people seeking them out: 'There's plenty of work if you want to get it.' His current situation was complicated by his injuries and his age; in the past he had found 'there was always a job there'.

Peter was also sure that in Australia you could fulfil any career ambitions: 'I have no doubt about it. If you've got the get up and go to do it.' Again whilst the opportunity was seen to exist, the individual must make the effort to see it realised.

When asked if there were enough jobs for all Australians, Peter replied, 'No, simply put, no.' He spoke more specifically about the lack of jobs for people like himself who were now limited by injury. Peter also talked with dissatisfaction about Centrelink and other employment agencies. He did not feel these agencies understood the unemployed individual. In particular, Peter commented that a 20-year-old person who had never been out of work could not empathise with the long-term unemployed.

Welfare

Peter was unsure about the type of assistance for immigrants. Rather than discussing formal systems of assistance, Peter referred to the informal support of ordinary Australians who were willing to help out. Peter felt Australians were responsive to direct requests from people, 'if there are any jobs going'.

Peter was somewhat concerned about the impact of an ageing nation on resources. He recommended an increase in immigration to ensure the dependency ratio would be adequate to support the country.

Quality of life

Peter regarded the quality of life in Australia as 'probably the best in the world'. The standard of living to which Peter referred frequently was characterised by opportunity, freedom, and good produce. The opportunity to own your own home was available to Australians if they worked hard.

Peter felt it was hard to answer whether some groups don't enjoy this comfortable standard of living. The difficulty was not in identifying the groups but in identifying the reason for their disadvantaged state. He noted that indigenous Australians tend to have a lower standard of living. Peter felt there were two reasons for a lower standard of living: some people would collect a cheque and go to the pub, while others were trying but, due to an inefficient system, they were not able to get on top. He felt all cultures have people that do and don't try: 'There's bad in all of us. There's bad Australians. There's bad English. You can't pigeonhole.'

I'm not getting by and I wouldn't blame myself... I don't blame the system either. I just think the system is inefficient.

Environment

Though Peter felt there remained some 'massive problems' in relation to the environment, he believed Australians held the environment in high regard.

You've probably got one of the best attitudes in the world towards your environment. Sometimes it's over the top. But in the main you respect the country and you respect the fact that it's got to be looked after.

He identified soil erosion and desalination as problems and as a result, 'farmers are doing it tough'. Peter felt that the 'greenies' were sometimes 'over the top'. He felt their objection to wood-chipping had contributed to a climate of bushfire danger, as back-burning could not occur.

Businesses

Peter was concerned about the sale of Australian assets and businesses overseas: 'It annoys me that Australia has been sold overseas... I'm not a person who likes foreign ownership... I just think that the coffer should stay in the country.' Other countries were dictating to the consequence of such sales. Peter felt 'fortunate' that some local industries in his regional Victorian town were still in Australian control.

Peter represented himself as a 'union man' with a long history as a union member, experience in the Trades and Labour Council and a Labour voter. He had seen evidence of poor employee treatment by small and big business. Peter believed people were working longer hours and were less likely to have full-time employment: 'Like anywhere else, [job security] is pretty fragile.'

Peter was concerned about some recent union actions. For example, he described as a 'stroke of genius' a deal with SPC employees a few years earlier, when the workers accepted a pay decrease in return for shares in the company. Peter believed unions and staff should accept Qantas' offer of a pay freeze for 18 months: 'At least they've got a job. But the unions won't back off.'

Education

Peter and his first wife were educated in private Catholic schools. He regarded himself as being 'biased' when making a decision about his own daughter's schooling when he selected private Catholic education in Melbourne. Though experiencing mixed success with his daughters' education, he would recommend private schooling because it provided a 'better education' despite 'costing an arm and a leg'.

I think there tends to be a bit more discipline in private schools than public schools... and there tends to be a bit more care for the child, more one-on-one than in a public school.

Discipline Peter felt was lacking in schools. Peter was careful to stress he wasn't 'advocating full violence' but 'I think there has got to be more discipline in the education system'.

The good old smack around the mouth doesn't exist anymore... One of my grand children... his mother gave him a smack one day and he dialed the police. They're taught in school, if your mother touches you, you call the police.

Peter reported mixed experiences with his two daughters' schooling, but he attributed the difference to the individual child. His eldest daughter 'piked out [on private education] and went to a public school'. Peter expressed considerable concern about her: drugs and boys were the reason his daughter changed to a public school. He noted that she was very intelligent and it was probably the fact that she matured quickly that made her take control of her life.

Peter's younger daughter was studying at university and due to job and travel constraints would finish her degree by correspondence in the next semester. The ability to complete courses by correspondence added to Peter's perspective that access to education in Australia was good.

Peter mentioned a report that ranked Australia's education system as second in the world behind Japan. This was evidence of a great education system.

As good as any in the world... according to reports that came out last week in terms of arithmetic, reading and what have you, I think we're second best in the world or something like that.

If Peter did have a criticism of the Australian education system it was the perceived reliance on computers. He was concerned that computer 'glitches' would leave younger and computer-dependent generations stranded.

Politics

Peter felt he had been involved in Australian decision-making particularly through his involvement with the Trades and Labour Council. He believed that Australians could have an influence on politics if there was an issue that they felt passionately about: 'If you've got a deep belief that something's wrong then you get involved.' Peter believed Australians regarded politics as important.

It depends on how much you're committed to your politics. It depends on how much you're committed to your ideal. If that's the case you'll have an influence on politics.

He believed the state of Australian society generally reflected the desires of the Australian public. There would however be exceptions where decisions were made in spite of popular belief. Peter cited the "war on terrorism" and responses to refugees as urgent decisions made with little consultation.

Security

In comparison with other nations, Peter felt safety was a highlight of Australia, which was 'probably the safest country in the world'. At an international level, Peter said, 'We don't upset the other nations too much' and this, as well as our isolated position on the globe, created a secure society.

At a domestic level, Australia was also seen as 'safer than anywhere else.' The presence of crime and drugs were noted, but they were less than detected in other countries: 'There's still street crime, there's still a drug problem, there's still a road rage problem but it's on a lesser degree to anywhere else.'

Peter attributed crime to four factors: society today in general (which he noted as being less respectful and lacking discipline), drugs, alcohol and frustration with unemployment.

People

Peter believed Australia's international reputation was very good. The number of refugees wanting to get to Australia was evidence of the positive international perception. He thought that an easy-going nature, freedom and security were major drawcards for Australia. Peter could not think of any aspect that might be seen as a negative by other countries. On the issue of a republic, Peter supported a move away from the monarchy suggesting 'Australia should have a handle on its own destiny'.

Peter valued multiculturalism: 'Greeks and Italians... look what they've done for the country.' He advocated more immigration to create jobs and support an ageing nation: 'A lot of people think that immigrants are taking jobs but they're not. They're creating jobs.' He raised the issue of concentrated areas of a particular culture as an issue for others but not one which he was overly concerned about: 'Footscray—it's Vietnam itself... They've put themselves in pockets and a lot of people don't like that.' Peter's own experiences made him reflect positively on Footscray as a source of excellent Asian produce.

Peter's solution to the refugee debate was to take all refugees onto the mainland and process them. Anyone who is not a refugee should be sent back. He would prefer people to go through the correct

channels—he had to wait two years to get processed as a migrant himself—but he placed the blame on the operators of the smuggling.

The issue of discipline and respect was a recurring theme. Peter believed this culture change created a tendency for younger Australians to be irresponsible, not committed to hard work, expecting a hand out, and focused on what others could do for them. He reflected that his eldest daughter would not keep medical appointments or get medicine for his sick grandson: ‘She cares when her friends are there because she can show him off, but once they’re gone...’. He indicated that his ex-wife cared for his grandson 95 per cent of the time.

Peter considered Australia to be ‘fervently’ religious. The religions might differ but Peter regarded ‘Australia as no different from anywhere else’ and people need something to have faith in. He believed Australians en masse would have a belief: ‘Faith is a belief in yourself and it’s a belief in an entity.’ The religious order in Australia Peter saw as corrupt-free, unlike in the United States of America.

Regional issues

When asked to compare metropolitan and regional Victoria, Peter promptly mentioned the positives of a regional life. He had difficulty bringing to mind any limitations to regional living. Peter preferred regional Victoria to Melbourne—‘the rat race’—as it provided a better pace of life and better climate. The only unique offering that Melbourne city provided was the variety of produce including different Asian goods, but these goods were only two hours away and could be purchased when visiting his daughters.

Direction of Australian society

Peter described Australia as ‘the best place on earth’. Even after such compliments, he felt undecided about whether he was satisfied with Australia at present. The quality of life was a particular highlight of Australian society. Peter would be happy if in 20 years’ time he could tell someone Australia was ‘as good as it is now’. Rather than naming existing problems, Peter commented on a number of emerging and worrying trends. He believed the trouble in suburbs like Cabramatta was testimony to the emergence of a society he feared.

Achieving change

Peter described direct involvement in lobby groups as achieving change. A less direct means of influencing decision-makers was through the ballot box. Peter also believed that his public behaviour was a means of shaping Australian society.

The responsibility for change he assigned to both the Australian people and the Australian government. Because Peter was not involved in any community groups or charities at present he felt his ability to influence government was limited: ‘I don’t know if I have any authority to make things different other than my say through the ballot box.’ Without involvement in such groups, he could have an influence on society by how he treated others and how he let them treat him.

Personal values

Peter provided a rich list of words that he thought described him: outgoing, knowledgeable, jovial, with a good personality. He further described himself to be ‘a good citizen in terms of being an Australian citizen.’ He couldn’t see how his friends’ descriptions of him would differ.

Peter sought people with outgoing and friendly personalities. He believed that he attracted people with the same interests and an outlook that ‘doesn’t take life that serious[ly]’.

He admitted that his opinions sometimes upset people: ‘I do upset people though because I like speaking my mind.’ Queuing for food or not getting what he ordered were some pet dislikes that he would complain about.

Peter emerged as a person who liked to engage people in debate. He believed 'utopia' would be if everyone had the same opinion but that on the other hand it would also be 'boring': 'Everyone is entitled to an opinion rightly or wrongly. You either agree or disagree. But people should have opinions.'

When getting through hard times it was 'family support' that Peter relied upon. Peter was a Roman Catholic. He said that he didn't practise religion 'but he should', referring to church attendance. Peter felt having a religion was very important: 'I think [religion] helps a lot of people... particularly at a time when you reach your expiry date.'

Peter did not indicate dissatisfaction with his life at present but did suggest 'it could have been better'. His unemployed status was a frustration, which impacted not only on his financial situation but also his self-esteem and a sense of worth. He contrasted his own circumstances with the success of his brothers. The progress of his eldest daughter and his grandson also played on his mind. Of greatest concern, however, was the health of his wife. The night before the interview they had celebrated her birthday and Peter commented, 'The only thing I'd like to get her is the only thing that I can't buy her. And that's a new set of lungs.'

Work

Peter would 'love' to work again, though he was beginning to resign himself to the fact that it was unlikely: 'I'm pretty much resolved to believing that my working days are over... I can't see any light at the end of the tunnel.' Peter believed that injury and his age were the two critical factors that had kept him unemployed. He had approached a number of people asking for work, without success. The employment agencies had also started to tell Peter they couldn't do anything more for him. His frustration with their efforts was evident.

I don't know how many jobs I've applied for. I've sort of given up, to be honest with you. I think the only way I'll gain employment at my age is if it's through the back door and I know somebody.

[Employment agencies are] hopeless... I have to beg for them to put me up for a job. And I'm not so sure that they do that. I'm not so sure they're not just giving me a line... so it's just totally frustrating and all I want to do is work.

Quality of life

Peter's quality of life was hampered by his financial situation as well as his wife's health, though in general he felt he had most things that he needed: 'For the moment I'm happy with what I've got.' Peter discussed with great pleasure his lifestyle. He considered himself fortunate to be living in Australia. He 'wouldn't mind owning a home but I think it's too late for us given the age factor'.

His financial situation limited him particularly around Christmas time when he borrowed money to pay for presents. He wished he had more money to buy a new car. In particular a station wagon would make it easier for Peter to carry his wife's oxygen unit for trips away. Peter's wife must spend 16 hours of everyday on the oxygen machine.

The late George Harrison died with \$550 million dollars. That didn't buy him a new health. Money's not the be-all and end-all. It's very important, mind you, but it won't buy you everything... You can be poor happy and rich happy and you can be unhappy in both situations.

The Internet had brought lifestyle change: 'I'm on the Net all the time.' Peter did all his banking on the Internet and could visit the TAB site from there.

Peter was not overly concerned about his present financial situation. Though he apologised for the line of thought, he noted that his mother's inheritance would provide greater security.

Peter wanted to age ‘slowly’. He said he read a lot, ensuring good general knowledge, and did puzzles to keep himself mentally active.

Relationships

Peter was satisfied with his relationships and did not feel he could hope for anything more.

Not a lot more than I’ve got already. My wife loves me. The grandkids think I’m it and a bit; [wife’s name] children, well, we come to grips at time but there’s nothing unpleasant. I’ll be happy when my eldest daughter settles down but other than that, that would be about it.

Peter indicated that people would on occasion ask him for advice or help and he was always pleased to assist. Peter indicated that he would remain open to requests for help but had no plans to become formally involved in a community group again.

Peter didn’t have close relationships with his neighbours, as they were new on both sides. With one family, ‘they wave’, but there were more physical barriers on the other side so they rarely caught sight of the people. He implied that the relationships would begin by chance not intention.

Interplay of social and personal aspirations

Peter stated that he saw the achievement of social and personal aspirations as separate, yet his illustration clearly connected his hopes for his children’s lives to their social context:

I think they are two different entities. My aspirations for society... I’d like to say everything is nice and rosy and my kids grow up in a world where they have food on the table, they have a house, they have a nice car ... that sort of thing. Personal aspirations... well... we could do with a new car. I wouldn’t mind owning my own house again and the fact that I hope I can have my wife for as long as possible.

Values

Peter raised the issue of values frequently throughout the conversation. To have values was ‘having respect for yourself, other people, parents, grandparents, law, other people no matter [their] race or creed, respect for country’.

During the conversation on values, Peter apologised for being ‘philosophical’.

Peter’s parents and education were the two primary sources of values. The decline in values amongst Australia’s younger generations, which concerned Peter, could also be attributed to changes in parenting and schooling: ‘[That] means I’m a bad parent, doesn’t it? Though I’m a good parent with one [child] and a bad parent with the other.’

Peter also believed that his interactions with others and material he might read could influence his values: ‘You change with age. You change with what happens around you. You change with who you interact with. Life forever changes.’ Peter could not give examples at the time, but he was certain this would be the case.

Values for children

Peter commented in considerable depth about the values schools should be teaching students. Aside from discipline and a focus that was less selfish—‘I think there should be less emphasis on I, me, me’—Peter believed a focus on self-reliance and preparation for life was essential.

I don’t think they are preparing kids enough for society in general. I don’t think they are preparing them for the fact that they have to learn a living. It’s all right knowing Latin, but unless you’re going to be a botanist it’s useless.

In particular, Peter suggested a greater number of 'apprenticeships' in school to provide preparation for the workforce and instil responsibility and commitment. Peter was strongly encouraging his 14-year-old grandson to get a job at McDonald's to 'get him to know values.'

Peter felt it was the reduced time parents spent with children that caused a decline in values. He felt parents were now focused on both working, wanting a new house and two cars. Children now wanted a computer for Christmas and not a football. A focus on material things was becoming ingrained. More interaction and outdoor activity, Peter believed, would be a positive influence on children. Peter thought he 'sounded old-fashioned' but made no apologies for his views.

Living out values

Peter believed that the people with whom he had a relationship would tend to have similar values, though opinions might differ: 'We're all in different environments... opinions are going to be different.' Peter struggled to identify trends in the thoughts of friends because they hadn't discussed some issues (capital punishment), or didn't have an opinion (IVF). In other areas he believed they would think differently (voting preference). He discussed these issues without much concern or passion.

Yet on the topic of abortion he had strong beliefs and believed that everyone he knew would have a similar opinion. If they did have a different view, Peter would 'do everything in [my] power to change their opinion.' He had told his daughter when she became pregnant that he would look after his grandson rather than her have an abortion. Peter linked these views to his Catholic upbringing. It is interesting that he did not strongly object to people having children outside marriage, or to IVF, as might have also been expected.

Peter regretted the break-up with his first wife, correlating this incident with the problems his eldest daughter experienced. Peter was a person who always stopped and helped people he thought were in trouble. He gave a few examples indicating this was evidence that as a person he did care. He believed people would choose not to get involved if it was too much trouble or they thought there might be some consequences. A belief that someone else or the police would turn up diminished the individual's responsibility.

15. Sussan: Female, over 50 years, middle income (25-70K h/hold), ESB, outer Melbourne suburb, public and secondary education, no dependent children

Sussan was a 57-year-old mother of two children, both now married and living away from home. Her husband and herself moved to their home in outer Melbourne suburb to be closer to their children. Sussan was now a grandmother of two. Prior to living in outer Melbourne suburb, Sussan and her husband had spent the majority of their lives in Melbourne's inner suburbs. They owned their outer Melbourne suburb home.

Sussan had an English-speaking background. She worked as a hairdresser before having her children, after which she became primarily a homemaker. She had been involved in clothing pools and related activities as her children had grown. Her husband was now retired.

Sussan had travelled widely throughout Australia, Asia and the United States. She identified Europe as next on their agenda. She divided her time between caring for her husband and the house, being with her children and grandchildren, and playing golf regularly, as well as being a committee member of the women's division at her golf club.

Social values

Sussan was able to reflect on Australian society from the vantage point of having travelled in other countries. Her feedback on Australia could only be described as glowing: 'One of the best countries you could come to live.' She emphasised a culture that was a 'middle-class society'. She explained that Australia was neither conservative nor leading the way, and she was clearly comfortable with the pace of the country. I felt her observations reflected her satisfaction with her life as being quietly paced, middling and comfortable.

A theme of opportunity emerged frequently from the discussion with Sussan. She highlighted Australia as being a land of opportunity, though with specific attention to families: 'Lots of opportunity for people with families.' Sussan felt a person who was willing to work hard in Australia could achieve whatever they wanted to. She felt opportunity was such that you did not have to obtain a tertiary qualification to be successful. She highlighted the ability of enthusiastic people to get work, particularly part-time employment, in Australia.

Additional comments Sussan offered without prompting included mentions of our schools and health system as 'good'. In both these areas Sussan felt she had personal knowledge, given the involvement of one son in education administration and her own recent experience at placing her mother and her husband's parents in aged care accommodation.

Employment

Sussan considered the employment opportunities in Australia to be vibrant. She felt those who were willing to work hard capitalised on the opportunities. She also acknowledged, when prompted, that some people had greater difficulty finding work than others, and specifically nominated sole parents.

Still I think it's fairly easy to get work. If you want that opportunity that's available to you. If you're prepared to start at the bottom you can work your way up.

She was less confident that people would be able to achieve their ideal career, indicating this was 'probably' so.

The ageing population and the related dependency ratio were raised as a concern, with fewer working people supporting Australia's older and younger citizens.

Businesses

Sussan believed there was good government support of business. Though she was generally positive about the behaviour of businesses she did feel there was some room for improvement. She recommended businesses should be prepared to reduce to maintain high employment and businesses should minimise their impact on the environment. Working with government to meet guidelines would ensure ethical business: 'They [businesses] need to be honest and work by the guidelines set down by the government.'

Welfare

A welfare area where Sussan considered improvement might be required was that of aged care. Her mother and her husband's parents were in aged care (public and private respectively). The quality of the care received in both establishments was good. Shortage of aged care resources was her key concern, though she and her husband had not personally encountered any problems. Later discussions suggested media reports of aged care might have informed Sussan's views in this area.

With respect to health care, Sussan was concerned at the number of people 'clogging up the system'. She felt strongly that people who could afford to go to their own doctor, and have private health cover, should do so. In response to a prompt, Sussan believed that the people 'clogging the system' were people on low incomes.

Sussan felt that there might be 'starving' people in Australia but not to the extent seen internationally. She felt our welfare system was sufficient to take care of those who were struggling. She believed the welfare system operated successfully given our small population.

Education

Sussan reported 'fairly good access' to education in Australia. In terms of the quality of education, state primary schools were considered excellent, with secondary schools lagging behind. The views of her son who was involved in public education were her source of information in this area. She could not comment on tertiary access.

Despite a view that the standard of public education was relatively high, Sussan considered private schools to provide more opportunities to students: 'I'm told the state primary schools are excellent.' Specifically, private schools provided their students with assistance in successfully completing the VCE and getting into university: 'They guide them to get into universities. They get their students through.'

Quality of life

Sussan regarded Australia's pace of life, the lack of queues and our space to be major contributors to her satisfaction with Australia. These comments were made in contrast to the lifestyle Sussan viewed in the United States. Sussan had established a good quality of life for herself, enjoying her family and her golf and the opportunity to travel. With a view of the ocean she was also able to appreciate Australia's environment. It is therefore not surprising that Sussan had a high level of satisfaction with Australia's way of life.

Sussan noted that though her lifestyle was achievable, it was not available for newly arrived immigrants without hard work. She referred frequently, however, to the assistance and sponsorship newly arrived Australians received which ensured a relatively smooth transition into Australia. Sussan noted that housing was inexpensive in Australia.

Safety

Sussan was not concerned about safety issues, either at an international or domestic level. She felt Australia would not be a target of international terrorism simply because it was an inconspicuous nation that didn't attract the limelight: 'We're a safe country because not many people know about us.'

We're nationally focused and that's a good thing. We're a small population. If we were bigger we'd be a threat to other countries. We should just stay nationally focused.

Environment

Australia's environment was important to Sussan and she was quite positive about the attitudes of Australians which she regarded as having 'improved drastically over the past 20 years'. In Australia today 'you wouldn't dream of throwing rubbish out of a car window and we're conscious of the chemicals that we use in the garden'. She rated the importance of Australia's environment to be 8 out of 10 and felt this was shared by all Australians. Litter was the principal environmental issue Sussan felt required ongoing monitoring.

Politics

Sussan observed that the average Australian did not have much influence on Australian politics. She disapproved of compulsory voting because it forced people to care about politics. She felt the existence of such a system suggested that Australians weren't interested in politics and had the consequence of reducing the importance of politics for Australians. Sussan herself regarded politics as being important.

People

Sussan felt the average Australian was 'generally nice and accepting'. Sussan believed Australians would be seen as 'easy going' and popular at an international level. Sussan felt we would have more in common with the US, UK and European countries than with our regional neighbours in South-East Asia, though Australia is 'open' to all countries. She felt there was some potential that other countries would regard Australia as racist, given our handling of refugee issues. She was keen that Australia accept all refugees and generally felt Australia had a good history in our treatment of diverse cultures arriving on our shores. Ultimately Sussan wanted a strong national identity: 'A national identity is important. We should look at ourselves as Australians.'

Sussan was concerned over the declining importance of the family unit. She identified the higher proportion of sole parent families and families with multiple mothers and fathers as marked and negative changes in the importance of family. She believed these varied family structures were 'confusing' for children and led to the development of crime, graffiti and other destructive behaviours: '[As a result of family breakdown] we have more crime and our society starts to fall apart.'

Sussan talked to a limited extent about minorities in Australia. Sussan suggested that indigenous Australians were in a satisfactory position and not particularly disadvantaged—'We look after them [indigenous Australians] quite well'—she did later refer to the 'gap'. Sussan expanded on the 'gap' as the separation between the rich and poor. The 'gap' she believed was increasing. Sussan commented that the major problem for disadvantaged Australians was that they 'don't get a say'.

Direction of Australian society

Sussan was satisfied with Australia: 'We are a balance: neither radical nor too conservative. We are the middle of the road and we don't like to rock the boat.' The only changes needed in Australia are minor. At that point of the interview she could not identify any main areas of dissatisfaction, and restated her perception that we were 'very lucky'.

Sussan struggled to conceptualise an ideal Australia that was actually improved: she could only visualise a changed Australia that had declined to a lesser society that reminded her of Third world conditions, with housing consisting of thatched huts and children with their arms outstretched for food. The children were happy, however, because food was forthcoming. Sussan commented at that time that '70 per cent' of the world population was 'starving'.

Despite Sussan's satisfaction with current Australia—'We're not too far off the ideal'—she had an extended wish list:

- Unemployment would be low, with particular attention paid to providing jobs for the youth. Sussan did not feel full employment was achievable.
- The family unit would be strengthened, resulting in reduced violence and crime.
- Business would focus on its role in providing employment, at the expense of profit if necessary.
- Business would ensure minimal impact on the environment.
- 'Welfare' would be for a minority, as opposed to a perceived majority of Australians receiving welfare at present.
- A more health-conscious culture would evolve, with a positive impact on Australia's health care system.
- Reduced working hours (40-50 hours) with flexi time.
- Open door policy for all refugees and immigrants.

Sussan feared that growing inequality in society might jeopardise a number of ideals she would like for a future Australia, including home ownership for all and quality education for all. She thought access to education would still be satisfactory, though public education would be a considerably lower standard than that provided in private schools.

Sussan had a few suggestions in the area of politics. Though Australia's basic system was regarded as satisfactory, she was eager to see compulsory voting reformed, as discussed previously. She was also concerned about the dominance of two main political parties in Australia, and would like to see a stronger third party that would 'provide more options and debate.' She requested a stronger presence of young Australians in politics: 'Get younger people into our political parties. This will bring a more realistic view.'

Sussan highlighted employment, the family unit and a continued focus on the environment as the key areas for attention in the future.

Achieving change

Sussan was uncertain about where the weight of responsibility lay. She had previously identified that the average Australian lacked the power to influence, yet for some issues, such as family welfare, the onus was on the individual. She alluded to the role of business in the area of employment and the environment, and noted the role of government in passing laws and legislation.

Personal values

Sussan described herself as a caring individual who was particularly concerned with the well-being of her family and friends. In addition to maintaining a caring and clean home she noted some creative skills in developing a stylish house. She was interested in her health and appearance. She felt her enthusiasm for golf might cause some to describe her as sporty. Golf was not only a means of maintaining her health; it also allowed an outlet for her competitive streak.

She further identified herself to be reliable, punctual, and a perfectionist with any task she undertook. Sussan identified honesty as a trait she sought in friends.

Sussan nominated the important issues for herself at the moment to be her own health and happiness and playing an active role in her grandchildren's lives. Indeed, Sussan referred to her children and grandchildren as sustaining her through times that might be tough: 'To have a family is just great. They're always in my plans.' She did not describe herself as having a particular faith or religion.

When asked who was responsible for the achievement of her personal aspirations she nominated her husband as the breadwinner.

Sussan was highly satisfied with her life. She was clearly proud of her family achievements, considered herself well-read, noted she read *The Age* every morning, was active and involved in the maintenance of her health and appearance. Sussan had identified the aspects in her life which gave her satisfaction, and had pursued those aspects.

Work

Sussan had not being in paid employment for a number of years. She indicated no regret at this and found fulfilment from her raising her family. She did not have any aspirations to be involved in paid employment again.

Sussan had made a conscious decision not to undertake further education. She felt that too many women of her age were doing further study and yet were not really doing much with the knowledge gained.

Standard of living

With views of the ocean, ability to engage in desired recreational activities and freedom to spend her time as she wished, Sussan was understandably satisfied with her current standard of living. The maintenance of her standard of living was key to Sussan and she appeared to be confident it would be sustained. She looked forward to further travel, playing golf and reading autobiographies. Sussan was keen to 'smell the roses' and to avoid having a routine.

Relationships

Sussan reported a positive relationship with her husband and children. She talked animatedly about her grandchildren and was looking forward to having more grandchildren over whom she could fuss. Her aspirations for her children were a major consideration and driver of her life, though not the only one.

With respect to involvement beyond family and friends, Sussan felt she had been relatively active in the past, citing as examples some parish care work and running the uniform clothes pool at the kids school. She felt that she 'had given enough to community' and did not have any ambitions for further involvement in community groups or activities. She did not consider her golf club committee to be a community group.

Interplay of social and personal aspirations

Sussan believed she could achieve her personal aspirations separately from the direction that Australian society takes. She did feel that people should be conscious of each other and help each other out. This notion was difficult to reconcile with her previous comment about having done enough for community and from her emphasis on the family unit. However this fit was not explored further.

Values

Sussan could not easily define the term 'values', though after some prompting she nominated friendships, family and a society that cares as some of her values. She did clarify that values were not material things.

In discussing the origin of her values, Sussan made an interesting reflection about the impact of her children. As a child she had been taught by her parents to be 'seen and not heard'. For that very reason she had always had the same opinions and attitudes as her parents. Only recently had the views of her adult children, whom she encouraged to form their own opinions, begun to change her own views. Her opinions now differed from those of her parents. Her opinions also differed from those of her husband whose own opinions remained consistent with those of his parents.

Sussan also identified her regular morning reading of *The Age* to be a source of information about current events and issues. She also listened to some talkback radio.

Sussan felt that the people with whom she had contact held similar views and this was likely to be a consequence of her seeking out relationships with these people.

Values for children

Sussan identified discipline to be the critical learning that schools should be providing children aside from traditional academic lessons. Parents had the additional responsibility of ensuring children were brought up knowing how to self-discipline, to be caring and to be honest.

Living out values

Sussan did not feel that her behaviours would convey her values to a complete stranger. Rather she thought only those that knew her well would know what she valued.

Some behaviours that she cited as regretting or feeling bad about included being rude to door-to-door salespeople and market researchers, because she knew they were just doing their jobs. Sussan also regretted not stopping to help someone. With regard to the latter example, Sussan sometimes thought twice about stopping to help someone because of the potential risk to her immediate safety. The unknown consequences which might result from offering assistance were a deterrent also. For instance, the person might ask you to do more than you expected. Sussan felt selfish when withholding assistance.

Final comments on poverty

Except for Sussan's earlier comments about disadvantaged Australians, the issue of poverty was not explored further during the interview. As an aside, Sussan identified the Salvation Army as her pet charity. She supported the Salvation Army because she felt they were proud of what they do and do not isolate people because of their religion. Rather, 'the Salvos help all people'.

16. Angela: Female, over 50 years, high income (>70K h/hold), ESB, Melbourne, tertiary education, youngest dependent over 15 years

Angela was 55 years old, married and a mother of two teenage children. Her husband worked in the development sector. They lived in a large home in Melbourne, complete with swimming pool and every convenience. Both children had received private school education.

Angela described her life as busy. Her husband disliked having a minute that wasn't allocated to activity and they had an extremely active social life, attending concerts, theatre, cinema, and dinners with friends and business acquaintances. They travelled overseas annually and interstate several times a year.

Angela and her husband also had part ownership of a business in the hospitality field where Angela worked part-time.

Angela's family had recently been affected by ill health—first her daughter's mental illness and then Angela's own cancer.

Social values

The aspects of Australian society which stood out most to Angela and which she would be first to point out to someone who was coming here to live from overseas were:

- the people—easy-going, fun-loving, with a good sense of humour;
- casual atmosphere—dress, manner, protocol;
- enjoyment of holidays, spending time out of doors, sport
- the differences between the main cities—Melbourne was more formal; Brisbane very casual.

Employment

Angela did not believe that it was always easy to get a job in Australia. She felt discrimination might make it more difficult for a new resident to get a job, as they didn't have connections within the 'old boys' networks'. She mentioned that they currently had a young man staying with them and believed that he had been discriminated against because of his foreign-sounding surname: in this context she believed many managers still have a 'WASP' (that is, White Anglo-Saxon Protestant) bias. Angela also felt that it could be difficult for people with qualifications to get the type of job they ideally wanted.

Businesses

In terms of opening your own business, Angela believed that to be successful you have to be very hardworking and entrepreneurial. She feared that a newcomer would struggle to get finance to open a business here.

Welfare

Angela believed support systems were generous in Australia compared with other countries. She pointed to the fact that we had sickness benefits, supporting mothers' benefits and unemployment benefits. She noted that dollars directed to benefits were not limitless. She admitted that she didn't know much about unemployment benefits but felt that they were still easy to get and that the undeserving, as well as the deserving, received payments.

Quality of life

Angela thought all housing in Australia was reasonably affordable and held the opinion that 'if you are prepared to work hard, you can still put a deposit on a house'.

She noted that if you were living a long way out of the city you would need a car as 'public transport isn't brilliant'. There was also a lack of facilities for teenagers in the outer suburbs and that potentially led to problems.

Angela considered that there were numerous opportunities for activity and more than adequate open spaces for passive recreation: 'You can do whatever you want.'

She felt that the drug problem was getting quite serious but acknowledged that solutions were difficult. She thought safe-injecting rooms were a good idea but noted that no-one wanted them in their neighbourhood.

Angela did not really think there was poverty in Australia, at least not in comparison with undeveloped countries, but she did see that there were people on limited incomes.

She believed that the quality of life might be declining, as there was not enough time for family enjoyment, with companies expecting employees to work increasingly long hours. She noted that some people sought to work more to earn more dollars to satisfy their materialistic needs.

Education

Angela believed private schools offered excellent education. She felt schools within the state system were variable—some were good, some were poor, with the differentiating factor being the neighbourhood. Angela noted that the local culture affected the school.

Security

She saw Australia as a comparatively safe society to live in. However, she noted that there were problems with safety on public transport.

Politics

Angela believed Australia to be a very democratic country where people could expect to influence politicians.

People

Australia was described as a good humoured, friendly and outgoing country. Angela believed that the images other countries would have of Australia would be unique depending upon their own culture. For instance, Germany would see Australia as disorganised and untidy, but the French would be envious of our lifestyle even if Australians were a bit too loud for their liking. Angela thought both the U.S. and U.K. would regard Australia as having much in common with them and their lifestyles. However, the U.S. would see Australia as small and the U.K. would have a colonial mentality.

Overall Angela listed the following qualities that she believed other countries would recognise in Australia – loyal, friendly, outgoing, entrepreneurial. She believed our Prime Minister would be seen as fussy and cautious.

Direction of Australian society

Angela's first response to the general issue of how satisfied she was with the general direction in which Australia was headed was to note:

September 11 made us really understand how temporary life could be. It made us realise that we don't have control over our own lives ... We thought we were safe but we have to question that now.

Angela commented that Australia felt safer than the rest of the world but then raised some doubt: 'With Indonesian Muslims to the north of us, maybe we don't feel so safe.' She had obviously been thinking long and hard about this issue and questioned Australia slavishly following the U.S. She saw potential for more problems in the future and thought of what her children and their generation might have to face—the current wave of terrorism might be suppressed but new extremist groups would emerge.

The second issue Angela raised spontaneously was the increasing development of communications and global networks—the technology revolution. While she noted the advantages she was also quick to acknowledge the problems—that technology was changing so quickly and was so demanding that it was difficult to keep abreast of it: ‘It can be very time-consuming and can rob us of the peaceful enjoyment of our lives.’

Angela was also concerned about the high level of demand being made on people, with the emphasis on achievement. She included teenagers as well as those in the workforce as suffering from ‘achievement stress’.

Another topic she raised was health and her concerns about the increasing amount of chemicals in food, genetically modified foods and the increasing number of people being diagnosed with cancer. This was probably a reflection on her personal situation and heightened awareness of factors potentially linked to cancer.

In terms of where Australian society was falling short, Angela saw the need for substantially increased funding of medical and health related research. She noted that scientists made breakthroughs but there was no funding to take them further. She also noted the need for research looking at stress, food and environmental hazards and their impact on the body.

Asked about the ideal Australia, Angela spontaneously raised issues related to multiculturalism. She discussed the dilemma it presented: on one hand cultures created ghettos and crime and drug trading might be fostered in these areas, but on the other hand she believed the people from different cultures who had settled in Australia enriched it. She would like Australians to be more accepting of different cultures and to have discrimination eliminated.

Angela would like to see our social composition continue to develop as in the past, Australians should accept cultural diversity and people from different backgrounds. She believed that we should be accepting more migrants and refugees: ‘They can come from anywhere as long as they intend to work and not use the system.’

Angela’s ideal society would be less materialist, a setting where people can take joy from simple things, spend less time working, have more time to muck around with their children and more time for themselves. She saw this vision as going back to ‘first principles’.

Employment

Angela could not see clear solutions to improve the job situation, as business was generally doing well but jobs were decreasing so it was not simply a matter of stimulating the economy.

Welfare

Angela was concerned that as the aged population grew, Australia might struggle to adequately look after its older people. Angela felt that more help was needed for some families as well as the homeless and disabled.

Education

Angela stated that she would prefer that private schools did not receive government funding and were not therefore beholden to the government. She saw the need for all state schools to be ‘brought up’ to a common standard and offer an equal quality of education to children attending them.

Achieving change

Angela believed that the barriers to achieving change were difficult to identify because things were happening all the time, such as the September 11 attacks.

Funding was a significant barrier to achieving improvement in areas such as health, aged care and disability services. She thought companies needed to contribute more—as they had done in funding the arts. She did not believe people should be required to pay more tax—she thought that people were taxed enough and that there were no concessions when the GST was introduced. She was concerned that increasing tax would reduce entrepreneurship. Angela was rather at a loss about how more funds could be raised to make these changes.

Personal values

Angela believed her friends would describe her as very friendly, chatty, well informed, intelligent and well organised.

She saw herself as less organised and confident than her friends believed, but she believed that she was able to handle stress without showing it. She felt her ability to cope showed in her not being unduly worried about having cancer.

Angela had suffered personal difficulties over the last three years. Her daughter developed a mental illness two and a half years ago. She was a very intellectually bright girl and completed VCE early for her age. However she had not been sufficiently emotionally mature to deal with some of the information she had received at school. She became weighed down with the world's problems and lost her desire to live. She was treated and is now a happy 17-year-old. However, her experience put considerable strain on the family. After her daughter's problems Angela had been diagnosed with cancer. Angela seemed to be coping exceptionally well with her condition and had an optimistic outlook. She stated that she had slowed down and noted that her illness had given her cause to look at her life. She believed in getting out and getting things done ... living for the day but living normally.

Angela stated that she was currently satisfied with her life. She thought that they would move to a high-rise apartment after her son finished his schooling: they would like to be close to everything, have a view and no responsibility for a garden. She was optimistic about her health. Her prognosis was that she was unlikely to be alive in five years but she did not believe this. She would also like to do a lot more travel.

Angela did not believe in the conventional Christian God but did believe that there were other energies or forces at work in the universe and that these energies could be tapped into to bring healing.

Work

Angela was disappointed that she did not have a satisfying career—this was one of her main regrets. She worked part-time in the family business but this was not particularly satisfying. Given her husband's frenetic pace of life and the desire to spend time with her children she had not pursued full-time work, though the potential for doing so lingered with her for a long time. Her illness had in a sense allowed her to let go of this option and to put some energy into more creative pursuits. She had taken up patchwork and would like to learn the piano.

Quality of life

Overall, Angela was content with life: she was materially comfortable, her daughter was well again and she was focused on what was important—her children and her health

Despite her affluence Angela described her fears about her financial security. Her husband's business suffered in the 1989 market crash and Angela declared that they 'lost everything and had to start again'. She was concerned that this could happen again and it would be too late in their lives to start again.

Angela also had a fear of getting old, in part engendered by watching the decline process which her parents were experiencing. Watching them she felt that ‘old age is creeping up on us’.

Relationships

Her principal relationships were with her husband and children. She also spent time with both her mother and mother-in-law and had a ‘huge group of female friends who are always wanting to have lunch’.

She questioned whether her husband controlled what she does – she went out a lot but the going out was his choice not hers.

Angela was also concerned about her children getting jobs. In particular she worried that her teenage son might waste his life. He did OK at school but could do better. He liked graffiti art and this was a worry to Angela. He seemed rather flat and after her experience with her daughter, Angela was concerned that he might be headed into a depressed state. Her husband put pressure on him and had high expectations for him which he might easily rebel against.

She saw herself as doing some sort of voluntary work in the future. She felt that she wanted to contribute something back to society and saw herself working with cancer patients and their families, perhaps counselling at the Cancer Clinics or the Royal Children’s Hospital.

Values

When asked to define what values meant to her, Angela described her own values. These were:

- thinking of others (whereas her husband’s values were ‘be tough’);
- respecting people who have tried (‘I am impatient with those who have not tried, and fools’);
- (correct) behaviour and manners; and
- creativity.

She felt her values were derived principally from her parents, and that school might have had some influence. She thought her friends might have had some influence, but said that you choose your friends and their values are important in that choice.

She believed that she had changed her opinion on things in the past but felt that her opinions had become stronger as she had aged. She was now less flexible and in some ways less tolerant than she used to be.

Values for children

Angela saw that schools today do a lot of ‘parenting’ of children, which they didn’t need to do in the past. She wanted to see schools teach children cooperation, social consciousness, friendship and models of families other than their own.

Angela believed that children establish their own identities within their homes. The values that she hoped were being passed to her children at home were: to be independent, to be hard-working, to be ‘intellectual’.

Both Angela and her husband liked to keep abreast of current affairs and three newspapers come into the household daily. Angela repeatedly referred to the fact that she saw herself and her husband as intellectual and this was a ‘value’ she had sought to pass onto her children.

Living out values

Angela believed that these values were lived out in their household. She felt that they functioned successfully as a family, and those looking in from the outside would say this. She saw herself and her husband as being willing to help others and to be leading an ‘intellectual’ life.

Final comments on poverty

Angela had mentioned earlier in the interview that she did not consider we had 'real' poverty in Australia (compared with other non-Western countries). She was aware that she held two sets of attitudes about poverty in Australia. On the one hand she felt that individuals were responsible for their own financial circumstances but on the other hand she was aware how poverty could become structural:

There can be an unemployment spiral. Generations grow up in households where there is no model of work so they don't have a work ethic as other groups might.

She did feel that some poverty was caused by the fact that people didn't want to work and preferred to 'milk' the system. She was concerned for children living in poverty and saw them as being affected by their parents who 'won't help themselves'. She was also concerned about the lack of structural support for young people, which could lead them into drugs and crime.

At this point Angela discussed indigenous Australians, saying that their plight was our problem, and they are not to blame for their situation. She stated that she had sought to become more informed about issues related to indigenous Australians and felt that there was an urgent need to do something. She noted that effective 'actions' were not confined to funding, in her opinion.

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