The Price of Belonging: Social Citizenship and Avenues of Recognition for Disadvantaged Young People

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ABSTRACT
This study is concerned with the question of how youth policy and programs can better support and care for young people who face disadvantage. It poses the question of whether there is a disjunction between disadvantaged young people's priorities and life experiences, and the assumptions made about young people in policies and programs relating to youth education and employment. Further, this study asked if youth policies and programs have lost sight of what disadvantaged young people need.

To gain a better understanding of processes of preferences and aspirations, three contrasting case studies were conducted with groups of young people as well as workers from the youth programs frequented by these young people. This study first explores what young people say about how they create meaningful lives, and how they hope to engage in society in the future. Secondly, the arenas where these aspirations become developed, shaped and stunted are analysed. Finally, the study investigates how these aspects were engaged with and recognised, within youth work settings.

The study examines the difference disadvantage makes to the development of social citizenship aspirations. I argue in this thesis that the ways people long to be a part of society (social citizenship aspirations) is developed through feelings of belonging and recognition. Through this framework, it becomes possible to conduct a different type of social criticism, where the focus is not only on the material conditions structuring aspirations, but also the mental conditions that facilitate self-realisation and the fostering of social citizenship aspirations. Further, the study maintains that aspirations are more than cognitive, but instead embedded in the material and social context, and made up of young people’s embodied and emotional longing to find a valorised place among their peers. The concepts of recognition and belonging allow for a richer understanding of young people’s lives that go beyond their transitions and their cultural embeddedness.

This thesis starts by arguing that the ways young people’s aspirations are conceptualised in both government policy and some academic research often rely on restrictive, individualistic definitions. Instead, by situating young people’s social citizenship aspirations, empirically represented as young people’s longing for safety, connection, respect and visibility, within processes of marginalisation across different arenas (i.e. school, local communities and youth programs) a type of ‘de-objectification’ results, which broadens our understanding of disadvantaged young people’s agency and capabilities in several ways. Firstly, the thesis demonstrates that the possibilities for exercising agency are always in relation to the specific local and social context and the broader socio-structural factors, which determine that environment. This understanding of aspirations breaks with the habitual way of understanding aspirations for disadvantaged groups; as the enactment of preference within constraint. Instead, I argue that recognition and belonging both enable and constrain aspirational horizons. Secondly, I suggest that
analyses that seek to comprehend the structures that delimit and define horizons for actions such as gender, class and place should best be contextualised within young people's active labour to find a valorised role for themselves. Thirdly, the focus on relationships and belonging in young people's lives may provide a more holistic and sensitive account of the social and cultural reproduction of problematic social practices, so often avoided due to its ambivalent and uncomfortable connotations.

Seen from this perspective, the type of social citizenship subjectivities encouraged within youth programs, or how young people are encouraged to see their place in society, becomes a matter of social justice. This study argues that narrowly designed youth programs aimed purely at educational transitions are in danger of reproducing further misrecognition and social exclusion. By neglecting to address young people’s social embeddedness and the foundation upon which young people create their social citizenship aspirations, low expectations are in danger of being reinforced. The concept of social citizenship provides a lens which may assist the sector to direct activities towards addressing this, by providing a holistic understanding of what creates young people’s self-understanding, values and attitudes, and how these go on to shape aspirations in all facets of life, including education, employment, personal relationships and social citizenship aspirations.

(Keywords: young people, disadvantage, youth work, social citizenship, recognition theory, belonging)
PREFACE

DECLARATION

This is to certify that

i. the thesis comprises only my original work toward the PhD,
ii. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
iii. the thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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Maja Lindegaard Moensted
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For Dad
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Chapter One: Narrowing Aspirational Horizons

Introduction - Young people’s aspirations and disadvantage

Former Australian Disability Discrimination Commissioner Graham Innes talks about the soft bigotry of low expectation carried by those with a disability (Innes 2010). This idea is more widely applicable. Many policy makers and institutions present disadvantaged young people as trapped by their cultural and socioeconomic heritage (Sarra 2003). When the public institutions set up to support disadvantaged youth harbour low expectations (Country Education Project 2011), these expectations can become self-fulfilling prophecies (Henchey, Dunnigan et al. 2001). They can echo in young people’s self-belief, and their interaction with peer groups, local communities and educational institutions. Such expectations shape future plans and the types of actions people will engage in. As young people’s aspirations drive their action, shape their practice and influence others’ reaction to them, they are therefore crucial to their future (Wierenga 2009). Gaining an understanding of this dynamic, where low expectations may shape disadvantaged young people’s aspirations and the way they see their role in society, is the focus of this study.

Ideas about desirable and achievable futures, of one’s future role in society, and what constitutes a contribution, are ingrained in culture (Blatterer 2010). Although normative assumptions about individuals’ place in society as the successful endpoint to youth transitions shape the lives of all young people, for marginalised groups of young people these assumptions may have an added narrowing effect, as conventional markers of success are significantly harder to reach (Lister 2007).

The research aims at understanding how material, cultural and structural embeddedness shape aspirations, and how these can be challenged or fortified within youth work settings. To understand this, the thesis engages with two sets of literature. Firstly, academic and public debates on conceptualisations of disadvantaged youth, including the purpose of youth work and how aspirations shape possibilities. I will highlight the often reductionist and limiting way disadvantaged young people are represented in policy and often also in research. Literature on aspirations and youth inequality is often linked to the supposed aspirational deficit of the ‘underclass’ (MacDonald and Marsh 2005). Alternatively, scholars over-emphasise social reproduction and the transmission of disadvantage, which may lead (unintentionally) to the ‘discrimination of lowered expectations’ (Shade 2006). I aim to nuance understandings of the role of aspirations in the reproduction of youth inequality in this study.

Secondly, this thesis draws on contemporary debates concerning how social science engages with citizenship theory and the related concepts of recognition and belonging, to develop a richer definition of aspiration. I aim to show that aspirations need to be
understood broadly. It is within a framework of aspirations as collective – and concerning social citizenship, not just individual fulfilment - that the broader meanings of young people's lives, their embeddedness within the local, cultural, social and structural context, and the purpose of youth programs, can be interrogated.

My central aim is to ask firstly, how young people's aspirations are shaped by disadvantage; and secondly, how this is challenged or reinforced within a youth work setting. This investigation engages with the aspirations of young people who face challenges, from the perspective of young people themselves and from the viewpoint of youth programs seeking to re-engage disconnected youth. I am defining disadvantaged youth as young people from a lower socioeconomic background, who experience marginalisation, discrimination or social exclusion based on their gender, ethnicity or social class (Diemer 2012).

A majority of youth services targeting disadvantaged youth sit in the arena connecting young people to the broader society, aiming at facilitating the successful transition to adult citizenship and majority society. This makes youth programs a fruitful site for investigating the 'making' of social citizenship aspirations (Marshall 1950: 25). I selected three youth programs addressing disadvantage, but engaging with contrasting groups of young people, to be part of this study: 1) a group of young men and women living in a small rural town (Green Valley group); 2) a group of young people from a Somali refugee background living in and around a housing commission estate (Migrant group); and 3) a group from the inner city who have disengaged from school (City group). Using workshops and focus groups with these three groups of young people, and interviews with staff from each youth program, I aim to gain a better understanding of the processes that shape preferences and aspirations.

Understanding disadvantage: Aspirational deficit of the ‘underclass' or the ‘discrimination of lowered expectations’

Traditional markers of adulthood such as full-time employment, economic independence and home ownership are less attainable in the current labour market and economic climate (Griffin 2001, Mizen 2003, Wyn and Harris 2004, Wyn and Woodman 2006, Wyn 2009). Yet many contemporary researchers have found young people to be largely optimistic about their own future, regardless of their gender, ethnicity, class or social background (Eckersley 1999, Arnett 2000, Wyn and Woodman 2006, Furlong and Cartmel 2007, Wyn 2009, Wierenga 2011, Du Bois-Reymond 2012). Furthermore, despite these changes in structures of social integration, the norms concerning adulthood have largely remained the same (Blatterer 2010). Some authors have connected this individual future optimism with an internalisation of the promise of ‘unbounded possibilities' (Blatterer 2010: 71) furthering the individualisation of risk (Beck 1992), where others have raised
concerns over contemporary young people’s deteriorating ability to connect their own aspirations with structural and cultural constraint, increasingly perceiving outcomes as dependent upon their own (lack of) skills (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). This diminishing appreciation of the social and structural forces that influence destinies has been referred to as the *epistemological fallacy of late modernity* (Furlong and Cartmel 1997). Others again have pointed out that this ‘cruel optimism’ (Berlant 2006) should be understood as an understandable response to the systematic societal uncertainty of modern life (Bauman 1998). As this section will show, individualisation of aspirations is also echoed in social policies and youth work practice, which has particular consequences for disadvantaged young people.

Looking through the lens of aspirational horizons, this research seeks to highlight the more intangible factors behind intergenerational inequality. Aspirations play a crucial role in determining longer-term outcomes for young people, and have been a key focus within youth studies as well as youth policies (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997, Hart 2012, Reay 2013, Kintrea, St Clair et al. 2015). Contemporary social policies frequently emphasise the need to lift the aspirations of young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Brown 2013), often by highlighting their faulty aspirations owing to individual dispositions and an ‘unhealthy’ community culture (Reay 2013). The ‘underclass’ thesis has influenced public opinion by fuelling concerns about the assumed dangerous group of disadvantaged, excluded and delinquent young people (MacDonald 1997). This approach focuses on the moral and cultural causes of poverty by arguing that material factors are less significant than the impoverishment of cultural and civic values among this group (Murray 1990). These ‘aspirational deficits’ are then, according to Murray, reproduced from one generation to another via antisocial values (Murray 1990). In this, marginalised groups are deemed largely responsible for their own problems, as their exclusion from social majority is understood as created and reinforced by their culture and values. Here the ‘underclass’ is presented as a threat to social, economic and moral order. The focus on the deficits of the disadvantaged thus links to policies aiming at disciplining and re-socialising ‘problem’ groups such as the long-time unemployed, single mothers and criminal youth through, for example, activation programs (Bullen and Kenway 2006). This viewpoint is echoed in educational policy aimed at raising expectations (and demands) towards working-class students, assuming they and their parents lack sociable and appropriate aspirations.

Such simplistic conceptualisations about marginalisation shape how public discourses conceptualise the issues and needs of disadvantaged youth (McLeod 2012), which in turn, is likely to have consequences for public institutions and youth work practices, particularly those designed to re-engage disadvantaged youth. Thus, incomplete ideas about the reproduction of inequality are not only shaping ideas about young people and youth citizenship, but also underpinning programs and interventions.
Youth studies have often critiqued the tendency to pathologise the aspirations of working-class young people (MacDonald and Marsh 2005, Furlong 2009, Evans 2016). These scholars suggest that the role of individual choice is frequently overstated in contemporary youth policy and certain youth discourses, unfairly positioning young people as largely personally responsible for their own predicaments (Bullen and Kenway 2006). On the other hand, a strong focus on social reproduction and the transmission of disadvantage can disempower young people. For example, within youth work practice this can lead to the (unintentional) reproduction of class, gender and ethnic patterns through prejudgements about preferences and interests (Sarra 2003). Furthermore, both approaches are in danger of becoming blind to the actual lives and priorities of young people themselves. As an alternative to the often reductive theories of how youth inequality becomes reproduced—which have a tendency to construct marginalised young people as either victims or personally responsible for their misfortune—this study will draw on and develop a more complex position drawing on a relational and processual framework for understanding young people’s aspirations.

**Critiques of the deficit approach to understanding disadvantage**

Work building on theorists such as Giddens (1991), Beck (1992) and Sennett (1998) has highlighted the decline in collectivised, class-based responses to societal inequalities by arguing that increasingly fragmented and individualised orientations have emerged. However, others highlight that where individuals might display more individualised forms of consciousness, “people’s locations within power structures still strongly impact on life chances” (Furlong and Cartmel 2009: 334). Similarly, Reay (2001) highlights that levels of social mobility remain stubbornly low. Furlong maintains that although it might no longer be possible to predict young people’s transitional destination or trajectory based on their current circumstances, class or gender, this should not lead to a rejection of previous models of structural analysis of inequality (Furlong 2011). He suggests that contemporary sociological models of understanding young people’s lives are “somewhat ill-suited to the modern world” (Furlong 2009: 335), calling for new way of conceptualising and researching these inequalities. Cuervo and Wyn (2014) argue along similar lines by underlining that as patterns of socioeconomic inequality has become entrenched in the Australian context, conceptual renewal in youth research is required. By taking a broader view of aspirations, I attempt to build an alternative framework through which to understand how youth inequality is challenged and reproduced.

The relationship between structure and agency in shaping youth inequality is both controversial and subject to much debate within the field of sociology of youth (White and Wyn 1998, MacDonald and Marsh 2005, Reay 2005, Furlong 2009, Coffey and Farrugia 2013). Much scholarship within sociology of youth has sought to develop frameworks that
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can account for both the structural and cultural factors at play in the reproduction of inequality (Reay 2005, Wierenga 2009, Bennett 2011, Bottrell and France 2015, Harris 2015). For instance, Bottrell and France argue that Bourdieu’s field theory provides a way of understanding young people’s agency whilst refusing the reductionism that dominates policy discourses (Bottrell and France 2015). However, although scholarship adopting such Bourdieuan frameworks acknowledges that actors influence and re-shape their local world (field and habitus), conceptualisations regarding how actors change habitus, and what drives these changes still lack specificity. Where the work of Bourdieu has been significant in emphasising how lives become shaped by structure, and thus reproduce structural inequalities, young people’s agency and reflexivity can be under-emphasised in such analysis (Roberts 2012).

According to Bullen and Kenway there has been a tendency to avoid addressing the cultural and behavioural elements in the ‘underclass’ debate within youth sociology due to its ambiguous and problematic nature, focusing instead on the economic and social structural factors shaping youth inequality (Bullen and Kenway 2006). MacDonald (1997) argues that instead of ignoring this element of the debate, alternative explanations concerning the reproduction of youth inequality that addresses both values and culture need to be developed (MacDonald 1997). Similarly, Bullen and Kenway highlight the necessity to move beyond “the polarized discourses of victim and perpetrator, beyond patronizing and pathologising” (Bullen and Kenway 2006: 146) by developing a model that understands the reproduction of inequality not as a result of either cultural or social structural forces but as an interaction of both. However, even within scholarship where structure and agency are acknowledged, aspirations are still largely conceptualised in individualistic ways. It seems further theorising and research is needed to capture a more nuanced view of the interplay between disadvantaged young people’s aspirations and their communities. In particular, there is a need for more specific knowledge concerning the ways disadvantaged young people themselves make sense of their circumstances in everyday life and how this shapes their aspirations.

This thesis argues for a rethinking of how young people’s aspirations are conceptualised both in contemporary social policy and academic research, to understand the reproduction of inequality. Here this study contributes to and extends upon the growing critique of the asocial and aspatial discourse of aspiration (Allen and Hollingworth 2013) as well as the tendency to pathologise the impact communities have on disadvantaged young people’s aspirations (Evans 2016). In seeking a more nuanced view on the interplay between aspirations, community embeddedness, material and social resources and opportunities, the concepts of social citizenship will be employed.
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Social citizenship practices and youth way of life

The concept of citizenship has been taken up in youth studies as a useful way of making sense of youth transitions, and to define and discuss ‘membership’ of adult society. However, a common criticism is that youth citizenship tends to be defined narrowly and ignores young people’s views (Thomson, Holland et al. 2004). Citizenship is often used as exterior measurement of successful, fragmented or at-risk transitions into adult citizenship (Jones and Wallace 1992), conceptualised as self-reliant, enabled individuals included in the social majority. This is problematic as such research rarely engages with how young people themselves understand and enact aspects of citizenship. For example, in the field of youth citizenship education, there is a tendency to focus on how students measure up to researchers’ predefined conceptions of citizenship (Rubin 2007). As a consequence, much of the research on youth citizenship has been etic rather than emic (Hall and Coffey 2007). Meanwhile, Thomson and colleagues (2004) suggest that citizenship should be analysed as the activities young people already engage in to increase their sense of competence and recognition. This project builds on this emerging subjective approach to citizenship, by focusing on young people’s avenues of belonging and recognition and how these impact on their citizenship aspirations.

Citizenship is, for this study, understood as a process of creating a valorised place in society, and is fundamentally social, taking place within available sites of belonging, modes of recognition and social organisation which structure the everyday (Wierenga 2009). These negotiations are mediated by people’s structural embeddedness. This broad definition of citizenship, which draws on Lister’s (2007) notion of ‘lived citizenship’, allows for a line of analysis that neither positions young people as passive victims of circumstance nor over-emphasises the agency and social mobility possible. Social citizenship is not a status gained once and for all. Instead it requires active and continuous action and is shaped by socially given conditions, constraint and opportunities (Lister 2007). Citizenship relates to social and political processes of learning, belonging, identity and participation, including social rights such as the right to a certain level of wellbeing and security. The concept recognises our interdependence rather than our independence (Hall and Coffey 2007, Lister 2007). Focusing research on the multiple contributions of all social actors highlights the question – what are we allowing disengaged young people to be and become?

I draw on three dimensions of citizenship theorising to develop a concept of social citizenship aspirations: Belonging, becoming and longing. Although the concepts becoming and longing appears similar as both are future orientated and aspirational, there is an important difference. Longing denotes movements towards the future that are deliberate due to a sense of needing, wanting, seeking or attaining something. Longing involves desire and hope. In following young people’s longing, we find what type of meaningful life they crave. Becoming has a focus on the fluidity of personal identity and
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orientation toward the future (Tilleczek 2011). Becoming refers to transitions of growing up, moving on, settling in, and denotes happenings, opportunities and constraints, choices made and chances taken, as well as paths of least resistance. Future aspirations are as much made up of people’s longing (for safety, connection, respect, and visibility), as it is made up of structural constraints, local opportunities and availability of local communities. Young people's striving for a meaningful life is illuminated by their search for place, pursuit of recognition, and striving for a community where they are deemed wanted and of value.

Within this framework, experiences of belonging and recognition are understood as preconditions for social citizenship. I argue in this thesis that the ways people long to be a part of society (social citizenship aspirations) are developed through feelings of belonging and recognition. Nurturing young people’s social citizenship is understood as facilitating the development of the essential creativity and talents of the young person, which allows them to take part in society in a meaningful way (Petersen and Willig 2004). This thesis provides a rethinking of young people’s aspirations by engaging with the concept of social citizenship. This provides a richer notion of young people's aspirations, which is highly social and community-based. The shift from an individualistic understanding of aspirations towards the relational concept of social citizenship aspirations, allows for a different sense of what young people want in their lives, and may also help the youth sector work with disadvantaged young people in a way that better reflects young people’s priorities. As such, this thesis seeks to not merely engage in academic debates about aspirations and disadvantage, but aims at informing how we work with young people facing challenges.

**Interrupting the cycle of disadvantage - The promise of youth work**

Increasingly, sociological literature shows how contemporary youth policies are driven by narrowly framed concerns with ensuring social control and educational transitions. However, how these policies are operationalised within youth work settings and whether these initiatives correspond with the needs and concerns of young people have received less attention (Savelsberg and Martin-Giles 2008, McLeod 2012, Batsleer 2013). This study builds upon the literature identifying how disadvantaged young people's identities and aspirations are constructed within neoliberal policies, seeking to investigate if these limited ways young people are engaged may serve to dilute the positive impact that could come of youth work interventions.

By engaging with youth work settings, this thesis is part of a tradition in youth studies that questions the assumptions behind the supposed aspirational deficit of the ‘underclass’ (MacDonald and Marsh 2005) whilst also opposing the ‘discrimination of lowered expectations’ prevalent in educational settings targeting disadvantaged youth (Shade
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2006). In other words, the thesis investigates whether there is a misfit between locally grounded cultural practices and the external expectations from youth programs, or if these seem to correspond too highly, leading to fatalistic expectations about the possibilities of certain groups of young people. As such, the thesis investigates the opportunities for working with young people by recognising and acknowledging their social and structural constraints in a meaningful way, whilst also challenging and widening their aspirational horizon.

The selection of youth programs as sites for investigating the shaping of aspirations was made for several reasons. Although youth services encapsulate a diversity of organisations with a variety of missions and working practices, in principle fundamental to youth work is the commitment to voluntary participation, community involvement, and support for the development of self-confidence and inter-personal skills. As Williamson puts it:

“"The practice of youth work (incorporating democratic association, participative activity, community involvement, advice and information, the development of enterprise and initiative, the acquisition of skills and competencies, youth exchanges between countries, and political education) contains much which bears strongly on elements of citizenship" (Williamson 1997: 208).

A majority of youth services sit in the arena connecting young people to the broader society, and in the case of youth services targeting disengaged youth, the aim is to enable the successful transition from youth to adult citizen (Sercombe 2004). Youth work is “a means whereby young people can learn the value and meaning of community membership, assert their own ability and rights to actively contribute at this level, and acquire and rehearse the skills necessary to do so” (Hall, Williamson et al. 2010: 468). Hall, Williamson et al. (2010) found in a research project investigating youth emerging citizenship that youth work provision was a rewarding arena for investigating how citizenship is developed, encouraged and negotiated. Youth services are often positioned as platforms for citizenship education within social policies, as much youth work practice, with its emphasis on active participation by young people, and support for the development of self-confidence and inter-personal skills, is cognate to citizenship as it is currently conceived. In the context of this study, and the focus on disadvantaged youth and the social citizenship subjectivities young people are encouraged to adopt in their meeting with societal institutions, the choice of youth services targeting disadvantaged youth is rewarding. Furthermore, as youth programs are aimed at re-integrating marginalised youth into mainstream society, investigating how young people’s social citizenship aspirations are encouraged and developed is possible in such a setting.

Seen from this perspective, the type of social citizenship subjectivities that are encouraged within youth programs, or how marginalised young people are encouraged to see their place in society, becomes a matter of social justice. This study argues, through empirical
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case studies, that narrowly designed youth programs aimed purely at educational transitions are in danger of reproducing further misrecognition and social exclusion. By neglecting to address young people's social embeddedness and the basis upon which young people create their social citizenship aspirations, low expectations are frequently strengthened and perpetuated. Three youth programs were selected for this investigation, all aiming at integrating young people experiencing different types of disadvantage into mainstream society by supporting their transition from school into further education or employment. As such the programs are all concerned with nurturing disadvantaged young people's aspirations.

A multiple case study approach facilitates the interrogation of similarities and differences across groups. The three groups in this study allow for useful comparisons. Growing up in a rural area (Green Valley group) offers very specific opportunities for belonging and avenues of expressing one's social citizenship compared to young people living in a major city. Where rural life for some young people offers a certain surety in terms of their place in the world, the future, networks and connections, the flip side can be an experience of rural life as limiting, narrowing potential life choices, and possible modes of expressions of citizenship. Meanwhile experiences of belonging and citizenship may take on very different meanings for migrant young people (Migrant group) compared to young people who have found a valorised role for themselves within local street-based gangs (City group), as belonging for the Migrant group is largely guaranteed by their ethnic community, unlike the City group that continuously have to fight for their sense of belonging by transgressing the rule of the law.

Research Question

In order to investigate how youth programs work with, and negotiate young people's aspirations, the thesis first aims at understanding the structural, social and contextual framework shaping the participants' social citizenship, and secondly focuses on how youth programs work with young people's aspirations. In other words, this study is concerned with 1) the difference disadvantage makes to the development of social citizenship aspirations and 2) what this means for youth programs that aim to work with young people's aspirations.

The following four guiding research questions structure this investigation:

1. How do experiences and feelings of belonging and recognition influence disadvantaged young people's plans for the future?
2. How do the young people's communities negate or create aspirations for social citizenship?
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3. How do youth programs engage with the aspirations that young people bring with them?
4. In which ways are disadvantaged young people's aspirational horizons challenged and reinforced in youth work settings?

This study builds on case studies to show how adopting an enriched notion of aspirations is productive in bringing out how young people themselves see their lives and priorities. I argue that the difference marginalisation makes to the development of social citizenship aspirations is best understood as a denial of valorised subjectivities for marginalised young people, and misrecognition of their search for alternative recognition and belonging. Further, I suggest that this social citizenship framework offers a different line of analysis for conceptualising how youth programs can intervene in the creation of youth inequality, by better incorporating the interaction between young people’s community of being, social structure, and human agency in program frameworks. This framework offers a more nuanced way to understand young people’s aspirations and the process that shapes these, which may assist the sector to direct activities towards addressing the institutionalised lowering of expectations that can appear in the meeting between disadvantaged young people and societal institutions.

**Thesis structure**

**Chapter Two, Three and Four** detail the thesis background and rationale. Two sets of literature will set the framework for this investigation. Firstly, socio-political debates on youth and how aspirations articulate and interact with possibilities will be presented (Chapter Two). Secondly, contemporary debates concerning how social science engages with broader understandings of social citizenship and the related concepts of recognition and belonging will be presented to build the conceptual frame for analysis in the second part of the thesis (Chapter Three). Through this I first show how the often reductionist and limiting ways disadvantaged young people are represented in policy and research leads to incomplete understandings of young people’s complex everyday lives and the basis on which they shape their social citizenship aspirations. Furthermore, I argue that instrumental understandings of the interface between material and social embeddedness and social citizenship aspirations lead to either victimisation or condemnation of marginalised young people. I will show how both of these understandings eventually culminate in low expectations towards disadvantaged young people, which goes on to shape how youth programs engage with young people. The alternative framework I built emphasising the necessity of acknowledging and supporting young people’s social citizenship development, not simply their educational transitions, makes possible a different type of critical social science of youth policy and programs, where the focus is on the mental conditions of young people’s self-realisation and social citizenship.
Chapter Four outlines the methodology, research design and process of data creation and analysis chosen to pursue the aim of the thesis. Given the aim of the study and the analytical framework employed, I make a case that an exploratory approach is suitable, using comparative cases studies with three groups involving qualitative in-depth interviews and group-based workshops. Three case studies with youth programs working with disadvantaged young people were undertaken, including workshops with young people from the programs. These three settings, programs and groups of young people will be presented providing contextual information for the analysis.

The findings of the study are divided in two major parts. Part A explores guiding research questions number 1 and 2, seeking to provide a rich understanding of the three groups of young people and their capacity to obtain relational, structural and cultural resources to drawn upon to gain belonging and recognition. Through this I show how a wider understanding of the young people themselves, their communities, their networks and the challenges they face is fundamental in comprehending the basis upon which they create their future citizenship aspirations. As such, in seeking to establish a broader understanding of disadvantaged young people’s aspirations, the analysis starts by investigating how the young people engage with the concept of their future, highlighting the difference that being disadvantaged makes to future orientations (Chapter Five).

The analysis then focuses on what shapes these young people's aspirational horizons. Firstly, their experiences at school (Chapter Six) is reviewed, as the school setting is one of the main societal avenues of inclusion and citizenship development for young people. Considering the challenges the young people face in achieving belonging and inclusion at school, the next chapter (Chapter Seven) deals with the question of how young people on the margins, who all experience different degrees of restriction on their access to conventional social citizenship, achieve recognition and belonging in their lives. The communities the participants are embedded within are analysed through the lens of citizenship, understood as spaces where alternative forms of belonging, identification, competencies and recognition are cultivated. How these communities shape, challenge and in many cases, entrench inequality is emphasised. Chapters Six and Seven thus show how the recognition, visibility and respect denied within educational institutions lead the young people to seek this elsewhere. Through this analysis, I aim to present a balanced view on the young people's communities, where the positive aspects as well as the potentially unhealthy or detrimental consequences for their future becoming are considered.

Based on the analysis of what shapes social citizenship aspirations for particular groups - through an exploration of the limits and possibilities of structural conditions and the personal and social resources accessible - the second part of the analysis turns towards addressing guiding research questions 3 and 4. These questions ask how youth programs engage with the aspirations young people bring with them. Here I show that certain
pedagogies and funding models are in danger of leading to misrecognition of the young person and a narrowing of their social citizenship aspirations. As such, Part B of the analysis turns towards youth programs to analyse how young people's aspirational horizons, and the ways these are acknowledged and worked with within the programs, either has the potential to expand horizons or, in other cases, reinforce limited self-understandings. In Chapter Eight I argue that narrowly designed youth programs aimed purely at educational transitions, neglect to address young people's social embeddedness and reproduce misrecognition and social exclusion.

Chapter Nine and Chapter Ten presents the final discussion and conclusion, turning towards the difference disadvantage makes to the development of social citizenship aspirations. In these chapters, lessons for policy and service delivery as well as the limitations and contribution of the study are highlighted. I suggest that the concept of social citizenship provides a lens which may assist the sector to direct activities towards addressing the institutionalised lowering of expectations. It facilitates a holistic understanding of what creates young people's self-understanding, values and attitudes and how these go on to shape aspirations in all facets of life ('social citizenship aspirations'), including education, employment, and personal relationships.

Overall, this study seeks to investigate how assumptions regarding the abilities of certain groups of young people come to place limits on their social citizenship aspirations. I link young people's struggles for belonging and social positioning with the aspirational status of social citizenship to suggest an alternative way of engaging with young people's aspirations within youth work settings. As such, the thesis investigates the opportunities for working with young people by recognising and acknowledging their social and structural constraints in a meaningful way, whilst also challenging and widening their aspirational horizons and envisioned social citizenship. The thesis now turns towards common constructions of disadvantaged young people and their aspirations, and how these provide a background to the approach taken in this thesis.
Chapter Two: Young People, Possibilities and the Making of Aspirations

Introduction

Individualistic explanations of social disadvantage have become increasingly influential in social policy debates in recent decades. In order to show how these perspectives harbour simplistic and erroneous assumptions about the reproduction of disadvantage, this chapter starts by investigating contemporary political priorities and normative assumptions as found within sociological literature and youth policy concerning disadvantage, disengagement and youth. It is the complications arising from such conceptualisations, and how these relate to inequality of social citizenship opportunities, that this study deals with. To undertake this investigation, the chapter engages with two interrelated bodies of sociological literature. Firstly, I explore the ways in which marginalised groups have been conceptualised within two dominant frameworks: the culturalist and structuralist strands (Murray and Lister 1996, Bullen and Kenway 2006, Macdonald, Shildrick et al. 2014). Secondly, I investigate what sociological literature tells us about how aspirations are shaped, nurtured or stunted, paying attention to how disadvantaged young people's aspirations have been understood within the structural and culturalist approaches.

Contemporary social policies habitually emphasise the need to lift the aspirations of disadvantaged young people (Brown 2013). A perceived lack of aspirations has frequently been used as an explanation of the poorer educational outcomes of certain groups of young people, such as working class or ethnic minority youth (as also noted by Smyth and Wrigley 2013). This ‘aspirational deficit’ thesis allocates the problem of low aspirations to the individual’s psyche and cultural upbringing, underplaying any inequalities in terms of exposure and opportunities (Payne 2012). Within this perspective little attention is paid to the actual decision-making process (Bennett, Glennester et al. 1992). Other researchers have challenged these assumptions, highlighting social factors shaping young people’s aspirations (Threadgold and Nilan 2009, Howard, Budge et al. 2010). However, such structuralist accounts have been critiqued for leading to deterministic understandings of aspirations and the lack hereof. Furthermore, within social policy and some academic discourses, aspirations are primarily understood in individualised ways.

Next, the chapter engages critically with key literature concerning how contemporary social policy frames disadvantaged youth and youth issues, and how youth programs are positioned and able to respond within this context. A combination of factors including long-term socio-structural, economic and demographic changes, and policy responses made to these factors, have created new uncertainties for all young people. Meanwhile,
young people who are experiencing disengagement from school or complicated labour market transitions are constituted as ‘at risk’, and understood as the problem both for themselves, and for society (France 2008, Mills and Pini 2014). Within contemporary youth studies, much debate is framed in terms of showing how the changes in policy, from Keynesian to neoliberal orientations, have failed to address the needs and concerns of many young people (Ziguras, Dufty et al. 2003, White and Wyn 2004, Savelsberg and Martin-Giles 2008, Giroux 2011, Wyn 2015). Additionally, sociological literature shows how contemporary youth policies are driven by narrowly framed concerns with ensuring social control and educational transitions (Smyth and McInerney 2012, Smyth, Robinson et al. 2013). However, how these policies are operationalised within youth work settings, and whether these initiatives correspond with the needs and concerns of many young people, has received less attention.

This study builds upon the literature, identifying how disadvantaged young people’s identities and aspirations are constructed within neoliberal policies, seeking to investigate if these limited ways of engaging with young people may serve to dilute the good that could come of youth work interventions. This chapter extends and develops the critique of the intensification of neoliberal approaches to youth practice, by highlighting a need for a more relational approach to understanding and working with young people facing challenges.

UNDERSTANDING MARGINALISATION - CULTURALIST OR STRUCTURALIST APPROACH

Understanding how societies frame the causes leading to social exclusion is critical, as these framings shape how the problem is defined, potential solutions, and consequently how social policy should respond. This study focuses on complications arising from these framings, and how these relate to inequality of social citizenship opportunities.

Several researchers have investigated and critiqued how conventional social problems become defined and maintained over time (O’Grady, Parnaby et al. 2010, Beddoe 2014, Jensen and Tyler 2015). Searching for such common understandings, Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong (2014) highlight two dominant explanations concerning socially excluded groups; the ‘welfare dependency story’ and the ‘deprivation story’. Along similar lines, a distinction can be drawn between approaches to poverty that subscribe to structuralist or cultural/behaviouralist explanations (Lister 1996, Bullen and Kenway 2006). These debates engage with the ‘classic polarity’ between structure and agency within sociology (Lister 2010). The argument presented in this section is that both perspectives carry limiting, essentialised and stereotypical beliefs about groups’ morals, values and aspirations. This
section will serve to frame the following discussion about how young people’s aspirations have been dealt with and theorised within these conceptualisations.

**Culturalist strand: The ‘Underclass’ and ‘welfare dependant’ families**

The term, ‘underclass’, is a highly contentious and controversial label used to describe marginalised groups. The term was spearheaded by neoliberal American social scientist Charles Murray (1984, 1990, 2013), arguing that “the problem for the ‘underclass’ is not economic poverty per se, but an impoverishment of cultural and civic values” (cited in Bullen and Kenway 2006: 141). The term was popularised in the US in the 1980s and the ideas started gaining traction in UK in the 1990s, in particular within popular media and tabloid outlets generating a common-sensual representation of poverty (Lister 1996). The discourse of the ‘underclass’, together with that of ‘welfare dependency’ and ‘lifters and leaners’, has been, and continues to be, influential in terms of defining a particular construction of poverty and welfare, in both the US and the United Kingdom, and has gained considerable currency in Australia (Bullen and Kenway 2006, Marston, McDonald et al. 2013, Mendes 2014) and New Zealand (Nolan 2007, Brown 2011, Beddoe 2014).

The ‘underclass’ thesis positions members of the underclass as responsible for their own plight (Murray 2013). Murray argues that although it was “post-war welfare policy [that] had encouraged the growth of a non-productive underclass” (MacDonald 1997: 8) it is now this group’s culture and values that reproduce and uphold social exclusion. Unemployment can thus be explained by the transmission of culture across generations, and this claim in particular has gained much traction within contemporary policy (Macdonald, Shildrick et al. 2014). As Jensen and Tyler note: ‘In a stunning reversal of the 1940s welfare imaginary, ‘welfare’ came to be understood across a wide range of political, social and cultural milieus as a cause of poverty and social problems” (Jensen and Tyler 2015: 472).

Disengaged or marginalised young people have provided the sub-text to much of the public anxiety about the ‘underclass’, and as such is recognised as a prime ‘underclass’ segment by culturalist and structuralist theorists alike (MacDonald 1997). The representation of ‘underclass’ youth has tended to highlight a range of anti-social behaviours and problems, arguing that this group is dangerous and in possession of a deviant moral compass. The three early warning signs, Murray cautions, for the development and spread of an ‘underclass’, is ‘illegitimacy’, violent crime, and labour market ‘drop-outs’ (Murray and Lister 1996).

“If illegitimate births are the leading indicator of an underclass and violent crime a proxy measure of its development, the definitive proof that an underclass has
arrived is that large numbers of young, healthy, low-income males choose not to take jobs” (Murray and Lister 1996: 121).

It seems it is the sexual practices of young women and the labour market attachment of young men under scrutiny here. In this, the ‘underclass’ becomes constructed as ‘a moral category’ (White 1996). Leading on from these debates is anxiety aimed at the supposedly inadequate social citizenship of these groups of young people (Hall and Coffey 2007).

Murray’s notion of the ‘underclass’ has been critiqued for questionable reliance on anecdotal evidence, and a narrow interpretation of statistical data (David 1996, Lister 1996). However, despite the lack of empirical evidence, the idea of ‘intergenerational cultures of worklessness’ and ‘workless families’ passing on their “cultures of worklessness” to their children, has become one of the dominant ideas of social politics (Macdonald, Shildrick et al. 2014: 200). Bullen and Kenway (2006) emphasise that within the Australian context, the widespread public support for more stringent welfare regulation and difficult eligibility criteria, is a consequence of such demeaning rhetoric towards recipients of welfare. Dehumanising groups, Lister argues, is more likely to lead to stigmatising policies, such as increasing ‘workfare’ policies and decreasing welfare, than the push for inclusive citizenship-based strategies (Lister 1996).

This section has argued how the framing of welfare-dependent families and communities in derogatory and radicalised ways create public anxiety (Beddoe 2014), which make it easier for majority society to see marginalised groups as beyond the bounds of common citizenship. The framing of social exclusion in terms of culture serves to legitimate moral regulation, stigmatisation and blaming of problematised groups. Stigma and blame are powerful tools for the reproduction of economic and social inequalities, as it focuses on the characteristics of victims, side-stepping structural explanations. However, much research has set out to invalidate the ‘underclass’ thesis, which is where this chapter turns next.

**Structuralist strand: The discrimination of lowered expectations**

As an alternative analysis of the causes leading to poverty and social exclusion, the structuralist perspective tends to see individuals faced with poverty as ‘victims of circumstances’ (MacDonald 1997: 13). The ‘deprivation story’ as coined by Macdonald, Shildrick and Furlong (2014) explains the culture of deprived communities in terms of structural disadvantage and the corresponding ‘cultural adaptation to social structural factors’ (MacDonald 1997: 17). Here the focus is on the long-term depression of opportunity structures and the effect this has on groups and individuals (White 1996, Bullen and Kenway 2006). Lister names the main structural disadvantages as; “unemployment, widening class differences, the exclusion of the very poorest from rapidly
rising living standards, and a hardening of public attitudes” (Lister 1996: 2). These factors combined separate groups of individuals from mainstream society, thereby creating social exclusion, and in many cases, a diminishment of avenues of social citizenship (Bullen and Kenway 2006). Research that falls within this explanatory perspective tends to avoid the cultural aspects of marginalised groups, favouring economic and social structural factors instead.

Much research within this strand has set out to invalidate the ‘underclass’ thesis (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004, MacDonald and Marsh 2004, Fletcher, Gore et al. 2008, Macdonald, Shildrick et al. 2014). For instance, Jeffrey and McDowell (2004) discuss the explanatory limits of much research that focuses on the cultural practices, outlooks, and lifestyles of the excluded, without including a broader analysis of social and economic changes and how these might affect places and groups. Similarly, MacDonald and Marsh argue that the ‘underclass’ approach misses the complexity of social exclusion by focusing too narrowly on individual deficits of people in poor neighbourhoods (MacDonald and Marsh 2004). The researchers contest the individualist perspective on, for example, school disengagement displayed by working-class pupils, by arguing that attitudes towards education need to be understood in view of the specific contemporary and historical conditions of a given neighbourhood. Furthermore, on the basis of qualitative research amongst young adults in deprived neighbourhoods, Macdonald and Marsh reject the ‘underclass’ thesis of the existence of a welfare dependant, work-shy, morally questionable subculture, having instead found strong commitment to the “social and moral value of working for a living among the participants” (MacDonald and Marsh 2005: 123). Against the claims of an ‘underclass’, a call for a more holistic understanding of youth transitions is made by the researchers, to better understand the processes of social reproduction in poor neighbourhoods.

Along similar lines, research among residents living in social housing rejects the notion of intergenerational ‘worklessness’ and concluded that the problem of the residents was not a lack of motivation or work ethic, nor was it finding work as such, but instead avoiding becoming caught up in cycles of low-paid, insecure jobs and underemployment (Fletcher, Gore et al. 2008). Brown (2013) reaches a parallel conclusion by arguing that the ‘deficit model’ based on blaming the victims, ignores much of the sociological evidence concerning social mobility. It appears that, despite decades of evidence against the descriptions of the poor as being culturally unique, the ‘underclass’ ideology exists as a ‘zombie’ argument, almost impossible to kill off (Macdonald, Shildrick et al. 2014).

**The need for alternative explanations of social reproduction of disadvantage**

Bullen and Kenway (2006) contend that debates on marginalised youth tend to become reductive, oscillating between patronising and pathologising young people. More so, both
the culturalist and the structuralist perspectives arguably reinforce assumptions about the moral character of certain groups of people; “although the structuralist approach is more complex and less punitive than the culturalist, and privileges structure over agency, it takes merely a different route to reach the same destination” (Bullen and Kenway 2006: 143). It seems both perspectives carry limiting, essentialised and stereotypical beliefs about societal groups’ morals, values and aspirations. Lister argues that the focus on a predetermined group defined as an ‘underclass’, whether this group is blamed or pitied, still might leave sociological research and policy blind to both the nuanced workings of structural forces pushing groups of people into poverty, but also to the “resourcefulness and resilience with which many of these ‘victims’ respond” (Lister 1996: 12).

Furthermore, both approaches to understanding disadvantage frame ‘community culture’ in problematic ways, whether seen as the cause or the effect of exclusion. Within the culturalist approach, young people who live in disadvantaged areas and who have depressed aspirations, are often explained by the so called ‘neighbourhood effects’; seeing the neighbourhood as “providing a key transmission mechanism between place-based disadvantage and socio-economic outcomes for adults” (Kintrea, St Clair et al. 2015). Structuralist studies in sociology and youth studies have highlighted that young people who remain in places where employment opportunities are limited, face restricted life chances and prospects of fulfilling their aspirations (Roberts 1995, Ball, Maguire et al. 2000, McDowell 2003). However, the impact of growing up in ‘locally bound’ communities (Harris 2013) appear to create a ‘stickiness’-to-place for many young people, despite the limited opportunities experienced there (Allen and Hollingworth 2013). This argument has frequently been taken up in policy discourses as evidence of the faulty aspirations of disadvantaged young people due to individual dispositions and an ‘unhealthy’ community culture (Reay 2013). It seems more attention still needs to be paid to develop new frameworks for understanding how relational embeddedness impacts upon the reproduction of disadvantage.

Influential critiques have been made of culturalists’ overemphasis on agency and choice (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006, Roberts 2010), as well as the tendency within the structuralist approach to avoid addressing the social reproduction of inequality due to its ambivalent connotations (MacDonald 1997). Instead, the need within sociological research for theories that offers a more complex position, which rethink structure and agency to conceptualise the process of marginalisation, is advocated (Furlong 2009). Although significant studies within sociology of youth have been done to understanding the social reproduction of disadvantage (Blackman 2005, Shildrick and MacDonald 2006, Wierenga 2009, Roberts 2010, Harris 2013, Bottrell and France 2015) attention still needs to be paid to develop new frameworks for understanding how relational embeddedness impacts upon the reproduction of disadvantage (Hollingworth 2015). This thesis builds upon this important literature, exploring the reproduction of marginalisation for young people, but
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turns towards young people’s avenues of recognition and belonging and how these shape their aspirations, which has received minimal attention from youth sociologists. This is done to develop a social and community-based framework for understanding the reproduction of youth inequality, which also acknowledges agency as an expression of how young people themselves create meaningful lives. Succeeding the discussion on the problematic framing of ‘community culture’, as either the cause or the effect of exclusion within selected ‘underclass’ scholarship, the following section investigates how sociology of youth has engaged with the question of the shaping of young people’s aspirations.

ASPIRATIONS - PROCESSES OF CHOICE AND POSSIBILITIES

The previous section sensitised us to the need for alternative conceptual apparatus to capture how structural inequalities are negotiated through cultural practices, within a framework that allows for recognition of the process through which young people are actively engaging in shaping their lives. I argue in this thesis that a relational focus on what shapes aspirations offer a productive lens for understanding the reproduction of youth inequality. This section seeks to build a foundation for this argument by investigating how the process of aspiring has been dealt with within youth studies.

Narrowing aspirational horizons

Within policy discourse, young people’s aspirations are habitually constructed as a silver bullet to achieving educational success and in turn social mobility (Allen and Hollingworth 2013, Reay 2013, Spohrer, Stahl et al. 2017). However, despite contemporary social policies’ recurrent focus on “lifting aspirations and increasing opportunities for those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds” (Brown 2013: 681), the language in which we comprehend aspiration is remarkably difficult to decode.

Within the culturalist approach to disadvantage, as described in the above sections, working-class students’ lack of upward social mobility is often explained by their supposed ‘aspirational deficit’, thus allocating the problem of low aspirations to the individual’s psyche and cultural upbringing, ignoring any inequalities in terms of exposure and opportunities (Payne 2012). Within this perspective little attention is paid to actual decision-making, other than the assumption that it involves a simple process of making choices (Bennett, Glennester et al. 1992).

A growing body of work critiques policy discourses concerned with raising aspiration, for their inadequate conceptualisations of aspirations (Archer 2010, Holloway, Brown et al. 2011, St Clair and Benjamin 2011, Allen and Hollingworth 2013, France and Roberts 2017). Much scholarship has found that meanings and visions of a good life are context-
dependent and often, ethnicity, class and gender specific (Willis 1977, Reay, David et al. 2005, Bottrell 2007, Bottrell 2009, Wierenga 2009, Hart 2012). Additionally, literature on youth continues to show how future thinking is significantly shaped by structure (Brannen and Nilsen 2002, Reiter 2003, Anderson, Bechhofer et al. 2005, Hockey 2009, Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2012, Bryant and Ellard 2015). Where more privileged young people may encounter opportunities facilitated by significant others such as parents or friends (Woodman 2011), disadvantaged young people have been found to both lack the cultural capital necessary to negotiate and plan for their futures, as well as the material and social network that might enable greater choices and opportunities (Threadgold and Nilan 2009, Howard, Budge et al. 2010).

For instance, McDowell’s research among working-class young men found that they aspired to the same things as middle-class youths and carry similar notions of ‘the good life’ (McDowell 2003). However, a strong relationship between negative labelling and unsatisfactory behaviour within educational settings was also found, leading many to discount the availability of an educational pathway for themselves personally. More so, disadvantaged young people’s meeting with the educational system habitually involves them facing institutionalised low expectations stemming from cynicism, fatalism and traditionalism (Bottrell 2007), which have been found to negatively impact upon their aspirations. Wyn and White (2000) argue that many young people experience their future possibilities as vague and uncertain, as their future hopes and dreams are rapidly foreclosed. As young people lose the ability to engage in long-term self-projections, they adopt a practical attitude of low expectations beyond the present. This confirms the affinities between structural conditions and cultural ideas of the good life, emphasising that it is not low expectations that constrain choice, but dominant cultural and socioeconomic conditions that induce lowering of future aspirations. Wierenga (2009) shows how cultural practices and community attitudes towards, for example, domestic labour, paid labour and gender-based citizenship, reproduce and reconstruct social inequality and confine what young people conceived of as their attainable future. On a similar note, Harris (2015) shows, using Bauman’s (1998) concept of ‘locally bound’ neighbourhoods, how local communities and the cultural practices associated with these, place boundaries on disadvantaged young people’s avenues of recognition and participation. Despite the strong sense of local belonging available, these communities offer limited alternative pathways or avenues of belonging (Harris 2015). This perspective is often taken up in popular, policy and academic discourse, to argue for the pathology of working-class culture and the supposed fixed and inflexible attachment to place (Skeggs 2004).

Spohrer and colleagues (2017) argue that policies aimed at ‘raising aspirations’ position working-class young people in terms of both ‘deficit’ and ‘potential’ (Spohrer, Stahl et al. 2017). This serves to problematise the behaviours and attitudes of young people which are
seen to lead to low aspirations, calling on young people to alter particular aspects of themselves. This suggests that the areas in need of altering reside within young people themselves, while also promising that if young people alter their emotions, attitudes and behaviours, they too can live the ‘good life’ of their middle-class peers. In this context, such ‘aspiration-raising’ policies can be understood as a strategy of ‘psychologisation’ of the individual, serving to keep “people in their place by promoting an unachievable fantasy of the ‘good life’” (Spohrer, Stahl et al. 2017: 11).

Seeking to better grasp the social aspects that are part of the reproduction of inequality, much scholarship has turned towards Bourdieu’s concept of social practice (Bourdieu 1984). Within such frameworks, young people’s aspirations are seen as embedded within their social connection and collective identities, which in turn influence the ways they envision their current and future place in society (Hart 2012, Allen and Hollingworth 2013, Bottrell and France 2015). ‘Habitus’ is a system of disposition, acting as a mediator between structure and practice (Bourdieu 1984). Local knowledge acts as ‘cultural capital’ due to its vital role in negotiating recognition and belonging. The logic of the field orients young peoples’ practical logic and cultural practices and shapes their self-understanding and aspirational horizons (France, Bottrell et al. 2013). As Bottrell and France note “decision-making in everyday life is not then a matter of free and rational choice, but is always delimited by the choices and positions available in the field” (2015: 160).

Bullen and Kenway (2006) also advocate using Bourdieu’s ideas on cultural capital to acknowledge the culture of disadvantaged communities and their generational synergies, without arriving at the same pernicious implications of the ‘underclass’ thesis. This thesis picks up on MacDonald’s (1997) and Bullen and Kenway’s (2006) suggestions that a less judgemental and more complex conceptual apparatus, able to address the social and cultural reproduction of inequality, is needed. However, although Bullen and Kenway’s use of subcultural capital goes some way in understanding the cultural currencies of disadvantaged young people, a Bourdieusian framework still arguably lacks the ability to capture the nuances of learning that facilitate change of habitus (Brown 1987, Jenkins 1992). Critiques of Bourdieu highlight the seeming structural determinism of this approach, seeing the adaptation of social practices as an essentially one-way process (Brown 1987, Jenkins 1992, Evans 2002). Where scholarship that adopts such Bourdieusian frameworks capture the limits placed on young people’s choices, and acknowledge that actors influence and re-shape their local world (field and habitus), they also often struggle to appreciate what drives these changes, as well as the resourcefulness and active labour undertaken by many disadvantaged young people. Where the work of Bourdieu has been significant in emphasising how lives are shaped by structure, and thus reproduce structural inequalities, young people’s agency and reflexivity can be lost in such analysis (Evans 2002, Roberts 2012). Cuervo and Wyn (2014) go on to argue that although measurements of the distribution of academic and labour market outcomes across
Chapter Two: Young People, Possibilities and the Making of Aspirations

populations are increasingly sophisticated, they offer little knowledge regarding “how difference is produced and how greater equality may be achieved” (Cuervo and Wyn 2014: 902).

While all of the above mentioned works make important contributions to understanding the social reproduction of disadvantage, when it comes to understanding the intersection between disadvantage and aspirations, this is still mainly conceptualised in individualistic ways. Aspirations are largely constructed as an individual attribute, a product of choice and agency, or a product of community culture producing a particular type of future orientation or habitus. However, neither culturalist nor structuralist perspectives are entirely sufficient to explaining the creativity, social embeddedness, and the subtlety involved in aspiring. Despite the policy and academic focus on young people’s aspirations, and the acknowledgement of the significance of aspirations for future life opportunities, the process of aspiring and what impacts, nurtures and stunts this process still needs further examination. In particular, this section has highlighted the still unmet need for a more holistic understanding of aspirations, one that neither pathologises local communities nor neglects young people’s social embeddedness.

The following section seeks to develop such a conceptualisation, by turning towards young people’s aspirational capacity. This focuses the analytical lens on young people’s capacity to aspire broadly, and the equal distribution of opportunities to explore one’s aspirations. I suggest such an understanding may be more useful in capturing the complex relationships between structural limits and possibilities, and subjective aspirations.

**Developing Aspirational Capacity**

The above sections argued that further theorising is needed to capture a more nuanced view on the intersection between disadvantaged young people’s aspirations and their community of being. This section develops the framework through which the process of aspiring will be analysed in this thesis, focusing upon the material, social, mental and relational resources that assist or hinder young people’s aspirational horizons. The concept of aspirational capacity will be employed to hone in on the process of aspiring.

Hodkinson and Sparkes make the observation that there is a significant knowledge gap regarding the ‘subjective realities’ involved in making career decisions, as well as the processes by which these choices are made (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997). They seek to create a framework that incorporates social and cultural factors within a model of decision making. Such a model will need to include a sophisticated understanding of how learning can lead to adaptation of preferences, as well as how “individual preferences [blend] with opportunity structures in a way that incorporates serendipity” (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997: 32). The authors argue that young people make pragmatically rational decisions
within their culturally-derived ‘horizons for action’ – as individuals can only ‘choose’ what they can ‘see’. Horizons for actions are influenced both by opportunity structures and by individual preferences. In this, decisions regarding one’s future are context-related and simultaneously highly influenced by significant others, family context, culture and life experience, shaped by opportunities and networks, and influenced by rationality as well as feelings (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997). In other words, important decisions regarding the future, such as career and education decisions, can best be appreciated “in terms of the life history of those who make them” (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997: 33).

Aspirations are goal-orientated and relate to both the future and the agency of the self (Hart 2012). Hart has developed a framework for comprehending aspirations and the individual’s capacity to build aspirations, by drawing on Sen (1999). Hart argues that “understanding the nature of aspiring tells us more comprehensively about the freedom an individual has to develop capabilities and to choose to pursue a future they have reason to value” (Hart 2012: 79). Hart argues that aspirations should be conceptualised as a meta-capability. That is, aspirations should be seen as both an important capability which individuals may enjoy to various degrees, but also understood in terms of the functioning of aspiring. The realisation of the ‘capability to aspire’ as a functioning, underpins the possibilities to develop numerous future capabilities. The ‘capability to aspire’ can be viewed as a freedom in its own right, namely a freedom to pursue a life deemed of value, which may be nurtured or stunted through relations with others including societal institutions. Here the analytical lens focuses on the multiplicity of aspiration as well as a person’s opportunities to develop their aspirations freely. Hart divides people’s ‘aspirational set’ into four overlapping fields - family/home, education, work and leisure/social life (Hart 2012).

Hart argues that the notion of adaption can be applied to aspirations as well as preferences. Out of fear of ridicule, many young people align their aspirations to those of their parents and community, to the aspirations felt appropriate according to their gender, class and ethnicity and to what they feel encouraged to aspire towards by societal institutions such as school and youth programs. ‘Adapted aspirations’ reflect the expectations and aspirations of significant others. These are the aspirations people feel they ‘ought’ to have. As Hart notes; “one of the most insidious forms of power is where individuals decide not to strive for certain goals because they deem themselves ineligible and thus become complicit in the exclusion” (2012: 92). In the process of adapting one’s aspirations to avoid ridicule and failure, a sense of autonomy and control is gained, making the process of adapted preferences and the power involved difficult to identify. Low expectations towards societal groups and marginalised students foster adapted aspirations. Hart’s finding that aspiration is both a capability and a functioning is of relevance to this study, as this underlines the importance of young people being supported to aspire in the first place, not just shown what to aspire towards.
While the language of low aspirations and the need to broaden aspirational horizons employed in this study might appear similar to that of neoliberal policies focusing on young people's 'aspirational deficits', there is an important difference. I argue, along with others, that the connection between limited social mobility and low aspirations cannot simply be fixed by teaching disadvantaged young people to broaden their aspirations (France and Roberts 2017, Spohrer, Stahl et al. 2017). However, despite the limited ways the framework of 'raising aspirations' have been understood and applied within policy discourses, we should not disregard working with and investigating young people's aspirations. Aspirations play a major role in determining longer-term outcomes for young people (Hart 2012) - not simply educational and labour market outcomes but outcomes relating to self-realisation, fulfilment and social citizenship. I argue in this study that the concept of aspirations offers a powerful lens for understanding how disadvantage affects young people's social citizenship. Further, when a broader concept of aspirations is employed, instead of a narrow focus on educational and labour market aspirations, the tendency to individualise aspirations can be avoided.

Following on from Hart (2012) and Hodkinson and Sparkes (1997), this study arrives at an understanding of aspirations as a contextualised, relational, non-linear and dynamic process, involving both young people's exposure and opportunities to explore, as well as an acknowledgement of the changeable nature of aspirations. This latter point challenges many policy assumptions, namely that once individuals express their aspirations, these remain stable over time, and reflect a rational weighing up of interest and skills. The understanding of aspirations developed for this study further stands in contrast to the 'deficit' understanding, which assumes that young people simply need to try harder and 'aim higher' to overcome their low aspirations.

**Summary: Understanding inequality through a relational framework**

As shown in the sections above, a discourse of 'low aspirations' is often used as an explanation for a lack of social mobility (Cummings, Laing et al. 2012). Within the 'underclass' thesis these low expectations are then portrayed as feeding into the 'culture of worklessness' (Page 2000). However, a similar understanding of the causes of young people's low aspirations can be reached by means of the structuralist perspective; frequently emphasising that unemployment can lead to pessimism, fatalism and low (work-related) aspirations. It seems that neither perspective leaves much room for the recognition of young people as actors in their own lives.

This thesis calls for a rethinking of how young people's aspirations are conceptualised both in government policy and academic research. Here this study contributes to and extends upon the growing critique of the asocial and aspatial discourse of aspiration (Allen and Hollingworth 2013) as well as the tendency to pathologise the impact
communities have on disadvantaged young people's aspirations (Evans 2016). I have proposed an alternative view of aspirations, that recognises both the limits placed on young people's aspirations by their 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997) and the importance of nurturing young people's capacity to aspire (Hart 2012). Following on from the review of how sociological literature understands the relationship between marginalisation and aspirations, the following sections engages with how these concepts have been framed within current social policy.

SOCIAL MOBILITY AND LIFE CHANCES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIA

A central aspect of youth research is highlighting how people's lives become shaped and formed by the larger societal context (Furlong and Cartmel 2007, Wierenga 2009, Woodman and Wyn 2015). A combination of factors including long-term socio-structural, economic and demographic changes, and policy responses to these factors, all impact on the circumstances young people face. These changes in structures of social integration (i.e. employment and education) are reflected in changes in what it means to become a 'successful' adult.

In a “rare backwards step in our long march of progress” (Rayner 2016: 8), young people are potentially going to be less well-off in the future than their parents' generation is today, falling behind the previous generation in “work, wealth and wellbeing” (Rayner 2016: 8). Substantial problems face young Australians, including structural labour market shifts, unemployment and underemployment; stagnating wage growth; obstacles to advancement within the workplace; declining real wealth and wage-growth; and big increases in debt (Smyth and Buchanan 2013, Wyn 2015). Consequently, many researchers have raised questions concerning the accessibility of traditional markers of adulthood in the current labour market and economic climate, highlighting for example, the often precarious and unpredictable early working experience of many young people (Mizen 2003, Wyn 2009). In addition, prolonged education, lack of access to affordable accommodation and extended periods of financial dependence means that many young people lack the capacity or the conditions to effectively navigate their transition to adulthood in the same manner as the previous generation (Dwyer, Stokes et al. 1998, Griffin 2001, White and Wyn 2004, Wyn and Harris 2004, Wyn and Woodman 2006, Furlong 2009, Arnett 2014). For these reasons, transition research has highlighted the increasingly fragmented, prolonged and difficult nature of (some) young people's transitions (Griffin 2001, Mizen 2003, Wyn 2009, Du Bois-Reymond 2012, McDowell 2012, Woodman and Wyn 2015).
Although these changes shape the pathways for all young people, for marginalised groups of young people, conventional markers of success are significantly harder to reach. A major finding emerging from Taylor, Borlagden, and Allan’s (Taylor, Borlagdan et al. 2012) longitudinal study highlights that although social and economic changes over the past 30 years have made life transitions more complex for all individuals, young people lacking the necessary familial, cultural and network resources face substantially more complexity and challenge. In other words, young people from high-income backgrounds with strong social and economic resources have more ‘choice’ and face less uncertainty than individuals from a lower income background (Taylor, Borlagdan et al. 2012).

Furlong and Cartmel (2007) argue that two seemingly contradictory processes can be observed within modern societies concerning youth transitions. Although structures on the one hand have become more obscure as individuals have been made more accountable for their labour market fate, the socioeconomic status of individuals still plays a large mediating role;

“On the one hand a trend towards differentiation and diversity which reflects the economic transformations which some interpret as leading to a ‘post-industrial’ society, and on the other, the maintenance of relatively stable, predictable transitions which help ensure that those occupying advantaged social positions retain the ability to transmit privileges to their offspring” (Furlong and Cartmel 2007: 36).

It appears that the same groups of young people predominantly from low socioeconomic neighbourhoods fall behind due to more complicated forms of disadvantage than school disengagement and weak labour market attachment (Andres and Wyn 2010, Lumby 2012, Robinson and Lamb 2012). Other studies have broadened this discussion by emphasising young people’s differentiated experiences of school and work (Dwyer, Stokes et al. 1998, Smyth and Hattam 2004, te Riele 2011) and the way in which patterns of participation and disengagement are classed, raced and gendered (Furlong and Cartmel 2009, Wierenga 2009, Rudd and Evans 2012). The following section turns towards research on the experience of education for disadvantaged youth, as education has the potential to play an ameliorating role for marginalised groups (Skattebol, Saunders et al. 2012).

School as a major site for social integration

School is an essential site for the development of capabilities and skills, and an arena where young people’s aspirations become shaped, nurtured and challenged. Education is, for most young people, part of the pathway to economic independence and social mobility in adulthood. Schools also play a vital role as a site for the development of mastery, recognition and the corresponding feelings of self-esteem, self-respect and social esteem.
(Honneth 1996). Although the last 40 years have seen important changes that impact on the ways in which social classes are reproduced, young people from low socioeconomic backgrounds, indigenous families, or youth living in rural areas continue to be the most disadvantaged in terms of their educational outcomes (Foundation for Young Australians 2013). In Australia, students overall perform above the OECD average, despite total expenditure on schooling being below the OECD average\(^1\). However disadvantaged students are less likely to do well than their counterparts in other developed countries (Zakharov 2012). Unlike most OECD countries, family background is the single most important determinant of academic achievement in Australia (Stokes, Turnbull et al. 2008). More so, educational research continues to highlight the negative school experiences reported by working class and marginalised young people (Willis 1977, Ball 1981, Mac an Ghaill 1996, O'Donnell and Sharpe 2000, MacDonald and Marsh 2004, Cuervo and Wyn 2014). Education, it seems, does not distribute opportunities and outcomes equally. Where advantaged students may experience education as a pathway to success and quality of life, disadvantaged students have been found to encounter subtle barriers entrenched within the school system, causing social exclusion and marginalisation (Deschenes, Cuban et al. 2001, Reay 2006, te Riele 2006, Stokes, Turnbull et al. 2008, Tilleczek, Laflamme et al. 2010, Myconos 2011, Furlong 2013). As noted by Deschenes and colleagues; “Schools as presently organised are much better calibrated to serve privileged groups than groups placed on the margin” (Deschenes, Cuban et al. 2001: 527).

Furthermore, educational research continues to document that teachers lower their expectations for low-achieving students (Sarra 2003, Rios, Witenko et al. 2010), and often harbour negative assumptions and unconscious racial biases about non-white students’ behaviours and abilities (Camilleri-Cassar 2013). Young people from a migrant background have been found to experience widespread problems within educational settings related to identity and communication, as schools were found to negate their cultural ways of knowing (McMurtry and Curling 2008, Camilleri-Cassar 2013). Worryingly, disadvantage appears to not only go unchallenged within educational institutions, but to become “enshrined and perpetuated through educational policy” (Reay 2006: 299). These intersecting marginalities come in the form of local and place-based disadvantage, arrested academic and social achievements, as well as lowered expectations from those around them (Bottrell 2007, Bottrell 2009, Camilleri-Cassar 2013, Bottrell and France 2015, Farrugia, Smyth et al. 2015).

Young people of today are living at a time of widespread and rapid social change. The social policies made in response to these changes are the focus of the next section. The

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\(^1\) Australia’s total expenditure on schooling (3.5% of gross domestic product) is just below the OECD average (3.6%) OECD 2011.
following sections engage critically with key sociological literature concerning how disadvantaged youth and youth issues are framed in public policy. This investigation provides a framework for the later chapters, when considering whether there is a disjunction between the policy assumptions pertaining to the needs of disadvantaged young people, and what young people themselves can tell us about their lives and priorities.

**SOCIAL POLICY - CITIZENSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES AND ACTIVE PARTICIPATION**

The theoretical terrain concerning disengagement and social exclusion for disadvantaged young people, and the policies made in response, is extensive (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Bessant 2003, Du Bois-Reymond 2012, Rayner 2016), as is the literature seeking to identify the interrelated factors in young people's lives, enabling or disabling positive schooling, work experiences and transitions (te Riele 2004, Bond 2010, France, Bottrell et al. 2013). This section aims to investigate what contemporary sociological literature tells us about dominant discourse of welfare initiatives for social inclusion, how these policy problems are conceptualised, and the problem to which the policy is constructed as a solution.

Tensions can be identified that are relevant to this study; firstly, the increasing shift towards individualisation in social welfare policy and how this appears to penalise vulnerable citizens, and secondly, how social and community influences are either pathologised or neglected within such discourses. And thirdly, the dual and often competing role of youth programs to both facilitate youth advocacy and ensure social integration. Tracing these tensions, this chapter raises the question whether contemporary policy assumptions correspond with young people's lives and priorities, paying attention to how community and social embeddedness is conceived.

*Individualisation of risk and vulnerability*

Despite the global crises in youth unemployment, the ideal representation of a linear pathway from school to paid, secure work coupled with the complementary process of heterosexual coupling, marriage and parenthood, is still prevalent within the Australian policy environment (te Riele 2006). When young people’s lives are measured against previous generations’ criteria of success, without a view to the different social, political and cultural reality of the present generation, the life patterns of young people become evidence of their faulty or failed transitions, and this view is reflected in much social policy (Hall, Williamson et al. 2006, Wyn and Woodman 2006, Blatterer 2010, Hall, Coffey et al. 2010).
Several researchers, employing a ‘governmentality’ framework, have argued that government policies operate with a normative construction of the successful, self-governing, entrepreneurial subject, able to negotiate the economic and cultural demands of neoliberal societies (Smyth, Robinson et al. 2013, Farrugia, Smyth et al. 2015). This normative centre allows policy regimes to identify and govern populations that deviate from this pathway. Young people, who are experiencing disengagement from school or complicated labour market transitions, are therefore constituted as the problem, both for themselves and for society. Certain youth behaviours and dispositions place at risk the development of particular ideal forms of future adult identities and the construction of “the array of psychological, cultural and sociological systems of thought that imagine the adult self as an entrepreneurial Self” (Kelly 2007: 25). Here, the youth-at-risk discourse functions as a representation of who young people as adults are supposed to become, by highlighting what young people are at risk of not becoming (Kelly 2007). Kelly argues that the general goal of most youth interventions is to transform the cultural resources of the disengaged young person to better align them with the development of an entrepreneurial subject. In this instance, a normative notion of what it means to be an adult, shape and narrow the opportunities for participation offered to young people (Brady 2007).

The Deficit Approach - Young people at-risk and as-risk

The ‘youth-at-risk’ discourse has emerged over the past two decades to describe young people who do not follow the ‘conventional’ path into adulthood, supplanting older categories such as delinquent, deviant and maladjusted youth (Kelly 2007). At-risk young people are identified as a particular group for intervention, positioned both as complicit in the reproduction of intergenerational poverty and social disengagement, and as sources of hope for interrupting such patterns.

From the youth-at-risk rhetoric, followed the development of risk-based research. This new scientific representation of youth-at-risk concentrates on assessing young people’s predisposition towards agreed upon problem behaviours (namely substance abuse, early school leaving, unemployment, and early parenthood) and a more intensive focus on the behaviours of known ‘vulnerable’ groups. This approach has been deemed a ‘deficit approach’ as the focus is on measuring and managing identified risk factors in order to avoid undesirable social outcomes (Bond 2010). This emphasis shifts the understanding of disadvantage from a product of structural inequality in society to an attribute or deficit of the individual (France 2008, Mills and Pini 2014) in line with a culturalist perspective on disadvantage.

The critique aimed at the deficit approach is that young people become defined in limited and instrumentalist ways (Kerka 2003, Bond 2010). Furthermore, at-risk status implies “probability, not explanation and this ambiguous label creates and perpetuates low
expectations” (Kerka 2003: 1). Further, the identification of some young people as being ‘at risk’ or ‘vulnerable’ has been criticised as leading to stigmatisation (te Riele and Gorur 2015), as these frames shape the ways in which we understand young people, potentially limiting their experience of agency (Brown 2011). Others have emphasised the importance of recognising the fluidity of risk, rather than seeing people as containers of risk. Tilleczek (2011) suggests that the analytical lens should rather be aimed at the process through which young people are placed at risk and end up living in risk situations. As Barlow, Kirkpatrick et al. (2005) highlight: “distinct differences exist between ‘risk’ as a lived social experience as opposed to a scientific concept” (Barlow, Kirkpatrick et al. 2005: 208).

More so, such terminology can be used to justify state intervention in citizens’ lives, as intervention becomes legitimated on the premise that the family members are vulnerable and dependent, due for example, to their inclination towards certain behaviours and likelihood of victimisation and/or poor outcomes (Daniel 2010, Brown 2011). How socioeconomic changes and policy reforms dovetail to create new forms of social exclusion for young people will be further explored in the following section.

**Constructing and governing vulnerable communities**

Over the last two decades the Australian Government has combined a fiscal policy approach reliant on neoliberal economics, with social policies emphasising participation, citizenship, inclusion and building community (Savelsberg and Martin-Giles 2008, McLeod 2012, Batsleer 2013). The policy agenda has a strong focus on targeting intergenerational disadvantage and improving the participation and engagement of ‘at-risk’ youth (McLeod 2012). However, Wyn (2015) argued that this approach continues to intensify the blaming and punitive approach to young people.

Articulating young people as responsible for managing a range of risks associated with schooling, employment, sexuality and peer relations has particular consequences for marginalised groups and has been criticised for penalising vulnerable citizens by ignoring the special challenges faced by some groups (Bessant 2001, Bessant 2003, Kerka 2003, Kelly 2007, Barber 2009, Black, Walsh et al. 2011). For instance, Billett, Thomas et al. (2011) found, analysing young people’s transitions from school to work, that the growing emphasis on the individual in the relations between persons and society, fails to ameliorate the lack of access to cultural and social capital experienced by some young people. A similar finding was made by Savelsberg and Martin-Giles (2008), arguing that the young people most in need are most likely to be subjected to punitive interventions. As they note, “rather than recognise and ameliorate the exclusionary dynamics, many youth policies exacerbate the problems, engaging in the ‘politics of enforcement’” (Savelsberg and Martin-Giles 2008: 29). Here socioeconomic changes and policy reforms combine to create new forms of social exclusion for young people.
This shift towards individualism in welfare policy has an interesting paradox at its core, creating a tension between autonomy and paternalism. The policy rhetoric on the one hand urges citizens to become empowered, autonomous and enabled. On the other hand, citizens are not trusted to identify their own issues or come up with appropriate solutions. Against this preoccupation with individualising responsibility and disciplining young people who are experiencing school disengagement, Mills and Pini suggest that a more appropriate response would involve an understanding of the oppressions and injustices many of them face on a daily basis (Mills and Pini 2014: 271).

Citizenship and youth participation agendas

Alongside notions of risk and responsibility, citizenship is increasingly a part of today’s political vocabulary. In Australian, policy makers regularly announce the need for younger generations to be included in the political culture, for example through such practices as compulsory civics and citizenship education (Billett, Thomas et al. 2011). Also, most State and Federal governments have developed policies and programs seeking to engage young people and encourage them to become active citizens (Brady 2007). However, within these policy discourses, citizenship is often conflated with participation.

As part of this development, an increase in community programs and place-based initiatives have emerged, aiming at cultivating participation and generating local solutions to local social problems (Mendes 2014). These programs seek to involve young people in community building and development under the mantra that increasing youth participation will lead to empowered young citizens (Savelsberg and Martin-Giles 2008, McLeod 2012). Following this line of reasoning, social issues are best addressed by developing policies that encourage young people to re-connect, re-engage and re-integrate into society, particularly the local community. Against these claims it has been suggested that a majority of the policy responses aimed at increasing youth participation are aimed at surveillance and control (Bessant 2003, Barber and Naulty 2005, Barber 2009, Edwards 2010, Black, Walsh et al. 2011).

Furthermore, within the rhetoric of increasing youth participation lies an implicit notion of young people seeming lacking information, motivation, and skills to participate in civic society (Harris, Wyn et al. 2007). Similarly, disadvantaged young people’s citizenship is understood as deficient and lacking. Hence, McLeod argues that the language of citizenship within neoliberal social policy constructs a “powerful axes of distinction between competent and incompetent youth citizens” (McLeod 2012: 12), obscuring social categories such as gender, ethnicity or class as relevant to understanding patterns of youth marginalisation. If these categories are considered, they are considered in the context of linking disadvantage to poor family and community functioning, rather than structurally positioned sites of complex social, economic and material relations. As such, this
framework corresponds with the culturalist ‘underclass’ thesis described previously in this chapter.

Bessant (2003) expresses deep concern with the policy discourse that positions participation of disengaged youth as the remedy to, and prevention strategy for, a raft of social problems. This is especially so, because the notion of youth participation becomes equated with returning to, or remaining in education, training or employment, undertaking voluntary work or being involved in youth sports. In effect, participation becomes about the increased management of young people’s ‘transition to adulthood’ rather than increased opportunities for democratic participation (Levitas 2005, Woodman and Threadgold 2014), potentially excluding other types of participation that young people might value more highly. In this, limited understandings within social policy of legitimate participation frame some young people’s way of participating as flawed (Lister 1998, Vromen 2003).

Although a majority of youth related policies focus on youth participation and youth citizenship as the solution, the practical question of how young people will be engaged and empowered to participate is largely ignored. In this context, it is valuable to question what is meant by youth participation when used by government and non-government organisations. Here, Vromen (2003) argues that policy representation of an active citizen provides “limited scope for either the recognition of existing means of participation and engagement, or the opening up of public debate on how active, public involvement by young people ought to be facilitated” (Vromen 2003: 80). Further, considerations regarding alternative forms of valuable contributions, types of citizenship, and forms of participation that might enhance young people’s sense of belonging, fall by the wayside.

**Summary**

A combination of factors including long-term socio-structural, economic and demographic changes, and policy responses to these factors, has created new uncertainties for all young people. The sociological literature shows that the policy changes made in response to these economic and social changes, from Keynesian to neoliberal orientations, have failed to address the needs and concerns of many young people and have further entrenched social exclusion (White and Wyn 2004, Savelsberg and Martin-Giles 2008, Giroux 2011, Pless 2014, Black and Walsh 2015).

This section has highlighted the problematic framing of contemporary youth issues within the social inclusion, citizenship and participation agenda. The interventions based on this agenda fine-tune the classifications of exclusion and, as we have seen in the sections above, render many young people and their immediate local communities responsible for their own predicament. In this, the ‘social’ is divorced from understandings of
disadvantage, furthering the individualisation of risk and blame. In-so-far as the social and material aspects of the reproduction of inequality is discussed, it is purely in the context of linking disadvantage to poor family and community functioning, rather than structurally positioned sites of complex social, economic and material relations.

This section has argued that citizenship within contemporary policy discourses is narrowly defined as participation, which again is narrowly understood as educational and labour market participation. Further, the strong economic focus on young people's transition to an economically productive adulthood within social policy tends to crowd out other significant issues for young people, thus potentially creating a disjunction between forms of citizenship valued in policy and the realities of the forms of social citizenship available to young people.

Sociological literature is rich in knowledge about contemporary youth policies driven by narrowly framed concerns with educational transitions. However, this literature review has revealed several questions relevant to this thesis, which have received less attention. Namely, how do the narrowly framed concerns with educational transitions within contemporary youth policies become operationalised within youth work settings? In which ways do the limited social citizenship imaginations found within social policy initiatives shape how youth programs are able to work with young people? How do these types of interventions affect young people's social citizenship aspirations? Further, the review has highlighted a need to investigate how these social, economic and policy changes relate to the lived realities of disadvantaged young people (Evans 2002, Allard 2007, Andres and Wyn 2010, Pless 2014), and how they interact with young people's own perspectives and their hopes for the future. Building on from these questions, the following sections turn to how youth programs are positioned within this policy environment.

YOUTH SERVICES – AGENTS OF CHANGE OR AGENTS OF SOCIAL CONTROL

In many instances when young people face challenges or fall behind, youth programs intervene, seeking to ensure a more equal distribution of opportunities. Most youth programs aim to broaden horizons and expand opportunities and aspirations whilst ensuring a type of integration into mainstream adult society. In this context, youth programs can be seen as a meeting point between societal expectations and young people's aspirations.

The section highlights how the aim of youth work has gone from being about the social participation and informal learning of young people, to a focus on mainly labour market participation, and measurable and accredited outcomes. How these changes come to
impact upon the work youth programs can do with young people will be explored in the empirical chapters.

The promise of youth work

Although there is no single, conclusive model of youth work, the overall aim is to engage holistically with young people by understanding them as social beings whose lives are shaped in negotiation with their social context (Bessant and Watts 1998). Youth settings in general, despite the variety of work performed, are venues where ‘tacit learning’ for citizenship takes place, as young people are supported and encouraged in their transition towards social majority (Hall, Williamson et al. 2010). Contemporary youth work practice emphasises the development of expressions of social citizenship such as self-confidence, inter-personal skills, community involvement and active participation (Coussée, Williamson et al. 2010). Youth work differs from other social welfare practice by placing the young people and their social context at the centre. As Sercombe (2010) notes: “youth workers hold in common their commitment to give priority to the interests of young people and to work not only towards the transformation of the young person in their social context, but also the transformation of that context” (Sercombe 2010: 27). Operating within a rights-based framework, activities aim at providing opportunities and equality of access and involvement which “widens horizons and invites social commitment” (Griffin and Luttrell 2011: 11).

Williamson (2011) speaks of the dual, somewhat opposing, roles of youth work practice between emancipation and control. On one hand, assisting young people in their ‘transition’ to adulthood, on the other providing a platform for advocacy. In other words, simultaneously seeking to assist young people to ‘fit’ smoothly into mainstream society, whilst also facilitating a forum where young people “can discuss and make sense of the society they live in, and […] consider the institutional barriers that may obstruct the realisation of their aspirations” (Williamson 2011: 28). As such, youth workers take on the role as both agents of change and agents of social control. This tension has been characterised as a conflict between young people’s social circumstances and aspirations, i.e. the youth ‘lifeworld’, and the demands and expectations of public policy or the ‘system’ (Coussée 2012). For instance, the focus on individual targets within neoliberal social policy strongly favouring the needs of the system world has been criticised for merely reinforcing existing inequalities, as it serves to mainly ensure social control (Milbourne 2009). Youth work operating without an aim of undertaking social critique and engagement in social change appears to be doomed to simply repeat and intensify patterns of social division and inequality (Batsleer 2013).
How youth programs are responding to the social policy changes

Youth service has historically had an education agenda, often linked to enhancing forms of citizenship, connecting young people with society and reducing risky behaviour (Roth and Brooks-gunn 2003, Durlak, Weissberg et al. 2010). However, as the framing of youth-at-risk and youth citizenship gain priority, services seeking to assist young people are increasingly required to refocus and rethink the work performed, whilst operating under increasing funding and accountability pressures (Sercombe, Omaji et al. 2002).

Youth work has benefitted from the increasing recognition from a social policy perspective of young people as citizens in the making (Milbourne 2009, Batsleer 2013). Yet this has often been accompanied by new impositions that are in tension with a broad understanding of citizenship, such as the increase of the imposition of targets in relation to social policy (for example, targets concerned with anti-social behaviour and school reengagement), work targets specifically aimed at NEETS (Young People Not in Education, Employment and Training), and a strong emphasis on individual case management (Batsleer 2013). It has been argued that the introduction of specific targets in youth work re-prioritises youth work to an outcome- and product-focused, as opposed to person-centred and process-focused, practice (Davies 2008, Ord 2016). As Batsleer argues (2013: 291), “universal aspirations for social education were now clearly and explicitly mediated through the performance management of targets”. Moreover, youth workers are increasingly drawn into the formal surveillance of young people (Batsleer 2013, Coussée 2016, de St Croix 2016).

This emphasis on targets combined with the short-termism in the funding of projects, produce individualised, brief interventions, rather than the building up of relationships (Batsleer 2013: 288), and this has implications for how youth programs are able to work with young people’s social environment. When the main goal of youth work becomes the “smooth integration into existing society”, broader questions about the position of young people in society, and their social citizenship, becomes neglected (Coussée 2016: 86).

Youth participation and the ‘strength-based approach’

The individualised focus within youth work, aiming at developing the skills to participate in society and role modelling ‘good citizenship’ has been widely criticised (Bessant 2003, Taylor 2010, Black 2011, Williamson 2011). Smyth and Wrigley maintain that instead of confronting current structures that exclude young people from power, many youth programs aimed at ‘youth participation’ focus on creating opportunities to exercise power within mainstream society (Smyth and Wrigley 2013). Along similar lines, Taylor (2010) argues that these types of programs “discourage certain kinds of activism amongst young people, to encourage a faith in formal decision-making structures, and to promote an
investment in the status quo for a small and relatively privileged group of young people” (Taylor 2010: 8). Furthermore, an individual focus on young people developing the necessary skills to be able to participate implicitly reinforces a view of non-participating ‘disengaged youth’ as inadequate (Zyngier 2003, Zyngier 2008, Smyth and McInerney 2012).

On this, Cousséé, Williamson et al. (2010) distinguish between ‘transit zone’ and ‘forum zone’ approaches in youth work. The transit zone approach is focused on making young people adapt to societal expectations, and work is often aimed at individual outcomes. In contrast, forum zone youth work focuses on providing a platform for advocacy, critical engagement and is aimed more at individual and social learning processes. Unfortunately, often programs aimed at working-class and disadvantaged youth tend to fall under the transit zone, whereas highly educated, middle-class youth receive support to self-organise their youth work forums. The counterproductive effect of this division is that disadvantaged youth, despite the clear emancipatory possibilities of transit work, are taught to adjust to existing social boundaries and power relations, while middle-class youth receive a form of social education: “Instead of closing the gap between the haves and the have-nots, youth work tends to widen the gap” (Cousséé 2012: 11).

Although youth work traditionally opposes ‘deficit’ models of young people (Griffin 1993), the neoliberal focus on correcting anti-social behaviour and encouraging school reengagement often serve to reinforce rather than oppose this at-risk narrative of particular groups of young people. As also noted by Jeffs and Smith (1999):

“When pleading for funds they tend to emphasize both the dangers posed by unmonitored youth as well as the failings and inadequacies of young people. They have often embraced the concept of ‘underclass’ and exaggerated the negative, conjuring up a collection of euphemisms for inadequacy such as 'status zero youth', 'at risk', 'disaffected', and 'excluded'. The face offered to young people and colleagues is different. Here the talk is of empowerment, engagement and participation— not control and inadequacy” (Jeffs and Smith 1999: 62).

In this framing of young people, the cultural deprivation theory, as found within the underclass thesis, is unmistakable. This in turn encourages individual intervention strategies as opposed to a broader intervention targeting structural barriers (Bessant 2003, Taylor 2010, Black 2011).

As a reaction to the deficit model of youth transition, the sector has seen a shift from a problem-based towards a strengths-based discourse (Bond 2010). This alternative approach places emphasis on young people’s varied strengths, by conceptualising youth as a resource whose potentials needs to be nurtured for both social and economic purposes (Kerka 2003, Wyn and Harris 2004, Bond 2010, Billett 2012). This strength-based approach
Chapter Two: Young People, Possibilities and the Making of Aspirations

involves recognising the resilience and capacities of individuals, rather than their limits. This ideally includes engaging more holistically with young people, appreciating the interaction between individuals and their environment as well as the structural, cultural, class and gender related factors that might affect a person's ability to engage with society (Myconos 2011).

The aim of youth work under this approach is to foster the psychological and social wellbeing of young people and address unmet or unfulfilled needs (Bond 2010, Myconos 2011). However, the promise of such an approach might be compromised for youth programs, when also operating under short-term funding regimes that favour measurable outcomes, as this study will argue, drawing on the data presented in the coming chapters. Simply focusing on young people's strengths is arguably just as reductive as focusing on their at-risk status, if the issue of unequal opportunity structure is ignored. The tension lies in working holistically in accordance with the ideology of the strengths-based approach, whilst also ensuring pre-determined goals and outcomes.

Summary

What makes youth work distinct, as opposed to other social welfare professions, is that the young person and their social context is the aim of engagement. This section has highlighted that despite youth work practice being a social practice mediating between young people's aspirations and societal expectations, the dual task of negotiating youth 'life world' and the 'system' is often fraught with tensions, contradictions and paradoxes, in particular within neoliberal policy environments. When working with disadvantaged young people or other 'vulnerable' groups, this tension between accepting diversity and fostering social cohesion becomes heightened. Youth work must find a way to avoid excessively individualised work, purely focusing on supporting individuals at a personal level, or too instrumentally aimed work, expected to deliver a range of social goals such as targeted educational reengagement programs. Meanwhile neither of these two approaches could be considered effective youth work practice (Williamson 2011).

The shifts in the understanding of disadvantage within neoliberal social policies, from a product of structural inequality in society to an attribute or deficit of the individual, has facilitated an increased imposition of social policy targets (such as those concerned with anti-social behaviour and school reengagement), and a strong emphasis on individual case management within youth work. In this dynamic, the aim of youth work has gone from being about social participation to a focus on mainly educational transitions and labour market participation. More so, as citizenship becomes reduced to financial independence and self-sufficiency, and participation is defined as labour market participation, programs are increasingly focusing narrowly on developing the skills and capabilities individual's need to interact with and gain from current structures in society. These types of foci may
serve to push out other concerns and circumstances young people might face. In an environment of targeted funding and social anxiety aimed at ‘at-risk’ youth, how young people and youth workers themselves define youth interests, concerns and priorities easily becomes obscured (Coussée 2012).

Helping disengaged young people improve their circumstances themselves, by providing them with essential skills and resources, is of course, essential. However, without considering the social and economic environment (e.g. the nature and conditions of the labour market and educational system) which young people encounter, the danger becomes narrowly viewing disadvantage and inequality as the consequence of individual action. By focusing strategies at the level of education and employment, deeper questions concerning initiatives most likely to make a meaningful difference to young people’s lives are negated. These simplistic ways of understanding young people’s lives, their challenges and what is important to them may lead to limited or misguided welfare interventions, not able to meet the needs of young people. These are among the concerns this study seeks to investigate.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has argued that both the structural and cultural perspectives are in danger of harbouring essentialised and stereotypical beliefs about societal groups’ morals, values and aspirations. This chapter has highlighted the need for frameworks that offers a reconsideration of the interconnection between community embeddedness and individual agency, to conceptualise the process of marginalisation in less reductionist ways. The chapter drew out several concerns regarding the often reductionist way young people from marginalised groups are represented in contemporary social policy discourses, by focusing on either their deficit or at-risk status or simply flipping this to a ‘strength’ focus. For instance, the ways contemporary Australian social policy constructs a new public debate around welfare recipients and disadvantaged young people based on narrow notions of individualism and self-reliance. Despite the language of empowering citizenship rights progressively more common in youth policy, narrow assumptions around risk and deficits are still prevalent, leading to a reproduction of the representation of youth as lacking and ‘transitional’ pegged against a framing of adulthood as complete and stable. Although much scholarship within the sociology of youth has argued against this framing of marginalised groups, the underlying ideas are still prevalent in contemporary social policies.

Within the youth policy framework, the ‘social’ has been marginalised. In-so-far as the social embeddedness of young people is considered, this is mainly used to link disadvantage to poor family and community functioning, rather than structurally
positioned sites of complex social, economic and material relations. Following this line of reasoning, policy discourses concerned with raising aspiration, locate these as both asocial and aspatial. As these policy frameworks fail to accurately recognise the needs of disadvantaged young people, they are unlikely to alleviate existing inequalities. Much sociological literature has critiqued dominant neoliberal aspirations discourse for simply providing a smokescreen for issues of unequal opportunity structure. Nevertheless, I argue that investigating aspirations in a broad sense, such as this study aims to do, provides a useful way of understanding how disadvantage impacts upon life chances.

Following on from these concerns, this study will develop a broader framework for thinking about aspirations as social citizenship aspirations. In the coming chapter I argue that understanding young people’s search for enhanced belonging, recognition and avenues of mastery are essential to understanding how young people navigate their complex social world. A richer notion of youth social citizenship aspirations may provide a more holistic framework for understanding young people's choices and their aspirations by redirecting attention from deficiencies in young people or their communities, to a critical reflection of how young people create meaningful lives and long to be part of society.
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Introduction

Chapter Two highlighted the need for alternative conceptual frameworks that open different lines of analysis concerning the reproduction of youth inequality, better able to incorporate the interaction between young people’s community of being, social structure and human action. Although many researchers in youth studies have developed ‘middle-ground’ perspectives on the structure versus agency debate, work is still needed in youth studies to develop frameworks that can capture the cultural or relational aspects of the reproduction of inequality, without either moralising or victimising young people.

This chapter engages theoretically with the intersection of citizenship theory and sociology of youth, seeking to contribute to contemporary debates on disadvantaged youth and the making of citizens. Where the framework of citizenship has been applied within youth studies, this has often been done to problematise young people’s capacity to exercise their formal entitlements of citizenship (Lister 1989, Jones and Wallace 1992, Harris 2015), or to investigate youth cultural and leisure practices as new forms of civic participation (Vromen 2003). Additionally, when the framework of citizenship has been utilised within youth studies, a rights-based model of citizenship is applied, focusing on youth participation, empowerment and political socialisation (Wierenga, Wyn et al. 2008, McLeod 2012). Where such scholarship is important in recognising young people’s expression of social citizenship in times of change, this research turns towards investigating how social citizenship aspirations becomes shaped and limited for disadvantaged groups. This is done to generate more complex knowledge about the difference disadvantage makes to the development of social citizenship aspirations.

A richer notion of young people’s social citizenship aspirations is developed in this thesis. This relational framework of citizenship evolved by following the participating young people’s longing for a meaningful life, their search for place, pursuit of recognition and striving for a community where they are deemed of value. The argument presented here is that the ways in which young people want to be a part of society (social citizenship aspirations) are developed through feelings of belonging and avenues of recognition. Using this set of concepts, it becomes possible to conduct a more nuanced type of social criticism, where the focus is not only on the material conditions, but also the equal distribution of avenues for self-realisation, belonging and social citizenship. Such an approach allows for an investigation of how social position shapes young people’s lives.

Drawing upon Axel Honneth’s (1996) concept of recognition this study analyses how structural, cultural and relational embeddedness simultaneously constitutes, enables and limits expressions of agency, belonging and social citizenship. Each of these theoretical
concepts are discussed below. Selected theorising on citizenship relevant to this study is included to provide theoretical context for the further analysis of the imaginations of youth social citizenship.

SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP IN MODERN SOCIETIES

It is widely acknowledged that the transition from youth to adulthood for today’s youth is different than for previous generations (Furlong and Cartmel 2007, Hall, Coffey et al. 2010). Although there might not be agreement concerning the outcomes of changes in youth transitions, as young people today are affected in different way by a diverse set of circumstances, it is generally agreed that the process of coming of age has become increasingly expanded and complex (Woodman and Wyn 2015). A growing body of academic commentary argues that the significant cultural and economic changes that have occurred between generations have altered the concept of citizenship (Hall, Williamson et al. 2006, Bennett, Wells et al. 2009, Hall, Coffey et al. 2010, Kyriacopoulos 2011). These transformations brought on by economic, social and cultural changes cause a loosening of previously taken for granted transitions into adulthood and full citizenship. In an increasingly global and multicultural world, the notion of citizenship becomes complex, multi-layered and often contradictory. Young people, being at the forefront of emerging and shifting citizenship, experience these changes the most. However, as citizenship is traditionally equated with adulthood, young people are often ignored within both classical theories of citizenship and newer citizenship literature. Additionally, research on youth citizenship has less commonly considered the impact of disadvantage on young people’s experiences and practices of citizenship (Kennelly and Dillabough 2008, Wood 2016).

The concept of social citizenship highlights the importance of achieving the freedom to function in a manner that reasonably expresses the way young people choose to be. It is a key theme in comparative welfare state literature (Fraser and Gordon 1994, Lister 2005, Lister 2007). As discussed in Chapter Two, the importance placed on economic independence and labour market participation for the achievement of full citizenship status, places many disadvantaged young people’s social citizenship in an ambiguous status. Although the formal political and civic rights that people hold changes when they turn 18, when it comes to social rights, it is less clear-cut. The ambiguity concerning young people’s social rights stem from the often limited autonomy of young people. Essentially, the time of achieving independence no longer corresponds with the time of achieving autonomy in the post-war political economy, on which many of the assumptions of citizenship are based. Further, access to secure employment and economic independent in capitalist democratic societies is of paramount importance for the experience of citizenship (Lister 1989). Although the status of many young people’s citizenship can be
considered inadequate, most go on to attain the rights of ‘full citizenship’ in time. Yet, for many marginalised young people their status as ‘abject citizens’ may continue, and they may “remain indefinite, second-class citizens even into adulthood” (Sharkey and Shields 2008: 240).

Traditionally citizenship debates have asked whether citizenship should be understood as an individual relationship between the person and the state, as Liberal theory has tended to see it, or whether the relationships has to be understood as mediated by the community, as Civic-Republican and Communal theorists argue (Oldfield 1990). In these debates, citizenship is seen as involving corresponding rights and political obligations, the former prioritising the individual, the latter the interests of the wider community. Or articulated differently, debates concerning whether citizenship should be understood as a status or a practice (Lister 1997). Liberal theorists argue for the idea that citizenship as a status entitles individuals to a definite set of universal rights granted by the state. Here the individual citizen is seen to act rationally to advance their own interests, leaving the state the role of protecting citizens in the exercise of their rights. The role of the individuals is limited to one of being passive recipients of specific rights conferred via legal status. A common critique of Liberal theory concerns the lack of distinction between the formal entitlements of citizenship and the capacity to exercise these entitlements, a critique of relevance for this study. For instance, there may exist a significant disparity between disadvantaged young people’s formal rights and their capacity to exercise these rights to their full potential. Furthermore, as Manning and Ryan (2004) point out, newer neoliberal public discourse has shifted the emphasis from “universal entitlement” to “mutual obligation”. As has been discussed in Chapter Two, this shift in focus has implications for disadvantaged groups, as concerns with their ability to participate fall by the wayside in favour of a more punitive approach stressing their obligations.

The Republican citizenship tradition was developed as a reaction against the individualism of the previously dominant Liberal paradigm, aiming to broaden the notion of political participation. This tradition places emphasis on people’s political identities as active citizens, focusing on the notion of the socially-embedded citizen and on community belonging. Contemporary citizenship theorists have pointed out that, although Republican citizenship theory operates with a more inclusive notion of the political, this approach is still problematic due to the narrow conception of the ‘political’ built on a rigid separation of public and private spheres (Lister 1997). Furthermore, as pointed out by feminist theorists, casting citizenship as a political obligation exercised in the public sphere contains a male bias (Siim and Squires 2007). Indeed, both conceptualisations are limited in their scope to capture young people’s citizenship practices, which may not neatly fit within traditional understandings of participation. Meanwhile recent citizenship theories have focused on bringing the two traditions together. Ruth Lister (2007) argues for a notion of citizenship as both a status and a
practice. Citizenship is here understood both as participation that is an expression of human agency, and as a right enabling people to act as agents. Such a conceptualising is of relevance for theorising groups that become excluded from avenues of participation or fulfilling the full potential of their citizenship status, such as marginalised youth.

This understanding of citizenship as an expression of agency as well as a status opens considerations regarding the quality of the welfare state protection offered to citizens. The following sections investigate relevant historical and ideological viewpoints on social citizenship, drawing out what makes social citizenship a relevant concept for theorising young people today.

**Traditional notions of citizenship**

Citizenship debates are driven in great part by the work of the British sociologist, T.H. Marshall and his 1950 essay, ‘Citizenship and Social Class’. Young people, however, are predominantly absent from Marshall’s description of modern citizenship and are at best referred to as ‘citizens in the making’ (Hall, Williamson et al. 2006). Marshall develops a normative concept of what citizenship should be, how it has developed over time and an ideal against which to measure future developments (e.g. a framework on which to judge future societal developments’ impact upon citizens’ political, civic or social citizenship rights). Civil rights include the rights necessary for individual freedom, such as freedom of speech, property rights and the right to law. Political citizenship rights refer to those rights, which enable people to participate in and exercise political power through holding office, voting and related activities. Social citizenship refers to the social rights, obligations and institutions that play a role in developing and supporting equality of status in the community. Social rights encompass a range of rights including the right to a certain level of economic wellbeing, security and “the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society” (Marshall cited in (Fraser and Gordon 2002: 91)).

In Marshall’s model of citizenship little struggle or contestation is necessarily, as the rise of citizenship is seen as inevitable and assured. The opportunity to participate or ‘active citizenship’ is a guarantee but not a requirement (Marshall 1950). In the recent decades, this passive notion of citizenship has been challenged both in academic and political debates. Contemporary theorising increasingly sees citizenship as an outcome of active participation, and citizenship has become an aspiration for most progressive democracies, which conceptualise it as the glue that holds society together (Barber 2009). The concept of social citizenship builds on this growing body of thought by focussing on the fulfilment of substantive citizenship as a first principle for social justice initiatives and hence provides a platform for theorising social policy. In this respect, citizenship is viewed as a counterbalance to the worst effects of unrestricted capitalism (Lister 2005).
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

The same transformations which provided the context for changing youth transitions are also changing the paradigm of citizenship and participation in post-war welfare states (Lister 2007, Harris, Wyn et al. 2010). As people's status and identity, along with the experience of a shared social membership, can no longer be taken for granted, citizenship becomes increasingly important to people's sense of selves. "Citizenship is centre-stage today because the conditions for the sorts of commonality and belongingness to which it once referred have shifted" (Hall, Coffey et al. 2010: 512). The preoccupation and concern with youth citizenship in current social policy, as discussed in Chapter Two, reflects concerns about young people and their place in society. So, while the concept of citizenship has been reintroduced to help understand youth transitions to adulthood, the concept has also become increasingly contested. In particular, there is a tension between how citizenship is understood in contemporary social policies (a state to be arrived at when economic independence is achieved), and how youth studies have utilised the concept (activities young people engage in to enact participation, social action, identification with community and public self-making) (Thomson, Holland et al. 2004).

While traditional notions of citizenship fail to capture the contests over social citizenship in contemporary society, citizenship theory is still a relevant framework for understanding the tensions between marginalised youth and broader society. It gives attention to the idea of young people achieving the freedom to function in a manner that reasonably expresses the way they choose to be. Following on from these insights, the thesis asks how marginalised youth are best resourced to do this. The following section draws out newer challenges made to Marshall's traditional framework of social citizenship. These theorists argue for the inclusion of matters of identity and difference such as those tied to age, race and gender, to be able to capture different-centred citizenship negotiations, akin to those made by disadvantaged youth.

**Challenges to the citizenship framework**

The citizenship frame has frequently been used to analyse conflicts tied to class inequality in democratic welfare states. However, many emphasise that Marshall's focus upon class as the main axis of inequality makes his analysis blind to other important inequalities, such as those concerning gender and ethnicity (Fraser and Gordon 1994, Lister 2005, Siim and Squires 2007, Breidahl 2011). Yet, arguing for the recognition of young people's citizenship as different but equal to adults poses a paradox, as citizenship status is an intrinsically universalistic concept.

Citizenship is always situated in a historical and political context where people's different awareness of rights, along with their capacities to claim these, leads to different outcomes. Lister emphasises the paradox that instead of addressing inequalities, universalism can work to marginalise the already marginal and exacerbate social exclusion (Lister 1997), as
universalism hides the difference in power that makes some citizens more equal than others. Consequently, contemporary writers often argue that Marshall’s framework is unable to deal with demands for citizenship based around difference and the political tension between equality and diversity. Accordingly, from the early 1990s scholars have increasingly redesigned the concept of citizenship to investigate the tension between equality and diversity relating to, for example, the social and political inclusion of disadvantaged groups, women and minorities in society (Kristensen 2007, Siim 2007). In essence, this debate is related to whether citizenship is a universal and abstract category or an “embodied category, involving concrete people who are differentially situated in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, sexuality, ability, state in the life cycle etc.” (Yuval-Davis 2007: 562).

The struggle for inclusive citizenship increasingly takes the form of multiple and conflicting equality and recognition demands. The right to belong as a ‘differently equal’ member of society has been analysed extensively in difference-centred, feminist models of citizenship (Skjeie and Siim 2000, Borchorst and Siim 2002, Siim 2009) but has also been applied to children and young people (O'Toole, Lister et al. 2003, Moosa-Mitha 2006, Lister 2007). Where feminist citizenship theorists argue for a dehomogenising of the notion of citizenship, stating that the criteria for inclusion as citizens cannot be uniform and should not be modelled on male norms, the same argument can be made concerning young people’s social citizenship, which often becomes modelled on adult norms. As Lister writes “the universalist cloak of the abstract, disembodied individual has been cast aside to reveal a definitely male citizen and a white, heterosexual, non-disabled one at that” (Lister 1997: 68).

Other critiques of the traditional citizenship framework contest the idea of stability of citizenship status, claiming that such an approach lack a sophisticated understanding of power and agency. For instance, Noel Smith and colleagues (2007) argue that citizenship identity is continuously negotiated throughout the life course and fluctuates between being more or less fluid or stable at different periods. This suggests that citizenship is best conceptualised as a field of struggle or an arena where relations linking people to their community, and wider social and political contexts are persistently negotiated and contested (Hall, Williamson et al. 2010). As such, citizenship is connected to notions of power, agency and choice, as aspects of citizenship are in some cases chosen and in others assigned (Rattansi and Phoenix 2005).

As an example, Colombo (2010) highlights the tensions for young migrants in negotiating social practices and ethno-racial differences whilst seeking social citizenship inclusion. Colombo (2010) shows how ethno-racial differences can be used both as a resource and become a constraint in claiming recognition and inclusion. Hence, knowing how to negotiate one’s ethno-racial difference and when to apply different social practices in different contexts are vital skills to learn for young migrants. Similarly, Kennelly and
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Dillabough (2008) show how economically disadvantaged and racially diverse young people living on the urban fringes experience tensions relating to their claiming of social citizenship and the interaction of social class and youth subcultural positioning. The researchers argue that social positioning and ethnicity influences “young people’s national and class imaginaries of legitimate citizenship and the state” (Kennelly and Dillabough 2008: 494) shaping how young people perceive and navigate the concepts of security and citizenship. This research stands in contrast to contemporary scholarship still employing a universalistic focus on the construction and claiming of citizenship. It appears that some groups, for example young women, disadvantaged or ethnic diverse youth, are more limited in terms of their citizenship negotiations compared to other groups. On this, Kennelly and Dillabough (2008) argue that within the field of citizenship, strong signifiers of successful and unsuccessful citizenship exist, which tend to pathologise mainly lower socioeconomic, racially diverse young people. The authors suggest that by tracing these signifiers the cultural and deeply coded forms of ‘symbolic violence’, which still operate through narratives of citizenship, become illuminated (Kennelly and Dillabough 2008).

Although it is imperative to extend the concept of citizenship beyond rights and responsibilities, it is just as important to recognise that entitling all citizens to the same rights does not automatically promote equitable outcomes. Common attitudes towards others in society, groups as well as individuals, are created in interaction with dominant structures. Voices that are not recognised or respected, such as disadvantaged young people, are not likely to be heard. Consequently, how people see themselves as citizens and in which way they are recognised by others and by institutions, will impact upon how they act to claim their citizenship rights. The subsequent sections turn directly to research on youth citizenship and youth participation, drawing out what current research teaches about how young people’s social citizenship has been understood, as well as any gaps in knowledge relevant to this thesis.

Research on youth citizenship

In the 1990s, citizenship was taken up as a useful way of making sense of youth transitions and discussing young people’s membership of adult society – what this should and currently means, and how it is attained (Jones and Wallace 1992). The citizenship framework was claimed to be more suitable than that of adulthood for understanding the end-product of youth (Hall, Coffey et al. 2010). Citizenship enables a discussion of young people’s participation beyond that associated with the ambiguities of unemployment, prolonged participation in training or education, and extended dependency on parents, seeing young people as citizens first and foremost, before they are labelled as persons experiencing poverty, unemployment or disengagement.
The usefulness of the citizenship framework lies in the fact that citizenship rights and obligations are obtained not based on employment or economic status but acquired automatically with age. Although this implies that the eventual attainment of adult citizenship is more or less assured, as has already been highlighted, it is important to draw a distinction between the formal entitlements of citizenship and the capacity to exercise these entitlements. A whole range of factors outside a person’s control affect access to citizenship and participation, such as place, personal circumstances, gender, cultural background, health, among others. Although citizenship formally is independent of economic power or social positioning, these factors can and do impact on people’s ability to fully exercise their status as citizens (Hall, Coffey et al. 2010). For instance, the lack of economic independence for many young people is a significant issue impacting their level of autonomy and therefore their experiences of citizenship. In this respect, young people in general and disadvantaged young people in particular, can be seen to have their citizenship status substantially undermined and this shows up as scant social participation, lack of social integration and lack of power.

A common criticism of research in this area is that a narrow definition of youth citizenship is habitually employed. On this Billett (2012) claims that where citizenship has been applied in sociology of youth, it has often been as an exterior measurement of young people’s full, successful, fragmented or at-risk transitions into adulthood. Furthermore due to a reliance on predetermined adult-centric measures, youth forms of citizenship have been poorly researched and continue to be inadequately understood (Billett 2012). More so, young people's views are seen as less valid than adult-centric measurements. Another common criticism of the use of adult indicators to measure youth social citizenship, such as neighbourhood participation and volunteering, are their lack of relevance to young people’s lives (Ginwright 2008). When an adult template of citizenship and participation is employed, the particularities of young people’s relationship with citizenship is ignored. As a result, young people’s citizenship becomes labelled as deficient or incomplete and young people themselves labelled as disengaged and apathetic. Additionally, much of the research on youth citizenship has been etic rather than emic (Hall and Coffey 2007). As such, although recent research has begun such an examination, there is a lack of research on how young people themselves make sense of citizenship (For UK examples of emerging citizenship see Hall, Williamson et al. 2006, Smith, Lister et al. 2007).

Along similar lines Hall, Williamson and Coffey claim that the reconceptualising of youth citizenship and practices “lack specificity and requires interpretation at a more grounded level” (2010: 470). This view is supported by Vromen, arguing that a maximising, humanistic and subjective view on youth citizenship - that takes account of youth beliefs, values and aspirations - would be better placed to capture how, why and why not young people participate and exercise their citizenship (Vromen 2003). Contemporary theorising
about youth citizenship has begun using such a definition (Thomson, Holland et al. 2004, Kennelly and Dillabough 2008, Harris 2013, Harris 2015). For instance, Thomson and colleagues (2004) have developed a more subjective model of citizenship, which focuses on the ways in which young people seek out opportunities for responsibility, competence and recognition in different fields of their lives and how these attempts are highly significant in shaping their future trajectory.

Other influential research aiming to reconceptualise youth citizenship includes the work of Ruth Lister and colleagues. Lister and colleagues (2003) critiqued the UK Government of the early 2000’s for depicting young people as ‘deficient citizens’, claiming that such policy discourses are based on a misperception of youth. Based on a longitudinal qualitative study, they examined young people’s understanding of citizenship and found multiple meanings which young people themselves attached to being a citizen, stressing the exclusionary power of narrow models of citizenship (Lister 2007). The employment-oriented conception of citizenship often embedded in policy discourses, for instance, excludes the way young people contribute to society outside paid employment. Where Lister and colleagues’ work is important in highlighting the disparities between young people’s understanding of citizenship and the assumptions made in research and policy, the processes through which these meanings are shaped and developed, and what influences on these, is still under-researched.

Where the citizenship frame has been taken up in youth studies, this has often been done to investigate or improve young people’s participation by more fully recognising their status and rights as citizens (Wierenga, Wyn et al. 2008). For instance, McLeod (2012) notes that although the framework of citizenship is increasingly utilised within youth studies, a rights-based model of citizenship is habitually applied, focusing on youth participation, empowerment and political socialisation. Scholars have sought to investigate the new ways young people are exercising their citizenship and participation (Lister 1998, Vromen 2003). However, within such work identity and citizenship are often conflated, and all participation by young people tends to be understood as expressions of citizenship. This can lead to a conceptualisation of citizenship that is simultaneously too vast and too individualistic to capture young people’s labour to create a valorised role for themselves within society. A more grounded understanding of how young people themselves make sense of their world and their place within it is needed.

A gap in knowledge exists concerning what actually is important for young people in terms of social citizenship, due in part to a reliance on predetermined adult-centric measures of citizenship. Following on from this concern, the subsequent section investigates how youth participation has been conceptualised and researched, as participation is commonly understood as a main measure of social citizenship in contemporary theorising and social policy.
Citizenship as participation

Participatory action is perhaps the most conventional interpretation of citizenship. Research concerning youth participation is framed by a range of theoretical perspectives on democracy and corresponding perspectives on the rights and responsibilities of citizens (Collin 2008). Principally two divergent approaches to researching young people's participation can be identified in the Anglophone literature; one researching the usage of traditional institutional forms of political participation such as voting, membership of political parties and unions and another approach focusing on young people's changing attitudes towards politics, democracy and citizenship, including non-institutional forms of participation.

The former approach, researching institutional forms of participation, conceptualises participation as either legitimating (consenting to state domination) or oppositional (struggling against the state) and typically involves quantitative studies of participation in elections, political parties, or civic organisations (Collin 2008). The point of departure for this approach is that young people could and should be socialised and educated to develop appreciations of literacy in traditional political institutions and processes of democracy (Putnam 1995, Torney-Purta 2002). Research taking this perspective frequently stresses the looming democratic crisis caused by young people becoming increasingly disengaged from politics and participation.

As a reaction to this approach, another strand of research on youth participation has developed, highlighting the limited conceptualisation of youth participation underpinning most research. This approach challenges the validity of both the quantitative methodologies of much political science as well as the dominant assumptions of citizenship and political participation that underlie these, arguing that a broadening of the concept of legitimate participation and spaces for practicing citizenship is now needed (Hall and Coffey 2007, Smith, Lister et al. 2007, Vromen and Collin 2010). Hence the crisis is not to be found in the participatory practices of young people, but rather in the quantitative approaches that dominate social sciences in this area and produces such conclusions (Manning and Ryan 2004). Subsequently, this research approach aims to develop a thicker understanding of the ways young adults participate outside of institutional or formalised structures (O'Toole, Lister et al. 2003, Vromen 2003, Lister 2007, Smith, Lister et al. 2007). Sites such as the home, the local neighbourhood and school (Smith, Lister et al. 2007), as well as activities such as informal discussions with peers, media consumption and internet use (Vromen 2008), blogging and engaging in website based debates (Harris, Wyn et al. 2010), have been highlighted as less conservative imaginings of young people’s citizenship activities. However, it can be argued that when the framework of citizenship is broadened to encompass all young people’s participation, young people’s struggles to envision or attain a part in broader social processes can be overlooked.
One of the implications emerging from this review is an ongoing need for research that can illustrate the effects of disadvantage on youth social citizenship. Investigating how social citizenship aspirations become formed and stunted illuminates the processes by which inequality is reproduced for disadvantaged young people. Following on from these implications, the subsequent sections develop the alternative approach to social citizenship employed in this study, by introducing the concepts of recognition and belonging as preconditions to the development of social citizenship.

**The conceptual frame: Recognition and belonging as preconditions for social citizenship**

The concept of recognition focuses on the interaction between individual identity and society and is fundamental to the experience of social citizenship (Honneth 1996). Honneth’s concepts of recognition captures the ways in which the welfare state as an institution of societal recognition may be considered pathological - acting as a barrier that prevents the realisation of the good life for some - and the ways in which it can instead support this realisation. An example here could be the narrow notion of social citizenship as economic independence echoed in contemporary social policies. As a result of changing educational requirements, economic changes and changes in the labour market, many disadvantaged young people cannot lay claim to the normative image of the independent wage-earner. These contemporary notions of citizenship consequently act as a barrier for the recognition of alternative ways disadvantaged young people participate in society and wish to exercise their citizenship. Emerging youth movements can hence be understood as a struggle for recognition for other ways of life (Lister 2007).

Honneth’s (1996) concept of recognition is divided into three separate spheres:

1. The private sphere comprising family and friendships (sphere of love where self-confidence is developed).
2. The sphere of rights and legal entitlements (sphere of rights where self-respect is developed).
3. The sphere of cultural and political solidarity (sphere of solidarity where self-esteem is developed).

Each sphere involves a mode of practical relations to self. The private sphere entails emotional support and love, which in Honneth’s terminology is the prerequisite for the development of basic self-confidence. This form of recognition enables a person to act, communicate and take part in close communities. The sphere of rights and legal entitlements entails universal respect gained from rights, which generates a citizen’s self-respect. This form of recognition consists of universal and equal juridical treatment and is decisive for a person’s ability to participate in society on equal terms with others. The
third sphere of cultural and political solidarity, coined ‘social appreciation’ by Honneth, entails self-esteem that is redeemed in social solidarity, where values are shared. Whereas legal recognition concerns recognition of ethically different citizens as equal legal persons, social appreciation is about recognition of the ethical person for his or her specific qualities (Honneth 1996).

Each form of recognition constitutes both an integrative aspect of the social order and a step in the development of the person, as each form of recognition must be experienced to ensure the three basic modes of practical relation to self are developed. A person unable to receive emotional support and respect, through rights and social esteem, is at risk of losing practical self-relation. Additionally, absence or withholding of recognition jeopardises a person’s positive relation to self (Jacobsen Hviid and Willing 2008). To be misrecognised is to be denied the status of a full partner in social interaction (Fraser 2000). Socially and culturally situated notions of mutual obligation, rights and responsibilities, dependency and self-sufficiency produce categories of deserving and undeserving needs, and govern whether ‘caring’ or ‘punitive’ responses are considered appropriate (Fraser and Gordon 2002). In this, institutionalised patterns of cultural value constitute some actors as inferior, excluded or invisible. In this regard institutionalised low expectations are considered a misrecognition. Here the concept of recognition ties in with the guiding research question concerning how youth programs can support young citizens to negotiate a valuable place for themselves in society.

Honneth argues, in line with Hegel and Marx, that work is more than simply economic in nature, but also “possesses an emancipatory potential in terms of self-realization” (Petersen and Willig 2004: 340). Employment for the adult population is understood as a major arena for recognition, and the advance of capabilities crucial for the development of positive relation to self and society (Petersen and Willig 2004). I will argue here, that in the case of young people, school is an essential sphere of recognition and self-realisation, in line with the sphere of work for adult citizens. School is for most a crucial arena where young people can realise their abilities, skills and talents and develop a sense of self-respect and self-esteem. In the case of many marginalised young people, as will be discussed in the analytical chapters, school appears to largely fail as a sphere for recognition. Instead school habitually delivers experiences of misrecognition, unbelonging and failure (Bottrell 2007, te Riele 2011, Camilleri-Cassar 2013, Farrugia, Smyth et al. 2015). According to such a perspective, where school is not reduced to a mere instrumental category, but considered an essential arena for self-realisation and justice, the experience of misrecognition and social exclusion within schools can be seen as the denial or non-realisation of citizenship rights. Tying this in with the concept of social citizenship, a person unable to gain social appreciation in their meeting with societal institutions such as educational institutions, are at risk of losing their sense of shared value and place in society. Or at risk of diminishing their social citizenship aspirations.
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

Nancy Fraser's (2000) proposes a ‘status model’ of recognition that bridges traditional dichotomies between the socioeconomic and the socio-cultural aspects of justice. Understanding recognition as status involves recognition becoming a question of institutionalised value patterns and politics rather than an individual, ethical question (Fraser 2000). By combining an economic focus on redistribution with a cultural focus on recognition operating with three dimensions of justice (redistribution in the economic sphere, recognition in the socio-cultural sphere and representation in the political sphere), Fraser translates the economic determination of citizens into a theory of social status, which addresses both the economic barriers and cultural exclusion that are reproduced through different societal mechanisms (Fraser 2000). “Redressing misrecognition now means changing social institutions – or more specifically, changing the interaction-regulating values that impede parity of participating at all relevant institutional sites’ (Fraser 2000: 4). This broader model of recognition suggests that we interrogate how institutional judgements about the good life attainable for certain groups of young people, may lead to social exclusion and low expectations.

This section argued that the equal distribution of opportunities to develop skills and abilities that will lead to self-realisation and recognition is central to understanding the reproduction of youth inequality. This involves investigating disadvantaged young people's opportunities to develop the competencies and capacities for active citizenship in their everyday practices. To further this argument, the chapter now turns towards the concept of belonging as integral to developing social citizenship.

Citizenship mediated through feelings of belonging

Much scholarship on youth emphasises the tensions between being young and becoming older (Tilleczek 2011), however the particular struggles involved in becoming older have gained significantly more attention within sociology of youth (e.g. transition research). Within this focus, “the critical and essential need for young people to find a fit in their social surroundings” has often been overlooked (Tilleczek 2011: 10). Appreciating young people’s need for belonging offers such a perspective, by anchoring young people’s being as well as their becoming. This section furthers the argument made in this chapter: Experiences of wanting to be a part of society are nurtured through feelings of belonging and avenues of recognition.

As a critique of the tendency within transition research to neglect young people’ everyday lives (Hall, Coffey et al. 2009) and the reductionist perspective encompassed within the depicted approach, newer research has started to include the metaphor of belonging as a way of capturing the impact of social change on young people (Tilleczek, Laflamme et al. 2010, Cuervo and Wyn 2014). Unlike a transition approach, belonging emphasises the relational complexity of young people’s life and how these shape and influence people’s
preferences and choices. Against the individualistic focus often found in youth policy and practice, belonging brings people's interconnectedness into focus as well as their striving to make and uphold connections to people, places and identities (Ignatieff 1994, Ilcan 2002). Cuervo and Wyn (2014) suggest that the concept of belonging in many ways is more apt at capturing youth as a social process, by showing the ways in which institutions and formal processes act to include and exclude persons (e.g. the 'politics of belonging' as coined by Yuval-Davis (2011)) as well as young people's own effort to 'stay connected' (Wyn and White 1997). Meanwhile Antonsich argues that the concept of belonging has been under-theorised and often regarded as self-explanatory within sociology (Antonsich 2010). On this, Antonsich calls for analysis of belonging on a more grounded level, to add specificity to how belonging operates in people's lives.

As social citizenship relates to a sense of belonging to a place (Hall, Coffey et al. 2010) the concept also includes lived experiences, participation and activities in the communal space and a relationship with others in that space (Hall and Coffey 2007). A sense of belonging can be defined as “the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment” (Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer et al. 1992: 172). The relationship between citizenship and belonging also involves who can be considered included or excluded from the community as well as the emotional components of social citizenship.

“Citizenship is the product of a process — one based on a mutual relationship between the individual and community. It is contingent on a fundamental sense of belonging to a community... the reasons some young people fail to engage with their communities is that they feel these communities have rejected them. Feelings are as important as knowledge and skills” (Williamson 2007: 13).

In this regard, the notion of belonging can be seen as a way of concretising the subjective and emotional part of citizenship. On this Ann-Dorte Christensen (2009) argues that the concept of belonging incorporates some of the tensions and social differences that exist in complex modern societies.

Yuval-Davis (2007) argues that the focus in contemporary political and academic debates on citizenship becomes misleading when not situated in the wider context of politics of belonging, which encompass citizenships and identities, as well as the emotions attached to them. Yuval-Davis differentiates between 'belonging' and 'politics of belonging'. Where belonging is about emotional attachment and feeling at home and safe, politics of belonging relates to “specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectives that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 197). Sense of belonging often appears naturalised because of its embeddedness in everyday practices. Only when threatened does belonging become articulated, formally structured and
Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework

politicised: “Even in its most stable ‘primordial’ forms, however, belonging is always a
dynamic process, not a reified fixity – the latter is only a naturalised construction of
particular hegemonic form of power relations. Belonging is usually multi-layered and – to
use geographical jargon – multi-scale" (Yuval-Davis 2011: 12).

To emphasise the deliberate, reflexive and articulated facets of belonging, the notion of
elective belonging is introduced by Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst (2005). Similar to
Yuval-Davis, Savage and colleagues contest belonging as an essential or entirely non-
discursive concept on the ground of the reflexive processes involved. Persons attach their
own biography to how they came to participate in a program or live in a neighbourhood,
and in doing so make this a marker of belonging (Jørgensen and Mølholt 2007). Such a
framing also encompasses the notion of unbelonging (Christensen 2009). Due to the
instability of belonging, it becomes important to look at states of unbelonging, that is,
who is being excluded; who do we not want to be like; against whom do we draw borders.
The concept of unbelonging is an underdeveloped concept within sociological literature.
As the analysis progresses, I will seek to further develop this concept as it proved vital in
understanding what the young people in this study was communicating about their
community experiences.

In an attempt to connect the structural and the identity level of belonging, Ann-Dorte
Christensen (2009) suggests an analytical division of the notion of belonging into macro,
meso and micro levels. Citizenship and belonging is rooted in interaction patterns
between citizenship processes at the macro level and everyday practices and life styles at
the micro level. Patterns of everyday practice are where values and understandings are
found and passed on from generation to generation. In this analytical division, the meso
level of collective organisations and institutions is what links the macro structures to the
level of individual agency and identities. To gain an understanding of processes of
inequality, social exclusion and identity, the crucial role of the meso-level of institutions
and organisations is stressed. An example of the construction of belonging in relation to
collective institutions could be the relationship between ages in youth programs, where
old institutional patterns appear unable to accommodate the autonomy and
independence that many young people pursue. The three analytical levels of belonging
will be employed in this thesis to highlight the interaction between macro and meso level
belonging and young people's aspirational horizon.

Citizenship is as much a marker of who we are, as it is of who we are not. This section
emphasised that belonging is a fundamental aspect of identity formation, incorporating
what one has in common with some people and what differentiates one from others.
Belonging sharpens the analytical lens on young people's embeddedness within multiple
sets of nested connections and communities (Tillich 2011) hereby reasserting the
centrality of relationships in the study of young people's lives (Wierenga and Wyn 2013).
Against the sociological preoccupation with the modern erosion of attachments to local
places and communities in an increasingly globalised world, the concept of belonging captures both the overwhelming place-belongingness experienced by many young people living in bounded communities such as rural towns, migrant communities or localised housing commissions, as well as the ways belonging is mediated and negotiated through structural embeddedness and everyday interactions.

This framing of citizenship also encompasses the notion of unbelonging (Christensen 2009) for instance, experiences of unbelonging in school. Individuals or groups that position themselves outside the community due to a variety of experiences and factors can find a sense of belonging or community in their unbelongingness. This concept goes some way in describing the phenomenon that people can feel strong attachment to places in society that are not deemed desirable by the wider community, such as ghetto areas or isolated rural communities (Brake 1985). In this sense belonging can both improve enhancing relationships that connect a young person with their world, and lock people into drug-use, poverty, isolation and social immobility.

**Summary - Defining social citizenship**

I am now able to give a working definition of a broader notion of citizenship (and aspirations). In summary, this review has identified the following models of citizenship:

- Citizenship as rights and responsibilities (Marshall 1950)
- Citizenship as linked to justice and recognition (Honneth 1996, Fraser 2000)
- Citizenship as contingent, negotiated and fluid (Savage, Bagnall et al. 2005, Smith, Lister et al. 2007)
- Citizenship as constructed and contested (Yuval-Davis 2007)
- Multi-layered, interconnected and interdependent citizenship (Yuval-Davis 2007)
- Citizenship as belonging (Hall and Coffey 2007, Christensen 2009)
- Citizenship as identity (of self an others) (Lister 2003)
- Citizenship as a status and a practice (Lister 2007)
- Citizenship as participation (Vromen 2003)

The nature and scope of social citizenship is the topic of a variety of debates. Some conceptualisations have a narrow focus on a conferred legal status with associated rights and responsibilities. Yet, numerous contemporary citizenship theorists provide a critical perspective on ethnocentric, gender specific, ageist and universalist framing of citizenship (Kristensen 2005, Lister 2007, Siim 2007, Breidahl 2011) where others highlight the narrow definitions of, especially, political participation as problematic (O’Toole, Lister et al. 2003, Vromen 2003). The normative construction of the citizen-as-adult (Moosa-Mitha 2006, Smith, Lister et al. 2007) and the idea that opportunities to participate are equally
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distributed despite structural inequalities such as class or cultural background (Moosa-Mitha 2006, Lister 2007) have been critiqued by others.

This chapter has shown the development of the meaning and application of concepts like citizenship, participation and belonging. In so doing, it is evident that these concepts are not generic, universal or portable from one situation to another. Instead a far more nuanced and multidimensional approach is needed, to understand how disadvantage shapes social citizenship aspirations. Correspondingly, the review has highlighted ways in which the universal conceptions of citizenship are themselves mediated by relations of power, social hierarchy, and often opposing identities, which operates simultaneously as a force for the inclusion of certain voices and identities and the exclusion of others.

Scholarship within youth studies has tended to focus on recognising and improving young people’s participation, or more fully acknowledging their status and rights as citizens. Others have drawn on Foucauldian frameworks to critique the citizenship framework (as discussed in Chapter Two). This study builds and extends on this important literature in three ways. Firstly, by not privileging any one area of life for investigating social citizenship practices, such as selected youth subcultures, and instead focusing on young people’s everyday practices to enhance belonging and recognition in the context of their broader life. This approach enables an analytical lens on the complexity of communities nested within each other, and the social and material embeddedness of young people's lives. Secondly, by investigating how avenues of belonging and recognition shape social citizenship aspirations for disadvantaged young people. The focus on how disadvantage shapes young people’s social citizenship aspirations combines theorising about citizenship with debates on youth inequality by emphasising the mental conditions for personal self-realisation and aspirational capacity. Thirdly, the focus on the aspirational aspects of social citizenship places young people’s longing at the centre of the analytical frame. Future aspirations are as much made up of longing (for safety, connection, respect, and visibility) as they are made up of structural constraints, opportunities and availability of local communities. A crucial aspect here is the identification of circumstances people strive towards. An understanding of the participants’ conceptions of the good life also includes conceptions of necessary means to achieve this, and as such provides a potent framework of understandings that trigger actions (horizons for action).

So, the broad definition of citizenship to be used in this study principally refers to the ways in which people access, maintain membership of, and actively participate in, society. Social citizenship emphasises the active agency of the person, and in achieving this, belonging and recognition becomes a precondition. Social citizenship comprises various dimensions: 1) status, rights and duties; 2) recognition; and 3) communities of belonging. This study concentrates mainly on the second and third dimension encompassing experiences of citizenship. This definition captures the idea that social citizenship is both a status and a set of relationships, many of which are not only inclusionary but also
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exclusionary. This is of particular importance for this study aiming to investigate the difference being disadvantaged makes to the development of social citizenship.

CONCLUSION - OPERATIONALISATION OF KEY CONCEPTS

There is general consensus within policy and academic debates that aspirations shape outcomes. Further, as argued in Chapter Two, categories such as class, race and gender continue to impact upon outcomes for young people within the Australian context. This study turns towards young people’s social citizenship aspirations, using an investigation of how these become formed and stunted, to illuminate the processes by which inequality is being reproduced for disadvantaged young people.

The theoretical framework can be summarised in the following model comprising three elements that move from the abstract to the particular, and in so doing conceptualise and subsequently operationalise the key concepts examined in the thesis. Further, the framework indicates what questions need to be pursued within the research design and with the research instruments. These three levels are:

1. The overarching theoretical concepts derived from the theory of recognition, which are a precondition for social citizenship aspirations.
2. Mid-level theoretical constructs which conceptualise these abstract concepts, in this case ‘belonging’ and ‘recognition’ and how experiences of such shape self-understanding and horizons for action.
3. The ‘sites of belonging’ which operationalise these mid-level concepts by examining avenues of belonging and recognition. These sites of belonging can be further differentiated into the macro, meso and micro level.
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Table 1: Theoretical framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overarching Theoretical Constructs</th>
<th>Social Citizenship</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mid-level Theoretical Constructs</td>
<td>Operationalised by the concepts Belonging and Recognition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Concepts</td>
<td>Investigated through Communities and how these shape social citizenship aspirations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MACRO</td>
<td>Imagined communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sphere of ‘Solidarity’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MESO</td>
<td>Local communities, youth services, school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sphere of ‘Rights’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MICRO</td>
<td>Family and friends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sphere of ‘Love’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1) Overarching theoretical constructs are the meta-theoretical construct of social citizenship. Experiences of citizenship are:
   - Based in forms of recognition (and therefore the possibilities of misrecognition),
   - have both redistribution and identity components, and
   - are ‘practically’ oriented towards ‘love’ ‘rights’ and ‘solidarity’.

   The concrete critical analysis of young people’s ongoing struggle for recognition is centred on forms of recognition or misrecognition experienced for marginalised youth within society and its institutions.

2) Belonging links the idea of social citizenship as a sense of belonging to place and space. It therefore suggests practical domains of lived experiences, participation and activities in the communal space and a relationship with others that occupy the same space. In operationalising the broader recognition-theoretic concepts, belonging points to citizenship being the product of a process. In particular, how young people's search for connection and safety (belonging), visibility and respect (recognition) within their communities shapes their self-understanding and horizons for action. Equality within a youth work setting is thus a question of facilitating access to and transition between young people’s nested communities and avenues of belonging and to challenge narrow horizons for future citizenship.
3) So, what are these contexts? These contexts represent the practical and concrete arenas in which experiences of belonging and recognition are situated and where imaginations of what types of futures are available for 'people like me' are created. They are therefore the practical sites through which recognition/misrecognition is experienced and social citizenship aspirations are shaped.

Three contexts can be identified:

a. At the macro level belonging refers to support for larger ‘imagined’ communities, for example geographical or religious communities. Imagined communities are important in the framing of borders between ‘us and them’. For the analysis three key structural factors help make sense of the young people’s sense of macro level belonging all representing different aspects of marginalisation: patterns of global migration and how the young migrants are viewed in Australia; rurality and geographic disadvantage; and class and racial dimensions of social exclusion within the urban environment. These will be further discussed in Chapter Eight.

b. At the meso level belonging refers to the association with collective organisations, for example educational institutions, youth services and youth communities. It also includes membership of groups of people with similar values, ideas or common interests. At this level, the participants’ educational experiences will be analysed. These are mostly characterised by misrecognition and unbelonging for all participants. However, avenues of local place-based belonging within homogenous peer groups were sought to compensate. The opportunities and consequences of these types of belonging in terms of opportunities for self-realisation, agency and recognition and the young people’s capacity to aspire beyond these groups, will be drawn out.

c. At the micro level, belonging refers to relations in everyday life including individual identity, family and friends and is based mainly on face-to-face relations. Micro level belongings construct social distinctions in relation to whom you identify with and are often reflexive and deliberate and oriented towards integration in local communities with ‘people like me’. Micro level belonging also defines people’s sense of self-worth and self-understanding.

These practical contexts provide the environments in which young people negotiate and experience their social citizenship. However, they are also linked back to the key constructs within recognition theory at the most abstract level, through experiences of solidarity, rights and love. Therefore, the model integrates the abstract framework of recognition theory with the concrete sites in which belonging and recognition are experienced.
This relational approach to analysis offers a more complex line of analysis for understanding the interaction between material structure, culture and human agency and between majority society and disadvantaged groups. For this relational investigation, the framework of complex cultural nesting is applied to the first part of the analysis in order to grasp how disadvantaged young people's social worlds impacts upon the processes of social citizenship aspirations. Having set up this understanding, the second part of the analysis turns towards youth services to analyse how young people's aspirational horizons, and the ways these are acknowledged and worked with within these services, affect the work youth services are able to do. First, however, I will introduce the research design.
Introduction

Chapter Three presented the analytical framework used to investigate disadvantaged young people’s experiences of social citizenship aspirations. This chapter presents the methodology employed in this thesis, and how the concepts outlined in Chapter Three are operationalised to understand young people’s social citizenship experiences.

The focus of this study is how best to work with young people and their citizenship aspirations in the context of the rest of their lives. For this, the guiding research questions start by asking how experiences of belonging and recognition influence disadvantaged young people’s plans for the future and how the young people’s communities negate or create aspirations for social citizenship. Secondly, the analysis turns to how the interaction between young people’s avenues of belonging and recognition and their horizons for action are engaged within youth work settings. The latter exploration is done to understand how imaginations of disadvantaged young people’s needs and circumstances as they are seen in social policy discourses, are operationalised within youth work settings. As this study is empirically grounded, the aim is to generate data that allows for the exploration of the meaning of experiences and social life.

Like many other studies within the field of sociology of youth that focus on processes in everyday life, qualitative methods were chosen, as these are best suited when seeking data on the complex experiences of disadvantage (Thomson, Bell et al. 2002, Lister, Smith et al. 2003, Hall and Coffey 2007, Wierenga 2009). Three qualitative case studies of young people and youth workers were undertaken, involving semi-structured interviews with workers and group-based workshops with young people. To employ an explorative approach in line with the aim of constructing a more complex understanding of what shapes young people’s citizenship aspirations, selected aspects of grounded theory procedures and tools, that fit the needs of this investigation, were applied (Charmaz 2006). The choices concerning epistemology, methodology and research design taken in this study, and the process of data production, will be explained below. The chapter also provides a summary of the participants involved in the study.

Epistemology - Knowledge as created in action

This is a qualitative study of the meaning-making processes of three groups of young people between 16-19 years of age, as they negotiate their social citizenship in their local contexts and how these meanings interact with the youth work settings within which they are engaged. The key rationale forming the overall design for the empirical investigation
was to adopt a flexible approach capable of capturing the complexity of experience and the multiple interactions in young people’s lives that shape and facilitate social citizenship.

Setting out to develop a more nuanced understanding of youth engagement with society poses certain challenges. Firstly, how does the research move beyond simply describing young people’s understandings of social citizenship and participation in adult categories? Secondly, how can the analysis capture disadvantaged young people’s experiences while avoiding the static, deterministic frames in danger of depicting youth as passive victims, or overemphasising the agency and social mobility possible? Thirdly, which methods warrant that the understandings, visions and aspirations of the young people are recognised while allowing for a future perspective to be developed? Following on from these points at issue, qualitative, group-based data gathering methods were chosen, as these support the aims of this study to investigate avenues of social citizenship, without relying on previously established, reductionist perspectives on disadvantaged youth. However, before outlining the method in further details, the epistemological cornerstone regarding knowledge creation guiding this study will be discussed, as these considerations assisted the research in moving beyond the challenges posed above, regarding the co-creation of new knowledge.

In relation to the formation of consciousness, knowledge and understandings, Nielsen and colleagues (2003) point out that the development of ideas is an ongoing and unfinished process where the exposure to and the development of ideas create each other. As a consequence, ideas and understandings cannot be identified and gathered by researchers as fixed elements. Ideas take form, are developed and challenged in practice. Research is therefore a matter of co-creating understandings, as opposed to simply collecting these. Subsequently, attitudes should be examined in action, as a moment in a specific life context (Olsén, Nielsen et al. 2003). Hence, empirical data is not a fixed phenomenon ‘out there’ waiting to be collected, but is created in practice through inquiry with the participants. This also implies a vision of the researcher as a producing subject, involved in productions of empirical data (Søndergård 1996).

In other words, investigating young people’s social citizenship will produce an empirical context that includes relationships, experiences, ideas and attitudes of the participants and the researcher, which would not otherwise have been there. Engaging a group of young people to contemplate their social citizenship aspirations and the complex ways that power operates to dominate and shape consciousness, provides an advantageous, although challenging, way to investigate the central research question. Reflecting this epistemology, methods have been chosen that aim at engaging the participants in a collaborative, communicative process, encouraging critical reflection regarding the ways they aspire to exercise social citizenship in the future. These epistemological aspects are in line with Charmaz’s version of grounded theory, which emphasises an open-ended
approach to research and are suited for explorative studies with young people (Charmaz 2006). How these considerations were applied will be discussed in the following sections.

**Grounded theory**

The research design and methods chosen aimed to facilitate critical reflection on the forces that prevent individuals and groups from shaping the decisions that crucially affect their lives. As this study aims at exploring a phenomenon (how disadvantage shapes social citizenship aspirations) and to develop hypotheses rather than to collect facts and numbers, an explorative, interpretive and open-ended approach to both the data creation as well as data analysis was required (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011). For this a grounded theory-inspired approach was chosen, as this section will discuss.

A number of different versions of grounded theory have emerged over the years (Pidgeon and Henwood 2004, Charmaz 2006, Charmaz and Henwood 2008). However, despite divergent understandings and emphasis made within grounded theory (see Strauss and Corbin 1998, Charmaz 2006) the overarching aim of grounded theory is to conduct research and analysis that is emergent, as opposed to determined by, preconceived logically deduced hypotheses. Creswell (2013) divides grounded theory approaches into two major types: the rigidly structured approach of Strauss and Corbin (1998) and the ‘constructivist’ approach of Charmaz (2006). The final aim of Strauss and Corbin’s version of grounded theory is theory building. In contrast Charmaz maintains that rather than being a clearly defined method with agreed upon procedures, grounded theory can be understood as an approach to investigation with several key aspects for conducting inquiry (Charmaz 2006). So, although grounded theory offers systematic guides to conducting data-driven qualitative analysis (Charmaz 2006), this ‘constructivist’ approach provides the researcher with flexible guidelines rather than rigid prescriptions, allowing for a less linear research design and process of analysis. Other researchers have applied grounded theory purely as a method of data analysis (process of category identification and integration) as opposed to a process through which to produce theory (Henwood and Pidgeon 1995). Such an approach, which has been referred to as an abbreviated version of grounded theory (Willig 2001), is also applied in this study.

This abbreviated version of the ‘constructivist’ approach has been chosen in this study, as the aim here is primarily to provide an empirically grounded, rich description of young people’s citizenship experiences. As the production of new theory was not the aim of this thesis, the full-version of grounded theory was not applied (I will however highlight the value of a more capacious understanding of aspirations – as social citizenship aspirations – developed in the previous chapter). The selected key aspects applied in this study include following the principles of grounded theory relating to the processes of coding and constant comparative analysis. As such, study data was subjected to grounded theory-
inspired coding and analysis, in order to produce a systematic representation of the participant’s experience and understanding.

The strengths of grounded theory lie in the strong focus on letting the empirical data guide the research process. Some grounded theorists emphasise the importance of entering the field as bare as possible. This involves conducting the literature review after developing an independent analysis and constructing the analytic codes and categories from the empirical data, not from preconceived hypotheses (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Others such as Blumer (1954) suggests using “sensitizing concepts” as guiding instruments for studying the social world. Blumer notes that: “Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look” (Blumer 1954: 7). The notion of sensitising concepts is useful, as it provokes the researcher to ask particular kinds of questions and guides empirical interests, without foreclosing on alternative interpretations. More so, sensitising concepts and disciplinary perspectives provide a “place to start, not to end” (Charmaz 2006: 17). These concepts are best used as tentative tools for developing ideas about processes emerging in the data and can easily be omitted should they prove irrelevant (Charmaz 2006). In this study, the sensitising concepts were also used as points of departures to form interview and workshop protocols and to develop ideas for analysis, as will be described later in this chapter.

The fixing of categories can be useful for research with a specific focus, such as oppositional analyses for political work against racism, sexism, oppression and discrimination (Staunæs 2005). However, when the aim of a study is to develop new understandings regarding the meaning-making processes and the transformative nature of experience, as is the case in this study, predetermined assumptions regarding relationships between fixed categories, can be limiting. McCall (2005) proposes what she calls an intercategorical approach for analysing data, a strategy that involves selecting strategic anchor points such as class, gender and ethnicity, while staying open to new categories. This approach has been chosen when analysing the data, as it recognises the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent, whilst maintaining an open, investigative stance towards how such categories change over time. An intercategorical approach employs a critical bearing toward categories, whilst still recognising their importance as 'lived' anchors that shapes contemporary life (Reay 2005). What is central to this approach is not the categories per se, as these are seen as in flux and never static. Rather, the emphasis is on relationships and changes within and between selected categories. As McCall notes “The intercategorical approach (...) begins with the observation that there are relationships of inequality among already constituted social groups, as imperfect and ever changing as they are, and takes those relationships as the centre of analysis” (McCall 2005: 1785). This line of analysis uses 'traditional' categories initially, to name social groups and structures of inequality at various points of
intersection, but the analysis is equally focused on illuminating the range of diversity and difference within the social group. Here the impact of racial, national, class, and gender structures of inequality is acknowledged, but does not determine “the complex texture of day-to-day life for individual members of the social group under study” (McCall 2005: 1782).

Chapter Two sensitised us to several issues in the ways marginalised youth have been represented and conceptualised, which potentially leads to incomplete understandings of how inequality becomes reproduced for certain groups. Following on from this discussion of the relevance of ‘traditional’ categories to conceptualise contemporary youth, I argue, along similar lines to Reay (2005) and Furlong (2011), that although these categories have lost their obvious explanatory power, they continue to play a crucial role in defining how social citizenship becomes lived and embodied. There is a need however, for a re-examination and re-conceptualisation of this process, to better grasp how this plays out for contemporary youth. The inter-categorical approach was selected in this study to assist such a re-conceptualisation of how disadvantage affects young lives. As such the strategic points of departure chosen for the comparative analysis in this study are: neighbourhoods and communities of being, experiences of belonging/unbelonging, avenues of recognition/misrecognition, gender and ethnicity. Categories emerging during the analysis such as Safety, Visibility, Connection and Respect were then cross-referenced with the meta-categories to develop an understanding of the intersection of these. The specific analytical procedures will be described later in this chapter.

**Qualitative case-studies**

To provide a comparative perspective three qualitative case studies of youth-based organisations targeted at disadvantaged young people were undertaken. A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin 2003). Case studies involving interviews and workshops were chosen as these methods are fitting for the research question and the line of inquiry taken in this study. This section will discuss the considerations regarding case study selection, representativeness and the appropriateness of the cases.

Sites for the research were purposefully sampled to provide for a diversity of social and economic contexts and approaches to the delivery of services. The underlying principle of purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases for study: that is, cases which allow researchers to learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research (Coyne 1997). Accordingly, the sample of youth programs was not chosen on the basis that the programs are representative of the general offerings of youth programs in Australia. Instead, the cases were chosen for their explanatory power, understood as
cases most likely to provide knowledge in relation to young people’s citizenship aspirations and ways of connecting with society.

Ensuring the appropriateness of the cases for the purpose of the study is key when using qualitative purposeful sampling (Morse, Swanson et al. 2001). Three groups of young people facing different types of disadvantage were selected to meet the information needs of the study, each group frequenting youth programs that operate under different ideologies of service. The groups and youth programs were chosen to provide different perspectives on how being disadvantaged shapes horizons for action and social citizenship aspirations. Cases were conducted with a group of Somali migrants living in public housing within a major metropolitan city, a group of rural young people struggling with school disengaging and attended an alternative to mainstream school and lastly a group of young people living in an ethnically diverse area in a major city. The focus of two of the programs is educational re-engagement and addressing academic barriers, one targeted at migrants and the other young people living in a rural town, where the third program is aimed at crime reduction. Although the three youth programs included are aimed at different groups of young people, and operate under different pedagogies, all programs share the goal of facilitating agency and transformation in the lives of their clients, by integrating them into broader society (as will be elaborated on in Part B of the analysis). The similarities in aim and differences in target group and ideology between cases, allowed for a comparative perspective to be developed.

This multiple case research design was chosen to compare commonalities and differences between the cases, and to allow a deeper investigation of why differences and consistencies exist. This strategy not only permits assessment of the research questions across different contexts, investigating a diversity of types of belonging and recognition shaping social citizenship aspirations, but is also advantageous over single-case designs, in that evidence from multiple case studies is often considered more convincing, and accordingly the research may be considered more robust (Yin 2003). Purposeful sampling of three types of youth programs allows for a comparison of how youth programs operating with different funding and ideology engage with young people’s aspirational horizons. The three groups of young people face different types of disadvantage anchored in nationality, gender or place-belongingness, which allows for an investigation of the impact of the local community on young people’s horizons for action. For these reasons, I argue that selecting purposefully sampled, comparative case studies is appropriate and useful for this study of disadvantaged young people’s citizenship aspirations.

The following section introduces the participants, their locality and youth program and briefly outlines the recruitment process. Pseudonyms are used for the neighbourhoods, youth programs and for the participants to preserve their anonymity.
The selection of sites and participants

Recruiting young people through youth programs

The recruitment of young people to participate was done through the youth programs. As the youth program workers were gatekeepers to access the young people, the recruitment of youth workers to interview and to build rapport with was first priority. Initially youth program managers were approach by email, followed by an informal phone conversation regarding the work undertaken at the program, to elicit whether the program would be suitable for this study. Relevant program managers and workers were subsequently interviewed, after which a strategy for recruiting youth participants was made, taking into considerations the advice and knowledge of the program workers regarding the best possible way of recruiting participants. A combination of posters on notice boards, advertising in kitchens and common areas and personal emails advertising the workshops (sent by the young people’s key workers) were used to recruit workshop participants. The assistance of the workers proved crucial in recruiting a ‘hard to reach’ group such as marginalised young people. A majority of the youth workers interviewed were concerned that few young people would attend the workshops, citing their own problems getting young people to be present at the program-run activities. In some instances, the workers explained, motivating the young people to leave their house was a challenge. This concern was valid to an extent, as gaining confirmation by the young people of their attendance proved very difficult (and not particularly reliable). As a gesture of valuing and compensating for their time and to encourage participation, workshop participants received $25 per workshop for attending. After each workshop, the participants were also offered pizza and other refreshments as a thank-you for their time and engagement. Speaking to the participants afterward, it was clear that the promise of food, as well as the chance to socialise with a group of other young people, acted as a significant motivator for attending for most participants. It turned out that some of the participants had gone to great lengths to participate, such as walking for more than an hour to get there. This was done not out of eagerness to participate in a study, but more out of boredom and lack of alternative activities to attend, highlighting how misleading the term ‘disengaged youth’ can be.

Importantly, this study does not aim at evaluating the effort of the individual workers, nor to evaluate the efficiency of the three programs. The study aims instead to investigate how the local understandings and the social processes mediating individuals’ choices and aspirations are acknowledged and worked with differently, within a diversity of youth work settings. However, the language of evaluation is difficult to avoid when discussing

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2 Despite the potential stigma invoked when using the terminology of ‘hard to reach’ groups, this term is used as it captures research that targets groups that might be hard to find and difficult to motivate to participate. Using this term does not suggest that the young people are hard to study or interview in general (Duvnjak and Fraser 2013).
how young people are supported by societal institutions such as youth programs. It feels imperative to point out that when discussing certain aspects of the work performed that appear to undermine the effectiveness of how the programs are able to engage with young people, I am not commenting on the overall effectiveness of the programs relating to their stated outcomes.

Participants, Youth Programs and Local context

Interviews with professionals

Twelve teachers, workers or program managers were interviewed between May 2013 and July 2014. Ten of the participants were recruited from the three youth programs. As the group I am calling the ‘Green Valley’ group all attended the same ‘alternative to mainstream’ school, two additional interviews with teachers were conducted. The experiences at mainstream school compared with experiences at ‘alternative to mainstream’ school became a theme in the Green Valley workshops. Hence, I decided to interview two teachers, to generate further understanding of the assistance offered to the young people. The youth program in Green Valley (what I am calling the ‘Youth Turnaround’ program) was run in conjunction with the alternative to mainstream school. Only the young people from Green Valley attended alternative education targeted at disengaged youth. The other young people participating either attended mainstream school or no school at all. Two of the program workers were interviewed twice to gather specific new data and to answer subsequent questions (one worker from what I am calling the ‘Zig Zag club’ and one worker from a Police and Citizens Youth Club (PCYC)). In summary, the interviews with workers included 3 workers from PCYC (‘City group’), 3 workers from Zig Zag Club (Migrant group), 4 workers from Youth Turnaround and 2 teachers from Green Valley.

Workshops with young people

A total of six workshops were run with sixteen young people aged between 16 and 19 (seven young women and nine young men). Ten young people (six women, four men) participated in two workshops each. A total of twelve hours of workshops were conducted with between six young people at the highest and two at the lowest.

The first round of workshops was run with young people from a migrant background in April 2014 (Zig Zag club). The second case study was conducted with rural participants in May 2014 (Youth Turnaround) and the last two workshops were conducted in July 2014 with young people attending a PCYC program.

Below is a breakdown of the youth participants.
Green Valley participants and Youth Turnaround

Four young people, two women and two men participated from Green Valley. All four young people were present at the first workshop, but only the two young women attended the second workshop.

Green Valley is located 80km outside of the nearest metropolitan city and categorised as one of the most disadvantaged areas in the region (lowest 10% by socioeconomic status). It is a remote and isolated area, with a higher percentage of young people compared to state standards. The educational attainment of Green Valley’s population is lower than the state as a whole, with half of the population over 15 years of age having no formal qualifications (compared with 46% for the wider metropolitan area). This is also an area of high unemployment compared to national data (2010 census data).

Youth Turnaround supports early school leavers and those ‘at risk’ of disengaging from school to re-engage with education and training. The aim of Youth Turnaround is to ensure that: “Every young person can achieve a purposeful future” through “economic,
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social and civic participation” (internal document). The program is targeted towards 13-19 year olds and involves intensive case management and activity-based programs. Although the focus is on school reengagement, there is an emphasis in the program on developing a range of life skills including resilience and emotional literacy. The program operates under a strengths-based and goal orientated philosophy. This strength-based approach involves recognising the resilience, strengths and capacities of individuals, rather than their limits (Bond 2010). Practically, this involves identifying young people’s strengths and their goals for the future and using these as points of departure for the work undertaken.

Youth Turnaround commenced in January 2010 as part of a national program funded by the Australian Federal Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). As a part of the funding requirement Youth Turnaround operates under a result-driven service model, where workers must reach a specific set of school reengagement goals with clients every year. A reengagement goal could for instance be strengthened connection with educational institutions or increased school attendance. This focused way of working towards school reengagement will be further discussed in Chapter Eight. Recruitment of young people occurs via direct referral and re-engagement activities, often delivered with other agency partners.

City group and PCYC

Two young women and four young men participated from this group. One of the young men and one of the young women only attended one workshop. Despite generally aspiring for gender balance in all case studies, under 30% of the young people being case managed at PCYC are women, making it difficult to recruit more young women.

The group of young people frequenting PCYC all live in one of the most ethnically diverse suburbs of a major metropolitan city, with close to 60% of the population born outside of Australia (compared with the national average of 40%) according to 2011 census of Population.

This youth program is part of Police Citizens Youth Clubs NSW (PCYC), one of Australia’s biggest youth organisations with more than 60 centres across the state of New South Wales. PCYC is State funded, but also receive donations from private enterprises (in particular for the charity work they undertake). The aim of this program is: “The reduction of crime by and against young people and the promotion of citizenship within communities across the state”\(^3\) (PCYC webpage). This aim is pursued by developing young people’s ‘skills, character and leadership’ through offering ‘fun, fitness and friendship’ to

\(^3\) http://www.pcycnsw.org/prime_about_us accessed 12 May 2015
all young people in the neighbourhood. PCYC was established in 1937 initially under the name Police Boys Clubs. The initial focus on young men has been widened to also include young women, however this legacy is still observable in the strong focus on physicality and sport in the activities offered at the club.

PCYC primarily runs sports orientated activities and weekly classes in for example fitness and martial arts, and includes a large gym with equipment and two exercise rooms, one with a fighting ring for boxing matches. Apart from these exercise programs, PCYC also hosts regular breakfast clubs (a free BBQ breakfast) before school. This part of the program is funded by a major Australian bank. The programs are run by paid police officers and a handful of volunteers and are open to all young people living in the area.

The police officers also undertake individual case management of young repeat offenders. All the young people participating from PCYC were being case managed by a police officer. As such, unlike the participants from the other two groups, the young people from the City group were not attending the youth program voluntarily initially but were required to as part of their sentence. However, at the point of study all the participants also took part in voluntary activities at PCYC such as boxing or exercise groups. Furthermore, the young people from this group mentioned ‘dropping-in’ to see their case worker, when they needed to talk or get advice, so despite the involuntary aspect of PCYC, all the young people eventually engaged with the program in a voluntary way. Attending the research workshops were of course also voluntarily and this was made clear before the workshops commenced.

Migrant participants and Zig Zag Club

Three young women and three young men participated in the first workshop at the Zig Zag club, but for the second workshop two of the young men unfortunately came several hours late and consequently were only able to join the group for pizza, not participate in the group.

Zig Zag club is run by a major charity organisation and was established in 1990 offering a diversity of assistance such as homework help, exam preparation and assistance in preparing applications for jobs and tertiary courses. All secondary school students in the area from Year 7 to 12 are eligible, but the majority of the young people frequenting Zig Zag Club are young people who are humanitarian refugees and have English as an additional language. In general, the young people from this program have experienced interrupted formal education and now require assistance to enable sustained and effective participation in mainstream education.
The club has three rooms, and twelve computers with internet and printing facilities. The core service is a drop-in centre run on weekdays in after-school hours, where users can receive homework help, tutoring and make use of the computers and printers. Although the assistance is aimed at what concerns the young people at present, it is predominantly centred on school re-engagement, and individualised help such as resume writing, school grants and scholarship applications and facilitating volunteer opportunities. The program has 160 young people registered as users and on an average day about twenty to thirty people drop by.

The group of young people attending this program all come from an African background and reside in a densely populated area of a major city. This is a suburb with a high concentration of economically disadvantaged people and is very culturally diverse. The area contains several public housing high rises, where the young people from this group live.

The following section outlines the research methods chosen for the case studies, namely exploratory interviews and group-based workshops. A summary of the workshop outline and some consideration about running groups with young people concludes the section.

**Exploratory research interviewing**

Exploratory research interviews were chosen as a data-gathering method with the professionals and the youth workers in this study (the young people participating were involved in workshops as will be described below). In-depth interviewing as a data-gathering method lends itself to interpretive inquiry that seeks to explore a particular topic or experience (Charmaz 2006). As Charmaz highlight "Both grounded theory methods and intensive interviewing are open-ended yet directed, shaped yet emergent, and paced yet unrestricted" (Charmaz 2006: 28).

As this is an explorative study, as opposed to a study aimed at hypothesis testing, methods providing the opportunity for identifying new ways of seeing and understanding young people's social citizenship and how they are recognised within youth work settings were chosen. Explorative, semi-structured interviews provide the freedom for informants to express their views in their own terms, as these enables the interviewees to “talk freely and emotionally and to have candour, richness, depth, authenticity, honesty about their experiences” (Cohen, Manion et al. 2011: 270). Further the process orientated, inter-relational understanding of knowledge as created in action, ascribed to in this study, corresponds with semi-structured, in-depth interviews for their malleable, explorative yet controlled approach (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009). For these reasons, in-depth interviewing is advantageous as a data collection method with professional and youth
workers, as these allow for flexibility and exploration whilst ensuring that relevant topics are covered.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and youth program workers. These were one-to-one, audio-recorded, and lasted between 45 minutes and over an hour. Interview questions were designed to explore areas related to the experience of the workers in their interaction with both the young people and the youth work setting. In particular, questions sought to investigate the guiding research question concerning how youth programs engage with the aspirations that young people bring with them. Themes covered the work performed, personal work history, aims and motivations for working in this sector and information regarding their views about the young people's aspirations and struggles. The ideology guiding the youth program and how the young people's concerns and issues were understood and assisted were the key points of investigation. The interviews ended with a more open-ended discussion of how best to work with disadvantaged youth. These interviews also assist in providing a social context for the young people's experiences (the full interview schedule is included in Appendix C).

**Workshop methods**

The research design employed in this study utilises group-based communication methods in line with the epistemological understandings of knowledge as created collectively and in action. These flexible and open-ended methods also correspond with grounded theory’s explorative approach to research. Considerations regarding the appropriateness of this approach is discussed in this section.

Groups as a research method can be seen as a collective testimony (Madriz 2000). In groups, the participants interact with each other as well as with the interviewer, allowing for the participants’ agenda to emerge as opposed to just the researcher's (Morgan 1988). Although discussion group methods produce less information on individual motivations and attitudes than in-depth interviews can achieve, they yield a different kind of knowledge as participants react to views they disagree with, or the group as a whole develops a perspective on a subject (Hakim 2000). This research method allows for a focus both on the discussed themes, but also on participant interaction and negotiations, which often opens up new avenues of exploration.

Collective methods have several advantages over individual research methods. Young people may have more confidence being in a group of peers as opposed to one-on-one with a researcher (Lahman 2008). Furthermore, the workshop situation might seem less artificial for the young people, as the setting mirrors a social situation to which most are accustomed (group interactions with peers). Moreover, collective research methods correspond with the method considerations concerning knowledge as created in action, as
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the group members investigate, explore and challenge theirs and each other's beliefs on specific topics (Pedersen 2008). In this context, the opportunity is created to develop ideas and knowledge, as opposed to simply asking for already formed ideas. More so, group-based methods have a strength in exploring community knowledge, language used and common attitudes in a way that renders control to the participants, all of which corresponds with the focus of this research on exploring young people's subjective experiences of citizenship (Boyden and Ennew 1997).

Although Boyden and Ennew's (1997) primary focus is on children, the researchers' considerations on the difficulties in researching children can arguably also be applied to young people. The researchers state that; “Children develop their own concepts, languages and cultures, through interacting with other children away from the influence of adults” (Boyden and Ennew 1997). The researchers emphasise the difficulties in accessing and interpreting the cultures and languages of children and young people. Boyden and Ennew (1997) suggest that encouraging participants to utilise a variety of modes of expressions, facilitates an easier interpretation process for the researcher. Along similar lines Morrow (2001) highlights the importance of using a range of research techniques to enable young people to participate in a way that suits them, and allows them to express themselves as they choose. The chosen research design for this study incorporates oral, visual and written aspects into the workshops, to ensure that several modes of expression are made available to the participants. A form of triangulation can be established using a range of social science qualitative data gathering methods (Morrow 2001). In choosing a variety of different methods that built upon each other, it was hoped that the participants' beliefs and lived experiences would unfold, and motivate debates and reflection.

A common critique of group-based research methods as opposed to individual methods is that collective methods can lack depth and potentially be one sided if some participants refrain from speaking up in the group out of fear of mockery. Several techniques in the workshops sought to minimise this factor. First, providing young people thinking space and note taking in the workshop started the participants off with reflection on their own ideas. This was then followed with the participants explaining their thoughts one by one without interruption. A common pitfall in focus groups is that some participants quickly agree with whoever speaks first. Allowing the participants to individually reflect on the workshop questions and presenting their thoughts without interruption should ideally avoid this pitfall. Another technique seeking to ensure all participants are represented in the workshop was the use of drawings and written labels. Drawings and labels are used as a tool to anchor the participants’ thoughts throughout the discussions and negotiations, making it easier for the participants to hold on to their own perspective whilst allowing for different perspectives to be developed.
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*Group-based task-orientated workshops*

Research on youth citizenship has highlighted that “the essence (even if not the language) of ‘citizenship’” appears meaningful for young people as they were found to care deeply about their role and position in society (Smith, Lister et al. 2007). However, when seeking to understand the social citizenship of young people on their terms, simply asking young people about these concepts is likely to not be the most effective method. All the selected workshop methods were chosen to generate awareness of the life experiences of the participants along with insights into the social relations at play. This section outlines the workshop schedule along with my considerations on how best to design workshops, which allows for an alternative type of knowledge creation.

In seeking to construct rich data with the choice of methodological tools, several techniques were applied, such as utilising task-orientated, communicative exercises; a strong focus in the workshops on building a thicker understanding of the young people’s life worlds; movements between individual reflection and group discussion; movements between exercises aimed at negotiations and exercises aimed at consensus building; exercises aimed at ‘interrupting’ preconceived ideas; the use of concrete objects such as labels and pictures; and as noted the use of both oral, visual and communicative tools. The use of task-centred activities gives more control to the young people, as they have more freedom in terms of setting their agenda, as opposed to for instance a traditional focus group. Further, workshop methods that encourage collaborative, communicative processes, playfulness and negotiations were chosen, to create a space where participants gain insight and respect for their own and each other’s understandings. The chosen exercises allowed time and space for the unpacking of a reasonable abstract concept such as social citizenship aspirations, in a way that breaks with ‘the normalized’ (Pedersen 2008: 45).

Researching young people comes with its own set of challenges as many competing interest and priorities are potentially fighting for their time and attention. It was critical that the participants found the discussions and the themes relevant and interesting, as the research design and chosen methods require a great deal of the participants in terms of concentration, involvement and willingness to engage. Furthermore, for the participants to want to attend the second workshop, they would have had to deem the first workshop worthwhile. Care was taken that the themes and workshops were thought interesting and engaging, whilst ensuring that the data generated was rich and relevant.

*Workshop schedule*

To answer the research question concerning types of citizenship practices and avenues of belonging and recognition disadvantaged young people experience and how these shape
or constrain their social citizenship aspirations, both workshops were focused on the participants’ idea of ‘the good life’. Their longings towards and imaginations about their version of ‘the good life’ relates to social citizenship, as it involves how one see themselves fitting into and being a part of society now and in the future. The workshops emphasised where and how the participants felt of value, recognised and experienced a sense of belonging, to further encompass the collective and social element of citizenship aspirations.

**First workshop**

This workshop was developed to explore the young people’s horizons for action, their vision of ‘the good life’ and whether this was felt attainable. The main exercise was a picture activity requiring the participants to draw three future scenarios (a worst case, a realistic and a best possible future scenario). These drawings were then presented to the group and commonalities and differences were discussed. This was followed by a group discussion about aspirations, what a ‘good life’ entails, what influences these aspirations, and the perceived level of personal control regarding one’s future. This also explores future longings and current belongings, as the participants talk about their values for now and for the future. In the first phase in the future scenarios exercise the pictures acted as a dialogue aid, a point of reference and an anchor for individual construction of meaning (Pedersen 2008). Another central technique of this workshop is the movement between individual reflection and group sharing. As Pedersen emphasise; “these shifts in states of mind and modes of communication provided a particular state of concentration apt for establishing not-so-common relations in data production” (Pedersen 2008: 38).

**Second workshop**

The second workshop centred on an exercise where the participants were asked to individually reflect on four “Personal qualities you need in life to do well.” The choice to focus on individual qualities is made as this concretises the abstract concept of citizenship to a more personal discussion concerning individual areas of mastery and recognition, and the mutual expectations and responsibilities present in the meeting between citizen and society. The personal qualities were written on labels and presented to the group. Again, this tool anchors individual reflection and meanings. The participants were then asked to place all the labels and qualities in the middle of the table and together prioritise the six most important qualities a person needs to do well in life. Asking the participants to negotiate allows for insight into what arguments holds legitimacy within the group and an exploration of naturalised rationalities and discourses. As the participants presented their choices and negotiated a consensus, they also shaped shared cultural meaning. This approach facilitates an analysis of how alliances are made (with which arguments), how statements are met by the group, which understandings appear valid or push the boundaries of the group norms, all important in gaining an understanding of the language, values and culture of the groups. This exercise was followed by a discussion.
about what facilitates the development of these qualities, and where the responsibility for
developing these qualities lies. This led on to an exploration of the participants’ areas of
recognition and mastery, and the role the youth program, school, family and
neighbourhood played in shaping these. This was done to allow for a less individualistic
conceptualisation of how the young people saw their future (the complete workshop
schedules are included as Appendix A and B).

Playful warm-up exercises and session evaluations were included in both workshops. A
small survey was handed out to the participants at the end of the workshops, gathering
demographic information as these types of data can be difficult and disruptive to try to
gather within a workshop.

The strength of the ‘future scenarios exercise’ lies in the ability to engage participants
through a playful approach and the inclusion of the utopian, creative element. Engaging
with feared and longed-for social citizenship identities is important to move the
discussion beyond establishing current conditions they face and criticising these. The
strength of the ‘qualities exercise’ is the ability to invite critical reflection, curiosity and
confidence in the research process, as the movement between individual preferences,
negotiations and a mutual understanding is found. Where the former exercises aim at
building a shared understanding of the communality of hopes and longings, the latter
exercise aims at negotiation. Both exercises yield different data and different insights into
the young people’s worlds.

**Analysis**

This study aims to arrive at comparative instances. Analysis proceeded from the verbatim
transcription of interviews and workshops, after which the data program NVivo was used
to code the text. In keeping with the principles of a constructivist grounded theory
approach, categories were established as they emerged from the data through initial line-
by-line coding and focused coding (Charmaz 2006). Initial line-by-line coding involves
studying and coding the data closely, which allows for a beginning conceptualising of
ideas, whereas focused coding involves the process of sorting, separating, and synthesising
the emerging codes. The resulting codes represented concepts of differing levels of
generality. In this, the analytic codes and categories were constructed from the data and
sensitising concepts (particularly drawn from theories of recognition), not from
preconceived hypotheses. Extensive memo-writing was then used to elaborate categories
and define relationships between categories. For each case, a case profile was constructed
containing information about the neighbourhood, the youth program, and young people
in the case, including her or his background, past experience, present situations and
future thoughts. This movement from several different types of coding, memo-writing,
comparisons and altering certain codes to higher-level conceptual categories, facilitates
progress towards higher levels of analysis. Once an analysis was developed from the data, this was analysed again with the strategic anchor points in mind (Flick 2002).

This thesis is an effort to use empirical data to engage the difference disadvantage makes to the development of social citizenship aspirations. The concept of social citizenship aspirations was approached through an investigation of how the young people see themselves fitting into and being a part of society now and in the future. This was a particular focus during the first workshop looking at future scenarios. Secondly, I investigated how experiences and feelings of belonging and recognition influence disadvantaged young people's plans for the future (guiding research question 1). This was illuminated through an investigation of the young people's sense of themselves in relation to the future and the quality of their social relationships. Experiences at school and in the local community highlighted experiences of belonging, mastery and recognition for the participants, illustrating the ways young people's communities negate or create aspirations for social citizenship (guiding research question 2). Part A of the analysis investigates these two first research questions.

I approached the third guiding research question, how youth programs engage with the aspirations that young people bring with them, through the worker interviews by exploring the workers' conceptualisations of the young people's contexts, goals and aspirations. How the young people's aspirational horizons were challenged and reinforced in youth work settings (guiding research question 4) was investigated through data from both the worker interviews and workshops with young people. Namely, through interrogating what I learned from the young people's narratives about how the mental and emotional conditions for self-realisation and social citizenship aspirations become shaped and stunted, and how these aspects were engaged with within youth work settings. Part B of the analysis investigates these third and fourth research questions.

**Ethical considerations**

This project was approved through the University of Melbourne Ethics Approval framework (Human Research Ethics Committee Approval Number 1339367). Further, I was required by several of the youth programs to obtain a Working With Children clearance to be able to conduct face-to-face workshops with young people under 18 years of age.

As all the participants were 16 years of age or older, consent from legal guardians was not required by the ethics committee. However, all steps to ensure informed consent was followed, including provision of participant information sheets and stressing to the participants that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. All participants gave consent for the interviews and surveys (the plain language statement for the project and the consent form for the project are attached as an appendix). I followed the
University of Melbourne protocols regarding secure data storage, the use of pseudonyms and not using the name of cities, towns, youth programs or schools.

The focus of this research is an investigation of complex concepts that will potentially touch upon sensitive, controversial, subversive or even potentially self-exposing topics. Many researchers agree that more participatory methods can increase the control the participants have in data creation, which both empowers and respects the participants (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). As described, I developed workshop methods that allow for a great deal of control to be given to the participants. Further, the workshops used methods to shift between different activities and different approaches to reflection, to facilitate a movement of choices, reflections, exchange of ideas and opinions, changes of perceptions and negotiations. Such a journey creates both a strong individual anchor and a common understanding, which ensures that the young people have time and space to develop their understandings, which makes such types of explorations with young people on the margins safer and more respectful.

Furthermore, group-based methods with an establish group (all participants are members of the same youth program) also labelled ‘friendship groups’ can be a means to empower young people and challenge the power dynamic between participants and researcher (Lahman 2008: 291). On the topic of power dynamics between participants and researcher, Lahman (2008) maintains that when researching children and young people it is always preferable to be with participants in their context, which also allows for more naturally occurring conversations to unfold (Lahman 2008). In the context of this study all meetings and workshops were conducted at the youth program sites, a place familiar to the participants.

It is important to note that although the chosen methods are participatory, this is not a participatory research project. While the participants are given agency in deciding how to respond to the exercises and which areas they choose to explore, the research agenda and research questions are predominantly shaped by the researcher. The methods positively engage the participants by encouraging them to take the role as co-researcher in the data creation process, although not the final analysis. Preliminary findings from the first workshop were discussed at the second workshop, and comparisons and differences between groups used as discussion points. It was hoped that this approach would assist in answering the research questions with ingenuity and incisiveness, and engage the participant in a respectful manner.

*On running groups with young people*

The three groups posed different challenges in terms of workshop facilitation. The Green Valley group was in many ways a challenging group to conduct workshops with, as the
participants from this group struggled with varying degrees of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. This group did not respond well to long spans of free-flowing conversation or complicated exercise instructions. Several times participants got up to do push-ups or jump around, as sitting focused for too long was challenging. This group required clear and concise facilitation, compared to what is ordinarily required or wanted in a workshop. In doing this, there is a danger of limiting the spontaneity and creativity of the participants and damaging the rapport between the interviewer and the participants. In cases when the participants are young adults, overly strict facilitation might make the participants relate to the facilitator as they would a schoolteacher. This could provoke a number of responses from the participants such as them ‘doing as told’, trying to get the exercise ‘right’ or rebelling against the exercise completely, all of which inhibits trust and open communication (Kyriacopoulos 2011). However, for this group, this more structured approach appeared to be useful and helpful for the participants.

Applying the same amount of direction would most likely have backfired with the city group, as this group were highly sensitive to feeling controlled by adults. This group were used to being told what to do by adults in positions of power (police and school personnel) and reacting against this, so in these meetings it was important to distance myself from the position of patronising adult. In this group, more space and less guidance were given, as the participants reacted intensely against being directed in an exercise. Initially several of the participants refused to participate in the first exercise because I, as an adult outsider, had not earned the right to tell them what to do. Only after the participants were assured that they would not be made to do anything, and were free to participate to whatever degree they desired, did they relax and engaged in the workshop. This was in many ways the opposite strategy as the one utilised with the Green Valley young people, who required clear, firm and repeated directions. It is a balancing act, however, that changes with every group. If the facilitation seems too vague or leaves room for doubt, the participants might lose trust in the process, and that the facilitator knows what she is doing. It proved vital in the workshops to strike this balance, where surety and direction was given with confidence, without coming across as authoritarian.

The group of young people from an African background required an altogether different approach as this group was highly accustomed to doing as they were told, in particular when told by an adult. The young women in this group expressed a sense of responsibility in wanting to do the exercise ‘right’, and might not be accustomed to the openness in the communication between themselves and three young men and also between themselves and an (culturally different) adult. Furthermore, this group all relied on strong cultural beliefs concerning what successful adulthood entails and hence were unaccustomed to articulating or reflecting upon the motivations behind these values. In this group, more focus needed to be placed on the playful and creative aspect of the exercises, and more time was spent investigating alternatives or gently interrupting or challenging the
participants’ beliefs. More work was also needed to create rapport and openness, to get beneath the initially short answers. It proved a great advantage to have a slightly larger group of six young people here, as stepping back and letting the young people mostly discuss and negotiate with each other in the exercises yielded the best result. Direct questions, as was advantageous in the Green Valley workshops, often triggered a desire to ‘get it right’ in this group, whereas letting the more creative ‘games’ in-built in the workshops run longer yielded more communication and information.

Despite these challenges around conducting workshops with different groups of young people, once a common footing and trust was established and the conversation was allowed to flow, the participants opened up about both challenging, vulnerable and joyous factor in their lives.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has detailed the methodology and research design used in this thesis, and outlined how the questions raised in Chapter One will be empirically addressed and how the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Three will be operationalised. The key rationale forming the overall design for the empirical investigation was to adopt a flexible approach that could capture the complexity of lived experience and the multiple interactions in young people’s lives that shape and facilitate social citizenship.

Given the research focus on how being disadvantaged shapes young people's social citizenship aspirations, I have argued that an empirically-grounded, explorative approach using group-based, task-orientated workshops and explorative research interviewing is appropriate and useful for the study. The methods aim at generating a rich understanding of the lived experiences of social citizenship by utilising the change of reflection and communicating modes built into the research design as well as providing time and opportunity for the participants to reflect upon and develop understandings. This is reflected in the research design allowing for two meetings going deeper in the exploration of the concepts as well as the utilisation of different data-creation methods.

In addition, the chapter has explained the rationale for purposefully sampling three contrasting groups of young people, Somalian young people, rural young people and a city group, as a useful approach to capture the different types of citizenship practices and avenues of belonging and recognition disadvantaged young people experience in their local context. It is towards the young people’s experiences of social citizenship the thesis now turns.
Analysis Part A

This study is concerned with the difference disadvantage makes to the development of social citizenship aspirations. This is done to begin to question how public institutions can better support young people who face disadvantage.

Part A of the analysis investigates the interwoven arenas that make up the foundation on which choices are made and decisions are conceived, by illustrating how various notions of structural and cultural belonging, modes of relatedness and avenues of recognition become embedded into young people’s horizons. To contextualise the young people’s engagement with their future this thesis will turn towards the participants’ local world and communities in the subsequent chapters, drawing attention to the young people’s search for connection, safety, respect and visibility within these. In particular, the difference disadvantage makes in this process. Chapter Five will show how a deeper understanding of young people’s known worlds can be uncovered when focusing on how they see their future. Focusing on future aspirations in a broad sense (not limited to education and employment) provides rich insight into the participants’ self-understandings and horizons for action, thus addressing the overall research aim of how social citizenship aspirations become shaped by disadvantage. To further interrogate this aspect, the thesis will move on to a more systematic description of what influences and shapes the participants’ self-understanding and concept of their future in the subsequent chapters. Chapter Six describes young people’s narratives of their experiences of belonging/unbelonging, recognition and misrecognition at school, and Chapter Seven investigates the local opportunities for belonging and the availability of local communities as the young people experience these and how these shape and place boundaries on young people’s present and future.
Chapter Five: The Concept of the Future

Introduction

This study focuses on how young people forge citizenship aspirations through a range of opportunities, constraints and choices. It is crucial therefore to understand how the participants engage with the concept of their futures and how they see themselves being a part of society in the future - what I have conceptualised as social citizenship aspirations. While it may appear unusual to start with young people’s concept of the future, it is only through documenting young people’s concept of the future that a sense of what constitutes their aspirational horizons emerges. The following chapters in Part A subsequently explore the determinants of these concepts of the future and why the young people engage with their future in these particular ways.

Asking young people about their futures, their wishes and dreams as well as their worries and anxieties, goes beyond an examination of their future goals. It is an entry point into how young people make sense of their world and their place within it. Through this frame, the participants responded with accounts of their values and self-understandings and in which ways, if at all, they long to be a part of the future. This is especially important as the concept of the future represents a possibility for security, connection, visibility and respect. For some of the young people the future is associated with hope, whereas for others any hope is eclipsed by fear and worry. Others again were motivated predominantly by what they did not want to become, driven solely by a scenario of a ‘dreaded’ possible, and in their eyes, plausible, future. This chapter suggests that young people who lack a sense of place and recognition in the present, struggle envisioning a valorised role for themselves in the future.

The analysis proceeds by describing how our three groups construct the future, focusing on the dominant views within each group, but also divergent visions. For the young people from both the City group and the Green Valley group, finding a sense of place both now and in the future was a major source of struggle, which both groups predominantly seeing the concept of the future as a source of anguish – the future understood in many ways as something from which they were marginalised. For the Migrant group on the other hand, the future seemed to hold great promise of security and recognition, although arguably based on limited choices or alternatives. To bring these dynamics out, this chapter discusses: Young people’s trepidations about the future; how young people construct the future through a normative concept of adulthood; the strategies used to either resist or embrace this future; and the levels of hope, clarity or ambiguity experienced by the young people.
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**Fearful future projections**

Whilst talking about future dreams may for some be a comfortable topic, involving optimism and hope, for the Green Valley group their future narratives were overwhelmingly dominated by anxieties. This section pulls out three initial key aspects in relation to the young people’s drive towards the future; the degree of clarity, ambiguity or anxiety. This section argues that a sense of clarity and control regarding one’s future does not necessarily induce well-being.

One of the key ways the young people from Green Valley constructed and engaged with the topic of their future was through a sense of trepidation. Some of the participants were clear about what they wanted, where others’ future plans remained vague. However, all the Green Valley young people expressed having to work hard to stay on a positive path and not stray down a path leading to an undesired future. Dale, who is very certain about his future dreams, wanting to be a tradesman, get married and buy a house, expresses deep worry despite this clarity: “I think about my future a lot, I want to have a good future, I don’t want to have a shit one”. Whilst the reasons for this will be explored later, these young people’s feelings of anxiety about the future stands in contrast with both the Migrant group and the City group, that did not experience similar levels of anxiety.

For Katie, the future is a risk to be calculated and controlled. Thinking about the future creates immense worries and anxiety, and she considers her future as a project that needs to be systematically planned. She describes spending hours daily organising, planning and revisiting her studies. When asked about the *most important qualities a person needs in order to do well in life*, Katie picks being organised, taking priority over her other choices of being smart, persistent and happy.

**Maja** Why is it important to be organised?

**Katie** To me it is, I’m really, I won’t function without, to be honest. Only like with my studies though, that’s my main priority, like I’m so anal about that all the time. Yeah, I just worry about it all the time, and I’m just so committed to it, so it’s a big part of my life, my education and my future, so yeah.

**Maja** Why do you worry about it?

**Katie** Just like, I don’t know really, it’s just, if I’m smart enough. Like work is going to be hard, so that’s why I need to be persistent, I need to be happy and I need to be organised to make sure that I get all the work done, and make sure I have time spare.

Although Katie describes in elaborate details her short-term educational goals, her accounts are void of any idealised visions of her future. Further, Katie experiences her future as having only a single possible, positive trajectory, which all hinges on her attaining the right grades and eventually a Diploma in Social Work. On the other hand,
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Katie has many undesirable future scenarios such as becoming a teenage mother or a drug addict. Speaking to Katie, it appears that she envisions a narrow range of possibilities, a belief that causes her considerable stress and anxiety. As Katie says about her life now: “Shit. Life is pretty shit right now, but I will get there. At the moment, it’s pretty shit. Just having to work really hard”. Although the level of stress and anxiety Katie is experiencing impacts on her sense of wellbeing, her dedication to her future is providing her with more than just the opportunity for an education. It is providing her with a sense of mastery and control. This appears as a paradox. Katie’s anxiety detracts from her sense of well-being on one hand, but on the other contributes to her sense of control, which although dependent on a future projection, is experienced as a present affective state. In contrast Cash has no future plans or positive future visions.

Maja What about you Cash, what would be your dream for the future?
Cash I’m still contemplating what I want to do with my life.
Maja Is it something that you worry about?
Cash I worry about a lot of things and my future is one of them. Mmm.
Maja What is your worst case scenario, in terms of what you worry about?
Cash Drugs.
Katie Babies.

Where Katie and Cash both expresses worry about their future, Katie is very clear about what she wants and how she will attain this. Cash however expresses uncertainty and apprehension. Many from the Green Valley group lacked genuine self-belief, doubting that they had the capacity to achieve a positive future or indeed a desirable future at all. These young people stated their biggest obstacles in terms of reaching their dreams as being ‘drugs and babies’ (although only the women worried about pregnancies). These threats to their future were made particularly real by the fact that all of the Green Valley young people were struggling with some form of drug or alcohol abuse, and expressed having close family members and friends using drugs. Teen motherhood also appeared as a highly plausible risk, as teenage mothers were present all around them, with best friends, sisters and other women in their friendship groups being pregnant or being young mothers. In the quote below Tara and Katie discuss having children. Where Katie is fearful of becoming pregnant, Tara is looking forward to becoming a mum.

Katie I wouldn’t choose to live my life as a young mum, but some people like my sister fell pregnant when she was 18, but since she was 17 all she wanted was a family. So, some people just want a family, and then there’s people like me who would rather just have a life.
Tara I wouldn’t mind if I got pregnant, I really wouldn’t care, I’ve got three or four friends who have kids and two of them are younger than me, one the same age
as me and the other one is older. Yeah, this girl I know, she was 14 when she had her baby. He’s cute. (...) If I get pregnant I will keep it, I’ve already told my mum. I’d love to have a baby now.

To put Tara’s remark about not caring whether she becomes pregnant into perspective, Tara struggles coming up with an alternative future for herself (or women in general) that does not involve becoming a stay-at-home mother. When the conversation later turns towards future job wishes, she observes: “Where girls work these days, I don’t even know to be honest, I don’t know”. In terms of the interplay between social positioning and aspirational horizons, Tara lacks the family resources and types of social connections, which would give her access to examples of alternative possible futures for women. Her aspirational capability becomes limited by a combination of local marginalisation and not belonging to the mainstream in the context of rural inequality. This finding corresponds with much scholarship that highlights the ways in which visions of the good life are context-dependent and shaped by place, culture, class and gender (Willis 1977, MacDonald 1997, Bottrell 2007, Bottrell 2009, Hart 2012).

The burden of social fears and moralising discourses are felt strongly by the participants from Green Valley. Ingrained in their narratives of successful futures are representations of individuals who deviate from the norms and become failures and underdogs. If one does not succeed, there is only one alternative future, and that is a bleak one. This is the fuel behind both the anger and the anxiety expressed by this group. In comparison neither the City group nor the Migrant group worried to the same extent about early parenthood or drug abuse. Of note, the Green Valley group was also the group receiving the greatest amount of targeted assistance from specific school reengagement personal, drug councillors and youth workers, all of which encouraged a strong focus on attaining conventional future success and stressed the risk associated with not attaining these (this will be further discussed in Chapter Eight).

It seems that this strong focus on the future can led to a narrowing of aspirational horizons. Although the majority of this group subscribe to traditional working-class futures (Brannen and Nilsen 2002), it can be argued that they predominantly aspire for a life that is known to them. We see this in Dale’s dream of becoming a tradesman like his father, and Tara a stay-at-home mother, like her mother, aunt and sisters. They hope or expect their lives to follow the same sequence as those of their parents. However, what is evident in their narration of the future, is the underlying sense of fear as opposed to hope. Attaining a life like their parents is a best-case scenario.

Fearful future projections, regardless of level of clarity or ambiguity, creates a feeling of apprehension, rather than being expectant about the future. On this Sennett notes; “An apprehension is an anxiety about what might happen; apprehension is created in a climate
emphasising constant risk, and apprehension increases when past experience seems no

guide to the present” (Sennett 1998: 97). This sense of trepidation combined with an

experience of limited choice, may leave people more reactive than proactive, leading them

predominantly to seek the safe options, as opposed to exploring alternatives.

Hart’s (2012) concept of adapted preference is of relevance here. Hart argues that although

individuals might demonstrate the functioning to aspire, they might still have limited
capacity to aspire outside the normative ideals of ways of being and doing for ‘people like
me’. This is a significant point, as young people may present with very clear and
achievable aspirations, but as their capacity to aspire has never been nurtured, these
preferences might be highly adapted or moulded towards certain more widely accepted
futures. As Hart notes: "If an individual has limited opportunities to develop their
aspirations freely, through external expression as well as unfretted private thoughts, then
their freedom in choosing ways of being and doing (well-being and agency achievement)
they have reason to value in the future is likely to be compromised” (Hart 2012: 79). From
the young people’s narratives, it seems that they have limited opportunities to develop
their aspirations freely, due to limited exposure to alternatives, lack of social resources,
material inequalities associated with living in a rural town and institutional pressures in
the form of a strong focus on future becoming held by the people seeking to support them
(school personnel and welfare workers). This also highlights the relational processes
involved in aspiring and the consequence in terms of aspirational horizons for
disadvantaged groups.

This section has demonstrated that even where these young people present with clear
ideas about the future, this future may hold few positive prospects, as a sense of clarity
and control regarding one’s future did not automatically lead to well-being. Two strategies
towards the future can be drawn out here. One is characterised by clarity and anxiety
(understood as aspirational clarity, clarity regarding the steps required to attain this, as
well as anxiety about the future) and another is characterised by ambiguity and anxiety
(understood as vague or no future plans and anxiety about the future). A sense of
trepidation is common to both positions.

**Embracing or rejecting the future**

The previous section explored fear and level of clarity. Another way the young people
spoke about the future was by rejecting the concept as irrelevant. While popular
discourses situate youth with future (Black and Walsh 2015), for the City group, this
relationship with the future was more complicated. As will be elaborated in this section,
the relationship between embracing or rejecting the future was evidenced in three
attitudes shown by the City young people: Those who rejected the concept of the future
and lacked hope; those who were also resistant to the concept of the future but nonetheless were hopeful; and those who embrace whatever may come.

Some participants from the City Group developed a strategy which could be described as ‘resistance and lacking hope’. This attitude was characterised by the participants rejecting the future they sensed available to them, while grieving what seemed to be denied them (a more desirable future).

During our first meeting where the participants were asked to draw three future scenarios, Kaleb simply wrote Freedom in big letters on his piece of paper. Likewise, he did not want to entertain a worst-case or realistic future scenario. I interpreted this as a sign of Kaleb not wanting to engage in the exercise in the way he thought he was required to. It was apparent that being asked to focus on the future was upsetting to him. When he felt his choice not to participate was respected, that he was not going to be pressured or coerced to do the exercise, he softened his defensive stance and elaborated on the most important topic he wanted to talk about - Freedom - and the fact that his life now seemed completely void of this.

Maja: That’s the most important thing for you, freedom?
Kaleb: Yeah, and like just do whatever I want you know, that’s it.
Maja: How do you get to do whatever you want?
Kaleb: Fuck the law, I don’t know.

Refusing to entertain the concept of ‘me and my future’ is a powerful alternative way of engaging with it. Kaleb’s future dreams are fuelled not by a desired becoming, but by a need to escape something, foremost restrictions imposed on him by the school and the police. Kaleb narrates his experiences at school as a daily violation from which he longs to be free. This experience of life as pressure and restriction is echoed in his interaction with his parents, the police, the youth program and society at large, as he observes: “Like everywhere you can’t do what you want, like you have to do what you are told”. This is stated repeatedly and with a significant amount of frustration. Kaleb longs for a sense of self-ownership. As this dream seems unattainable, he discounts the distant future. Along similar lines, Kylie struggles coming up with a future that does not involve her going to prison, both because it seems to her to be where her current trajectories will lead her, but also because she cannot envision a future where she is part of society in a meaningful way: “Yeah, ending up in jail because we are doing what we want to do, because we are not doing what we are told, that’s why”. These young people articulate a rejection of the versions of adulthood they sense available to them. They cannot envision a desirable future for themselves, not due to fear of drugs and motherhood like the Green Valley group, but because they perceive their present opportunities and future paths as restrictive and non-
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negotiable. As these young people struggle experiencing their life as belonging to them, they reject engaging with the concept of their future.

Their defensive ‘fuck the law’ strategy is both an expression of deep-felt agitation towards a sensed unfairness, and can be understood as a response to a sense of powerlessness and a rejection of engagement on the premises as they are laid out (pursuing the available, normative life-course as the participants perceive it). The question is, what does it mean for a person’s sense of self and wellbeing when he or she cannot forward reference or create a future towards which they can move. Wierenga highlights, in her study of the aspirations of young people in a rural town, the importance of having a sense of progress: “For all respondents, having a language (or multiple languages) with which to orient themselves towards valued goal-states, demarcates the difference between ‘life as adventure’ or ‘life as chaos’” (Wierenga 2011: 378). It appears that when the future is characterised by a desire to avoid pain, disappointment or boredom, it becomes void of the opportunity for meaningful self-expression.

Another strategy evident in the young people’s attitudes towards the future also included rejecting the idea of an adult normative future. But unlike the previous strategy, which lacked hope, this strategy was hopeful. This attitude could be summarised as ‘resistance and hope’.

Leanne does not experience apathy or the same powerlessness towards her future as Kaleb and Kylie. Although her future dreams at the moment appears stifled, as she has left school and will not be completing her Higher School Certificate (HSC)\(^4\), her future imaginations are creative. She describes a desire to change the world for the better, and has a passion in her voice when she speaks about what needs to be changed.

Leanne My ideal future would be aliens coming down and saving planet Earth because [otherwise] it’s going to fuck up in generations to come, and our generation isn’t doing anything for the future, and all generations before us have fought for things and I believe that the society is just a big stupid bunch of people stuck in a system. They are being born into being a robot and there’s lines of what’s wrong and right, and they don’t do what they want to do, they do what they are told to do, and they don’t even think about thinking outside of the box because they are all just programmed into this is right and this is wrong. So, my ideal one, would be aliens taking over, showing this world what the fuck is actually real, and what living is actually really about and peace, and accepting, and humans not to start a war over aliens invading,

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\(^4\) The Higher School Certificate (HSC) is the credential awarded to secondary school students who successfully complete senior high school level studies (Years 11 and 12 or equivalent) in New South Wales, Australia.
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like just chill, Like everyone would be happy and the world would have so much more intellect and we would unlock more planets and it would be fantastic, so that would be my ideal.

Despite the radical concept of longing for an alien invasion, this idea is used metaphorically to represent the sweeping social changes for which Leanne is yearning. Her scenario is not characterised by apathy - instead she expresses the capacity to imagine a positive, forward-orientated vision, an ideal of how she would like the world to be, as opposed to merely a stance of opposition towards her reality. Moreover, Leanne is the only participant who extends her projection beyond herself and her immediate surroundings. She is inspired by a utopian vision of long-term societal transformations. This also includes political and practical ideas about how the education system needs to change. Consequently, although she has no short-term, personal aspirations, she is motivated and paradoxically hopeful towards the future. The hopefulness in this statement lies in her sense of having a stake in the future, in the collective future being a relevant topic to care about. Leanne’s attitude towards the future can be seen as involving both resistance andhopefulness. It is worth highlighting though, that very few of the participants were able to envision a future where their life situation improved.

A third strategy evident is what might be describe as ‘embracing the future’. This involved a laissez-faire attitude and a focus on being in the present, responding to life in the now, involving a re-active rather than a pro-active approach. Some of the participants expressed little desire propelling them towards something, nor had they any motivation to flee their current situation. Sam and Marcel eagerly joined in the discussion about longing for freedom, but from a standpoint not characterised as a rejection and resistance of the future.

Sam I have no plans for the future, I have no idea what’s going to happen.
Marcel Wouldn’t that be boring, if you know what’s going to happen for the rest of your life!
Sam Go with the breeze, just do whatever, yeah freedom.
Marcel I think it would be very horrible in ten years’ time if I was unhappy in my job, unhappy with my life, unhappy with the people I was surrounded by.
Kylie Yeah, who wants to live like a boring life where you just...
Leanne Yeah, I’d get angry if I was like stuck in the system in ten years and not using my life to do actually something worthwhile
Kaleb Who wants to like go to school. You go to school and then you work hard in your HSC to get into a Uni and then you work hard at Uni to get a job, and then you work hard at your job and then you die.
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Sam and Marcel employ a more relaxed attitude towards their future. It appears, that they are following a path of least-resistance, a willingness to embrace the version of ‘adulthood’ they sense attainable. Sam sees himself getting a job in McDonalds or another fast food outlet once school is finished and anticipates making a life for himself in the same neighbourhood where he currently lives. He has no visions concerning how this life course might change, in fact his ideal scenario is becoming a drug dealer, as that is the only avenue to wealth he can envision for himself. Where this strategy could potentially be interpreted as a sign of success (clear attainable goals towards full-time employment), it is better understood as a way to negotiate a life experienced as offering very few opportunities, a surrendering to the limitations experienced.

Maja: Are you worried about your future?
Marcel: Not really.
Maja: Do you ever think about it?
Marcel: I’m just going to let it unfold in front of me, step by step.

Marcel is neither worried about his future nor very clear about how he wants his future to look. His best case scenario involves him becoming a professional soccer player, although he no longer attends soccer training. Equally, Sam and Mike do not think much about the future. By focusing on enjoying life, some of the participants develop an optimistic attitude, believing that step by step life would unfold well. For these young people, reflections about the future are deferred or postponed (Brannen and Nilsen 2002).

Although the young people’s positive, relaxed engagement with the future creates a sense of seeming contentedness, it is important to acknowledge that being able to dream, plan or envisage a desirable future, requires emotional and mental resources and significant social capital, and that to hope involves a fundamental experience of agency, choice and possibilities (te Riele 2011). There is vulnerability in wanting. There is considerably more vulnerability involved in allowing a longing to surface, than to squash it before it makes itself felt. Low expectations may shelter a person from disappointments. Rejecting what one cannot have, as opposed to trying and failing, keeps the person’s sense of self intact. What is potentially won with this strategy, is a sense of being the author of one’s life, as this strategy was experienced as a choice not to care. On the other hand, seeking out the least-worst or least risky option, is likely to have negative consequences for the young people’s future and current social participation, self-expression, well-being and learning opportunities.

In summary, three different strategies have emerged towards engaging with a particular form of normative adulthood (education, steady job, relationship etc.): Lack of hope and resistance; hope and resistance; embracing of the future. All of these strategies can be argued to reflect a realistic assessment of one’s future based on an understanding of one’s
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present opportunities. In the instance of Kaleb, he understands what opportunities seem to be ahead of him on the basis of his past and present experience. His approach could be considered fatalistic, but it could also be considered a high level of competence – a sophisticated social calculus. Sam on the other hand, adopt a future attitude that is more accepting, by embracing what may come. In contrast, the Green Valley group express no resistance towards this normative version of adulthood, but rather a lack of hope concerning its attainability, fearing that they might waste their life on drugs or early motherhood. This analysis continues by focusing on the social embeddedness of aspirations in the following section.

Relational orientation and collective aspirations

Whilst general approaches to planning focus on the opportunities and risks for the individual, many of the young people discuss planning in highly relational ways, embedding these in the context of family and community. Especially evident here is the highly gendered embeddedness of the process of aspirations.

Where some of the participants experience no choices or desirable possibilities, and can be characterised as ‘reactive’, most of the migrant young people from Zig Zag Club both experience their future as a given and feel a sense of authorship towards this future. They too do not worry noticeably about their future, but not because they reject the concept as irrelevant or felt limited in their choices. On the contrary, this group has an acute sense of their future and can account for very detailed immediate and long-term plans and visions for themselves. The young migrant women describe in detail their future home, their children, the traits of their future husbands and how they would feel once this future was attained. The young men are equally clear about their roles as future family providers, wishing to be well-renowned and well-paid architects, businessmen or professional basketball players.

The young migrant men and women can best be described as having highly traditional family values, involving the men as breadwinners and the women taking the role as homemakers. This is compatible with much research on the expectations of children of immigrants (Brannen and Nilsen 2002, Brannen and Nilsen 2002). Within this group, it is generally accepted that women and men have different roles and different responsibilities. For men, it is imperative to be financially prosperous, whereas most important for a woman, in terms of securing a desirable future, is to find a good husband.

Wada A woman has just got to find the right guy.
Maja [To the women in the group] Do you agree, is it that much easier to be a woman? Is it just about finding the right husband?
Aamori No, no, right husband and they get like children and that’s it, but still they
Chapter Five: The Concept of the Future

reach their goals.
Babette You just stay home.
Raad The man wears the pants. There has to be a man in the house, so some ladies try to be a man, that’s why there are a lot of single mothers.
Babette We have to do this because we live together.
Aamori The man has to be the boss, we have to accept that.

As can be read in the quote above, both the young women and the young men are clear about their future place in society (and within the family). The young men express feeling obliged to do well and improve upon their parents’ economic situations. As Wade explains: “If you don’t have money, you will be broke, if you are broke, your whole family suffers. You have to be like make them proud and shit”. In this social dynamic, future aspirations are not simply related to the individual, but intertwined with the wishes, wellbeing and reputation of the family. Likewise, how they are to go about attaining these futures is role-modelled by their local African community, as will be discussed in Chapter Seven.

In summary, the young migrants view adulthood as embedded in collective female and male traditions involving a clearly scheduled and predictable, standardised life course. The major concern for this group may not be lack of aspirations, but rather restricted exposure and freedom to develop capabilities outside of these cultural norms, resulting in limited aspirational horizons. This group can be said to be ‘expectant’ rather than ‘apprehensive’ about the future (Sennett 1998). Little doubt is expressed about the attainability of these aspirations within the Australian context. Although the Migrant group foresee their futures as highly socially embedded, and express aspirational horizons and self-understandings highly aligned with the local community values, they articulate a sense of authorship and ownership towards their future. The clear norms provide both a sense of a pathway and a degree of ontological security, which is not present in the tales of the young people in Green Valley or the City group. The ability to imagine a valorised future role for oneself, seems to influence how people feel about themselves and their sense of stake in the future.

Expectant, Apprehensive or Predetermined futures

Through the frame of future aspirations, the participants narrate their values and self-understandings and in which ways, if at all, they longed to be a part of the future. The previous sections showed the young people’s orientation towards their future, either involving a rejection of the future or planning for the future. These orientations all suggest a strong link between being and becoming, between the present and the future. From the young people’s discussions, three primary orientations towards the future emerged:
Chapter Five: The Concept of the Future

- **Apprehensive and tactical orientation**: the future as a risk to be calculated and controlled. Strong focus on the future.
- **Extended present focus**: hedonistic orientation, naïve trust in the future or acceptance of whatever may come. Strong present focus.
- **The future as predetermined**: collective aspirations, high level of certainty and well-being, but a limited aspirational horizon. Expectant orientation.

The degree of clarity and planning towards the future is often portrayed as being associated with a sense of agency (Brannen and Nilsen 2002, Woodman 2011), an understanding which underpins much youth work practice (as will be elaborated in Part B.). However, the ways the young people in this study discuss planning, complicate this straightforward relationship between planning and agency. For some young people, a plan is evident, but this plan is based on highly limited aspirational horizons. The absence of relational and material resources on which they can draw when imagining their futures led the young people to stay within their known-world, although many of them are aware of the limitations here. This reflects the lack of future alternatives identified by the young people themselves. On this topic Carstensen (2006) argues that people experiencing their future opportunities as increasing, which is predominantly young people or people making new beginnings, engage in further activities that enhance their opportunities. On the contrary, people who perceive their future opportunities as contracting (such as at life crises or old age) rescale their goals towards more feasible aspirations and focus instead on emotional satisfaction. A similar finding was visible in this chapter, where the young people who did not experience a sense of choice and opportunity were most likely to scale down their aspirations.

The concept of self-extension as employed by Worth (2009) is pivotal here. Self-extension, she argues, is essential to young people's transitional becoming as it involves “the widening of social and personal interests, the process of developing greater exterior connections with the world” (Worth 2009: 1054). The young people who do not experience choice and possibilities tend to not act to expand their horizons by gaining information and exploring new areas. Largely these participants focus on creating relational belonging and stability at a time when ideally, they could focus on expanding their horizons. In this pattern, there is a connection between experiencing oneself as having limited choices and lowering one's expectations. Regardless of whether hopeful future aspirations are realistic, actualised or indeed predict the future, they are real in their consequences (Mische 2009, Worth 2009).

The following section brings together the strategies of the participants in a typology that allows for the representation of the degree of agency and clarity to be included. The typology highlights the crucial element of experiencing oneself as having a sense of authorship, as vital for experiencing a stake in the future.
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Discussion: Being the author of your own life

The participants’ engagement with their futures is captured in the following typology. As this is a separation made for analytical purposes, the young people do not necessarily fit neatly into one category in all aspects of their life, nor are these categories mutually exclusive. The purpose of this typology is to begin to develop a 'language of description' (Bernstein 1996) for representing how the participants engage with their future, and the degree to which the participants experienced clarity or ambiguity about their future and the level of hope and anxiety experienced.

There are three contrasting examples of being the author of one's life, one involving clarity and anxiety, one characterised by hopefulness and clarity and a third involving uncertainty and hopefulness. The first two involve an active, purposeful stance towards the future, where the latter adopts a more passive orientation.

There are also three versions of lack of authorship, of merely responding to circumstances. One involves embracing the future, whereas the other two are characterised by a rejection of the future. Of the group that rejected the attainable future, some experienced a sense of resistance for example Leanne, where other experienced lack of hope and resignation associated with their future. The rejection of the future is not necessarily a denial that the future is important, but more a self-protective strategy, born from limited belief in the attainability of a good life in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CLARITY ABOUT FUTURE</th>
<th>APPREHENSIVE</th>
<th>EXPECTANT</th>
<th>REJECTION</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tactical planning</td>
<td>Hopefulness</td>
<td>Lack of hope</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>Anxiety, fear and stress</td>
<td>Future is assured</td>
<td>Resigned</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Focus on becoming certainty</td>
<td>Embracing the future certainty</td>
<td>Defeated</td>
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<td>Author of one’s own life</td>
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<th>AMBIGUITY ABOUT FUTURE</th>
<th>APPREHENSIVE</th>
<th>EXPECTANT</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack of hope, frustration, inability to act or move forward</td>
<td>Hopefulness</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncertainty</td>
<td>Easy-going, hedonistic orientation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Being focused</td>
<td>Being focused</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Embracing the future</td>
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*Table 2: Future Orientations*
Chapter Five: The Concept of the Future

Importantly, this is not a calculation of the actual agency or opportunities available to the participants, but an inquiry into their felt sense of agency. The model, shown in Table 2, captures WHETHER young people’s self-understanding encompass experiencing themselves as being the author of their own life. The degree of anxiety felt was not related to any rational assessment of the attainability of one’s future aspirations, nor did the anxiety subside once a sense of clarity was gained. Interestingly, certainty or ambiguity did not seem to have any coalition with the participants’ sense of hopefulness or positivity. Anxiety was predominantly associated with experiencing limited choices, and largely unaffected by individual action. It appears that the most important factor for the young people in terms of having a sense of stake in the future and a willingness to participate, was experiencing themselves as having choices.

The young people’s accounts suggest a relationship between experiences of choice and experiences of social citizenship. Without a sense of stake in the future any willingness to be a part of society diminishes. Mische highlights the importance of analysing the form and content of people’s future aspirations, as these in part determine the present, by influencing how people think, behave and feel in the moment (Mische 2009). A similar conclusion can be drawn on the basis of this research, as the participants’ beliefs and expectations of the future contribute to not just how they act (or do not act), but also affect how they experience their place in society. As such, future expectations can act in “self-fulfilling or unanticipated ways” (Mische 2009: 699) despite them proving faulty. It could be argued that young people robbed of a sense of agency or of having a life belonging to them, will develop a lack of interest in engaging or participating in society now as well as in the future. This point will be further developed in the following chapters.

CONCLUSION

At the heart of the discussion of how young people engage with the concept of the future, and their future social citizenship lies the degree to which the participants consider their future as a venture they have choices over, or whether they see their future as more or less fixed. This chapter proposes that young people lacking a sense of place and agency in the present, struggle in envisioning a valorised role for themselves in the future. Three examples demonstrate this dynamic. Firstly, the young people’s narratives suggest a relationship between being able to orient oneself towards a desirable future and, to some extent, experiencing oneself as the author of one’s own life, as opposed to simply living in reaction to circumstances. We see this in the narratives of the Green Valley group, where finding a sense of place both now and in the future, is a major source of struggle. Subsequently, the concept of the future was a source of anguish and fear.

Secondly, although the concept of the future represents a possibility for security, connection and respect for some participants (for example the Migrant group), for others
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This possibility of a meaningful future was in many ways understood as something they were marginalised from. The City young men expressed the bleakest future narratives, motivated predominantly by what they did not want to become, without a positive future dream to strive for. Despite many of the young men's sense of resistance towards the future they sensed attainable to them, no positive alternative seemed attainable. In the absence of a sense of hope for a meaningful future, depressing expectations or refusing to take part in broader society, seem the most effective self-protection strategies. This finding speaks to the impact disadvantage has on people's future aspirations. In contrast, the Migrant group expressed both a strong sense of place and direction, and a hopefulness regarding the future. All the participants, however, structured their future visions in relation to a search for security, connection and recognition, as we will see in the subsequent chapters.

Thirdly, few of the participants venture far from their known world when constructing their future aspirations. Despite the diverse circumstances and context of the participants, none of them experience their future as comprising a wide range of possibilities and positive alternative outcomes. The role of socialisation is fundamental here, as people tend to develop a sense of clarity about futures that are role-modelled in their immediate surroundings, and struggle envisioning alternatives. However, the young people's narratives demonstrate that it is not purely relational embeddedness or 'neighbourhood effects' that place restrictions on young people's aspirations. The inability to experience oneself as the author of one's own destiny appear to be a profound constraint on the young people's social citizenship aspirations.

What stands out in many of the stories is a remarkably consistent, gendered representation of how adulthood and future social citizenship ought to be. Many of the participants relay normative notions of gendered citizenship, including highly traditional notions of masculine and feminine contributions. Despite many of the participants struggling to see themselves reaching or fitting into these traditional notions of masculine and feminine social citizenships, and some even rejecting these ideals, they struggle to find alternatives. How these gendered notions of social citizenship are resisted and negotiated by the participants, will be further explored later in the thesis.

This chapter has endeavoured to establish a broad understanding of how the participants see their future social citizenship, by investigating how the young people engage with the concept of their future, highlighting the difference a sense of choice and authorship make to young people's sense of the future. The analysis now proceeds by seeking to explain why the young people engage with the concept of their future in their particular ways. Seeking to answer research question one and two concerning what shapes young people's horizons for action, the following chapter reviews how the participants narrate their experiences at school and their sense of unbelonging felt here.
Chapter Six: Educational Experiences and Resistance to School

Introduction

Educational achievements are for many young people associated with a sense of mastery and competence. Young people’s social persona and self-understanding concerning who they are in relationship to others is shaped at school, as school is one of the primary social contexts outside of the immediate family, where daily negotiations with friends, peers and teachers take place. This makes school a key arena for understanding and negotiating one’s place in society, and one of the fundamental fields for constructing a sense of self that is safe and valuable within one’s community. School is thus a major arena for the negotiations of social citizenship aspiration.

This chapter presents the young people’s narratives of their educational experiences, and how these experiences creates certain orientations towards educational institutions. During the field work, there were no direct questions about the participants’ experiences at school, but the topic of school was raised in all groups by the young people themselves, highlighting the importance of school, both as a positive and negative factor, in young people’s lives. This chapter shows how positive experiences of recognition and belonging at school encourages further investment in this area, whereas negative experiences can lead to disillusion and the search for alternative avenues for belonging and recognition.

The chapter examines the three different groups, as they indicate three different ways that education is experienced as marginalising. For the Green Valley young people, alternative school although an improvement from mainstream school, still produces marginal status; for the City young people their resistance to school reproduce their marginality; whereas the chapter shows how the power of traditional gender divisions is not interrupted by education for the Migrant group. Despite differences in context all the young people narrate school as a place of social disconnection and stigmatisation.

SCHOOL FOR THE GREEN VALLEY GROUP

This section focuses on the Green Valley group’s experiences of alternative school, highlighting the mixed experiences alternative education offers for marginalised young people.

In understanding why this group is in alternative education, this section explores their experiences at mainstream school, which for some was characterised by exclusion and
bullying, whereas others struggled keeping up due to personal and familial challenges. For all, however, mainstream school was narrated as an ‘othering’ experience, due primarily to the lack of consideration, of their displacement from community and peers, shown by the school personnel.

The young people’s access to belonging at school, and the particular gendered types of belonging available, will be analysed in this section, drawing attention to how the social expectations concerning gendered practices, leave little room for alternative forms of self-expression and agency for both the young women and the young men. This section concludes by looking at how this alternative education may or may not have provided alternative horizons for action.

From mainstream school to alternative education

The Green Valley group have all left mainstream school and are attending Community VCAL\(^5\) to complete their year 12. VCAL is considered an alternative to mainstream school as it combines classroom tuition with vocational training and work placements. In the literature concerning school disengagement, although there is no agreement on the degree of importance to be placed on individual versus structural factors, there is a general agreement that school disengagement cannot be traced back to a single event (Zakharov 2012). School disengagement can be understood as a process where several factors in the realms of the family, the school and wider community contexts collide (Stokes, Turnbull et al. 2008). The two young women, Katie and Tara, left mainstream school primarily for social reasons as both experienced persistent bulling.

Tara I used to get bullied because I’m Aboriginal. And they would be like, you abo\(^6\) cunt and I bashed them, and then I left. That’s when I started hanging out [on the streets] in Green Valley and then it’s like, I felt like I belonged with them. Not school.

Katie Well, I heard a rumour going around my old school that I was like an ice-head\(^7\). Because I’ve dealt with psychotic illnesses before, so I used to think that there was actual things on my skin, but not from drugs, I used to scratch my skin and that, and I’ve had rumours like I was pregnant before, when that wasn’t true, and I’ve had people call up my house phone and tell my mum I was pregnant, so I’ve had pretty nasty rumours going around about me.

\(^5\) Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning is an alternative to mainstream educating, which is vocational focused and offers a more flexible learning program.

\(^6\) Abo is a derogatory word for an Aboriginal Australian.

\(^7\) Ice is slang for methamphetamines, an illicit street drug.
Katie and Tara convey not ‘fitting in’ at school where both felt socially disconnected and stigmatised. Katie sought protection within the ‘smokers group’, a group of young men with a reputation as ‘troublemakers’.

Katie  I didn’t fit in or anything at school, but like other people saw it different, but I was told that, people respected me because I was like in the smokers group. That group was kind of the most known, they were mostly troublemakers. So, I was kind of known in that way (...) I didn’t like school but I was respected at school and it’s like I’m not, I don’t fight, I have an angry personality but like I remember flipping it in Year 8. I remember having a psycho-fit in Year 8 and then I was still known for it in Year 11, people just knew me as a psycho and I never got in any fights at school.

In the face of social exclusion at mainstream school, both young women turn away from associating with female peers. In its place, they seek out and become included in a community of young men. The rules of engagement in these male-dominated groups suit the young women better. Both women turn to more traditional male avenues of creating respect through physicality, when unable to secure a sense of belonging amongst their female peers at school.

Maja  How come you don’t hang out with girls?
Tara  Bitchy. Like I moved here [VCAL] like from girls, and it’s just like, “oh she doesn’t have that type of clothing”, or “err she looks gross today”, and “oh my God this chick said that and oh my God she looked up this guy” and it’s just like nah, boys are so much easier.

Katie  Yeah, I get away from them because they all just talk behind each other’s back. And when I hang out with boys, if they’ve got a problem, they’ll talk to each other face to face, what’s going on, or why are you doing that or something. Girls just bitchy. Like girls they will have a fight, it will drag on for ages, boys will punch on and they’ll get over it, next day they are fine, shaking hands.

Tara  Draw a bit of blood and then they are done.
Katie  Yeah, like two of my mates had a massive punch on, and then they are laughing afterwards showing each other what they did to each other. Like they were really angry with each other, had a fight and then they were fine. Girls aren’t like that.

Tara  They drag it on and on and on and start rumours and just...

The public sphere at mainstream school was dominated by a culture of gossiping, scrutinising and evaluating the social practices of other women, in particular their appearance and sexual practices. Offences included wearing the wrong clothes, not being ‘pretty’ enough, being too ‘sexy’ (or not ‘sexy’ enough) or associating with the wrong
young men. Public humiliation and exclusion was the means which transgression was dealt.

In the quote above both male and female gendered practices recognised and valued in Green Valley are showcased. Where the role-modelling of modes of femininity is limited to physical habitus, the social practices associated with ‘hanging out with boys’ can be said to be exaggerated forms of masculinity, revolving around hardness, ‘punching on’, being tough and ‘getting on with it’. It seems that in the cultural climate of Green Valley, the social expectations concerning gendered practices leaves little room for alternative forms of self-expression and agency for both the young women and the young men. This was shown in the young women’s inability to create belonging and safety within the ‘bitchy’ female culture, and their choice to instead pursue belonging to a community with cultural patterns associated with ‘tough’ masculinity. The young men from Green Valley did not question or mention the forms of masculinity experienced as available, as they were not in visible conflict with these representations. It is when faced with unbelonging and exclusion, that the cultural practices become articulated. However, the cultural messages regarding how gender should be performed were clear and unambiguous for both men and women, strongly embedded in the social practices of the community via both words and action, and consequently thoroughly normalised.

The reasons behind leaving mainstream school for the young men in Green Valley were mainly difficulties juggling the expectations of school with personal and family challenges and involvement with drugs and alcohol.

Dale I was going through a lot so I decided to leave, mainstream was too much for me, so I had to do something like VCAL just so I can be able to have a couple of days free where I don’t have anything to worry about... Yeah, things were going bad for me, and just some time without having to do something you know. I don’t live at home, so... I left mainstream at 15, came back to VCAL so, because I left home at 15. You don’t need an end score in VCAL, it’s a lot different, it’s more hands on here.

Like many marginalised young people, Dale does not experience school as a place of value and learning, but instead as a place where he is unsupported and unrecognised (Smyth and Hattam 2004). Dale is, however, aware of the normative value placed on education and considers finishing Year 12 a personal success, whether useful for his future or not. In contrast Cash considers attending and finishing VCAL a meaningless activity.

Cash’s main educational challenges are related to family issues, Attention Deficit Disorder and drug-use. School provides ‘something to do’: “If I’m not at school, I’m sitting at home doing nothing. And if I’ve got weed I smoke bongs and I’m like this is boring” (Cash), however he neither considers it useful, nor does it play a role in his future aspirations.
Although the two young men find VCAL easier than mainstream school, neither of them deem school an area of recognition.

Mainstream school leaves the young people from Green Valley feeling undervalued, unsupported and unrecongnised. More so, for Katie mainstream school leaves her feeling incompetent and disparaged: “Like I know I struggled at school, I felt like people hated me. It damaged me a lot, like social awkwardness”. The feeling of being undervalued can both lead to low self-worth and a lowering of expectations (Skattebol, Saunders et al. 2012) but can also reorient young people away from investing in their education all together. In this situation, negative experiences at school go on to influence how they view their capabilities and perceive themselves as learners.

Despite the different reasons the young men and women from Green Valley give for leaving mainstream school – experiences of isolation, bullying, family issues, poor self‐esteem, mental health issues or personal challenges – the pattern that runs through all their accounts are the absence of support in general, and in particular a lack of awareness from school personnel of the challenges the young people were facing. Alternative education provides some relief from the negative experience at mainstream school, which is where the next section focuses.

**Experiences of support and validation as foundations for engagements**

As was shown in the section above, Katie and Tara’s experiences in mainstream school are one of exclusion and invisibility. Both experienced the teachers as indifferent and apathetic. VCAL is experienced as a friendlier and more supportive place.

Tara  It’s way better here. I haven’t heard of any girl bitchiness since being here.
Katie  Yeah, they are more one on one, there’s not much people in the class, they can be like you know, “how are you doing with your maths? I’ll help you, I’ll sit down with you”, and at normal school they’d be just sitting at the front on their computers and stuff.
Tara  Yeah, they just don’t care [at mainstream]. Our teacher here tells us every day he wants us to get further and we should like step up our game. Yeah, he’s good. The extra mile.
Katie  Like, he’s harsh but, like if we are being shitty, he’ll pull us up on it and just like explain like I want the best for your future and he’s like a really supportive teacher. He’s the best teacher I’ve had, that’s actually cared about my future.
Maja  Wow, has that changed how you feel about school?
Katie  It’s like someone cares for you.
Tara  It’s positive. Like I know I’m coming to school and not, you know, people are supportive.
Chapter Six: Educational Experiences and Resistance to School

Maja Mmm, did that make you think that you could do something, in terms of further education?
Katie Yeah, I didn’t think I could do it and like the support I’ve been getting from my teacher just made me want to do better. Like I’ve been trying so much harder the past few weeks, trying to be on time, and stuff, because I’m pushed to be better, and it’s just like when you get complimented doing something good, it just makes you feel good about yourself, so you want to do it again. I got really good, like in my report, like I got A’s and B’s and it made me want to do better. Like you want to keep up the grades, and I know I can. So, because you’ve got the support.
Maja Is it similar for you?
Tara Yeah, heaps. Yeah, at high school I used to get straight A’s until all that stuff happened. Yeah, and then I started getting like D’s and F’s and I was like whatever. Here they try and help you to try and get back to where you used to be. And that’s good.
Maja And nobody pulled you aside at the mainstream school, like when you were getting A’s and then all of a sudden you were getting D’s, did nobody help you out?
Tara No, they don’t really do that, not like in the movies, when they go “what’s going on?”
Katie The teachers just don’t really care these days to be honest.

Many themes are spoken about in the quote above. The young women feel seen by their new teacher. At VCAL there are smaller classes, more support and first and foremost teachers that care. They express valuing having a teacher that pushes them further, and offers praise and recognition. Katie discusses both the feeling of mastery won at school, but also the significant effort invested. It appears it is the encouragement she now receives which fuels her motivation. The young women’s favourable experience with their teacher emphasises the importance of building relationships of recognition and trust with young people (Wierenga 2009).

Despite both young women experiencing more support and validation at VCAL, only Katie sees school as a vital area for developing competences and aspires for further education. For Katie, it is the feeling of being valued, respected and visible that creates educational mastery and aspirations, not the other way around. Tara instead dreams of starting a family.

Cash does not see much point of VCAL, nor does he experience it as different from mainstream: “pretty much the same thing, just three days a week”. Similarly, although alternative education, unlike mainstream school, is not associated with feeling unsupported and invisible for Dale, further education is absent from his future narrative.
Chapter Six: Educational Experiences and Resistance to School

Dale longs for what Thomson and colleagues (2002) label an ‘escalated adulthood’. He cannot wait for school to be over, so he can get a job as a tradesman and start saving for a house, seeking responsibility and mastery via the means of traditional working-class values such as full-time employment and home ownership.

Maja What’s stopping you from getting that good future you described?
Dale In a way school because I can’t start working yet. And I can’t start making the money that I want for my future. But in a way school is good for me as well, because it’s giving me a Year 12 pass at the end of the year and I might as well get that. I don’t know.

It appears that only Katie has had her negative experiences at mainstream school challenged and is now imagining a future that involves additional education. Along similar lines, France and colleagues (2013) find in their study of disengaged young people in alternative education that, despite the much-needed respite, the negative experiences at mainstream school continue to affect their attitudes towards the role of education in their lives.

This section has shown that despite feeling more stable and settled in alternative education settings, school is experienced as a place to survive, not a place to thrive, for most of the Green Valley group. In this context, negative experiences at school come to place limits on young people’s self-understanding as learners, and ultimately shape their aspirations for the future.

Discussion - Social and relational exclusion at school

For many disadvantaged young people, school is not only difficult in an educational sense but also involves a magnitude of relational and social challenge. For the Green Valley group, the combination of personal issues, family conflict and social difficulties at school leave these young people in risk situations from which they have very limited opportunity to act, in particular considering the absence of formal support structures within their community, at school and home. What stands out from the young people's stories is the spiral of alienation, misrecognition, insecurity, boredom and failure that sets a context for them to turn towards drugs and problematic peer groups, as we will see in the next chapter. Despite all of this, the Green Valley group state a desire to learn and to not fall behind. However, the alienating experiences at school, combined with the search for places to belong, foreclose on further educational investments for most of the participants. Several of the participants long for school to be over so they can begin employment or start a family, concurrently leaving behind past negative educational experiences and seizing new opportunities to ‘get on with their lives’.
Chapter Six: Educational Experiences and Resistance to School

Fortunately, the young people have mostly encouraging experiences at community VCAL, where they gain a sense of being respected and validated and attain the essential time and support needed to cope with other challenging areas of their life. The positive experience at VCAL does go some way for the young people in creating a sense of themselves as valuable and capable, as we see in the case of Katie and Tara. For the young women, their involvement with the attentive teacher at VCAL has given them an appreciation that they and their futures count.

Notwithstanding the benefits and positive aspects of programs like VCAL, the experience of being marginalised and excluded from mainstream education leaves a lingering negative impression, cementing an understanding of educational institutions as places to avoid in the future. For instance, Smyth, Robinson and McInerney (2013) argue that although the alternative to mainstream schools in general are friendlier, more flexible and less authoritarian, the alienation not only continues but becomes further magnified by being 'deflected and deferred'; “Neoliberalism favours academic performance and qualifications, and in the global economy ‘low skill’ equates to poorly paid and insecure work” (Smyth, Robinson et al. 2013: 502). These experiences are found particularly in the narratives of young men, as they express believing in education as a valuable avenue for future success, but just not for them. It seems that although alternative education opens alternative future horizons for some of the participants, for others it merely cements the experience of not fitting into an educational setting. A life-long experience of school being not for ‘people like me’, but a place of disconnection, unbelonging and rejection, weighs heavier in many cases than one year of attentive and caring teachers.

CONTEMPT AND ALIENATION - SCHOOL FOR THE CITY GROUP

Where the previous section considered the ways school have been an experience of marginalisation for the rural young people, this section analyses the oppositional agency expressed by the City group in their meeting with school, taking the form of defiance, boredom and ‘laziness’. The section concludes with a discussion of how the agency, expressed as opposition (challenging the teachers) or apathy (boredom and ‘laziness’), can be understood as a reaction to not feeling met with suitable learning approaches and not having their way of life and self-understanding validated in their meeting with the public institution.

Cultural resistance as survival strategies

A notable aspect of the City group’s experience at school is that none of the participants can describe anything positive about school. School is purely spoken about with
disapproval or at best disinterested. This group has no desire to continue school after year 12, nor are they interested in taking vocational courses. For a variety of reasons, stemming from feeling disparaged, judged and disrespected in class, this group all express disregard for the educational system.

Kaleb  There is disrespect, but also more like abuse of power. It’s more like judgemental, like a lot of people are being judgemental just because we are teenagers and you know, they think that we are narrow minded, that we just want to cause trouble, but we are the ones that like are more, we just want to talk about what’s right and stuff.

For Kaleb, school is experienced as power abuse, disrespect, discrimination and misrecognition. The experience of the educational system as a punitive and unjust system is repeated by most of the City participants, and none of the participants recall having felt respected or valued at school. The perceived injustice ingrained in the educational system is felt on many levels. Firstly, it is described as a feeling of invisibility, of being an individual unworthy of attention. Secondly, it is relayed in the form of negative stereotypes, feeling met by teachers with default low expectations. Thirdly, it is experienced in the form of dominance, abuse of power and control: “It’s like teachers, if you do something good, they don’t compliment you. But if you do something bad, you are in trouble” (Marcel). The feeling of being invalidated, invisible and disrespected in class creates a self-perpetuating cycle of disrespect for the teachers and for the learning environment. As also argued by others, these experiences place young people in risk situations as “it is clear that some young people are put in positions at school that effectively promote processes of cultural resistance as survival strategies” (Furlong 2005: 387).

Kaleb and Leanne are both highly engaged and opinionated when sharing about school, the Australian education system in general and the irrelevance of the school curriculum in particular. In part, Leanne and Kaleb’s frustration communicates feeling that their engagement and opinions are shut down and discounted.

Leanne  The education system is ridiculous.

Kaleb  Yeah. I would probably do something to get rid of the HSC8, I want to do something that will change it, make it better, just do something to make it better and I want to, like what she said, I just want to tell people that like the thing about humans is that they always try to fit in, which is really annoying, like I hate people who do that, but I reckon just do what you want to do,

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8 The Higher School Certificate (HSC) is the credential awarded to secondary school students who successfully complete senior high school level studies (Years 11 and 12 or equivalent) in New South Wales, Australia.
freedom. You end up homeless, that’s what I hate about it, if you do what you want to do, you end up homeless, you have to have money to survive.

Leanne You don’t learn, in Geography you don’t learn about real stuff, you learn about stupid stuff, yeah, people need to be more real, the education system needs to be more real and less lazy, and more focused on everyone’s different strengths and kind of wake up and realise that it’s 2014 and not everyone is born to be a robot. And just because for example in the HSC, it’s a silly system because if you don’t get a certain ATAR\(^9\) or whatever, you can’t get into, what you want to do, but what if you are actually good at what you want to do and your ATAR has been brought down by something, which has nothing to do with your job or career path.

Comparable to other studies on young people, the participants do not perceive school as offering them valuable or relatable knowledge (Smyth and Hattam 2004, Smyth and Hattam 2010). Instead they experience school as trying to streamline them, without recognising and valuing diversity of learning styles or diversity of skills and capabilities. In turn, the young people from the City group experience a deep-felt invisibility at school.

Leanne Things aren’t appreciated, if you are not in the system, you are not appreciated. I see myself as quite a smart girl for 17 years of age, and I just got put down constantly at school, like I went to lots of performing arts schools and got like scholarships there and stuff, on my performing arts, and then would get like pretty much called a piece of crap every day by teachers because I wouldn’t know how to do, like my work work. And I didn’t get into the school on like, whatever, on my maths skills, I got in on my talent and that’s not being acknowledged at all, like that’s nothing... We need] a more positive education system, education is so important and I love learning, I love knowledge, and I have been turned off school when I haven’t even like completed shit all in school because I fucking hated it, and I got treated like a piece of shit and it’s ridiculous because I’m someone who actually really does love learning, and it’s just not right. Some more money needs to be put into the education system, for kids who don’t particularly fit into this, this and this, and tick that and that and that.

Although Leanne expresses being engaged in certain school activities, the pedagogy at school is perceived by Leanne to not only misrecognise her and her abilities, but also to

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\(^{9}\) Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR) is a rank used by tertiary institutions in Australia to indicate a student’s position relative to all the students within that year.
place restrictions on the skills worthy of recognition at school in general. In this, Leanne articulates a desire to become visible and recognised for her distinction within the school context. As Dubet writes:

“In an educational hierarchy consisting of degrees of failure, disrespect flows down the long cascade of distinction... but the feeling of being disrespected is also deeper, it derives from the duality of experience which makes the individual a transparent being, unknown to teachers and the school organisation, someone whose real interests and talents, and whose suffering, seem ignored by a school which, in many cases, also feels itself and object of disdain” (Dubet cited in (McDonald 1999: 153)).

The underlying pedagogy and structure of mainstream education is placing young people, who potentially would benefit from more experiential teaching approaches, in a disadvantaged position, as the institutionalised measures of social esteem and what competencies are deemed worthy of recognition favour certain types of capabilities. Further, the young people’s ‘disengagement’ appears to be a reaction to feeling invisible and disrespected, as opposed to a personal pathology.

Notably, Kaleb and Leanne are highly reflexive about the unfairness inbuilt in the system for ‘people like them’ and indignant that the odds seem to be stacked against them. Unlike the Green Valley young people, these young people resist individualising and internalising their failure to succeed in mainstream education. The oppositional agency expressed by these young people can be understood as a reaction to not having their way of life and self-understanding validated in their meeting with the institutional judgement. Although school resistance is articulated as critique of curriculum, teachers and processes at school, the young people are grieving not just the loss of educational outcomes but the limits placed on their “scope for being who they are” (Bottrell 2007: 604).

In contrast Sam, Mike and Kylie appear indifferent about school; “School doesn’t concern me” (Kylie). For Sam, school is a place he can practice his graffiti sketches and meet up with friends; “I don’t hate school, but I don’t like school, like I go there and sleep and draw, that’s it, because I don’t listen, I don’t care”. This group has very low expectations towards the educational system. Unlike Kaleb, Leanne and to an extent Marcel, these three are not frustrated or irritated with school, they convey no desire to change the educational system, they simply do not care. As school has nothing to offer them, they are waiting school out. On an individual level, the young people may be seen to lower their expectations to self-protect from lack of opportunities and misrecognition, and to disengage from what they sense ‘people like me’ are being denied.

The City young people have all attended several different high schools, predominantly because they got expelled from their previous schools. As was described in the sections
above Sam, Mike, Kaleb, Marcel, Kylie and Leanne faces difficulties following the rules at school, have problematic or indifferent relationships with the teachers, and struggle fitting in. School is not experienced as a place of belonging and acceptance. As they repeatedly become excluded and expelled, this group do not hold much hope for or interest in their educational futures, in fact none of them envision undertaking further education. Consequently, this group of young people are focusing on having fun and being free of the responsibilities that generally are associated with contemporary adulthood. But there are marked differences in how they react to the experience of misrecognition and unbelonging at school. As has been highlighted in the sections above, two main strategies were found; apathy or opposition. The next section investigates further how disengagement can be seen as a strategy against disrespect and invisibility.

Disengagement as an act of self-protection

In the narratives of the City group there is an ever-present class and racial consciousness. Below Marcel, who is Indigenous Australian, speaks about the experience of segregation at the private school he attended.

Marcel If anyone tried to punch me at school, I would have fucking dropped them. All just rich little white cunts.
Maja How was that, going to a school with all privileged white kids?
Marcel It was alright, I liked it, I liked St Michaels, because St Michaels had heaps of [Indigenous-targeted] scholarships, there was heaps of Islanders and some Aboriginal kids, so I got along with heaps of them. There was a set of abo twins, they live out at fucking Melville. I got along with them heaps. Because they play footy as well.

Marcel had won a scholarship to a prestigious private school, due to his athletic skills and cultural heritage. Here he initially experiences mastery and recognition, as he is a skilful athlete who then breaks many of the school athletics records. As can be seen in the quote above, Marcel highlights thriving at the school due to friendships with other ‘scholarship students’, such as other CALD and Indigenous students living in a traditional working-class and CALD area. Notably, he conveys a strong sense of ‘them’ and ‘us’, the ‘scholarship students’ and the ‘white’ students. Despite attending a private school and succeeding at the school, ‘people like me’ are predominantly experienced as the other scholarship-students; the non-scholarship students are spoken about with sharp contempt.

Marcel I used to be a sprinter too. And then I got kicked out of my first school, which was a big sports school, an athletics school. And then I went to St Michal’s
Boys and that is when I started smoking heaps... I stopped going to classes, I was on a scholarship, for Aboriginal and sport. Footy. And then I started running, I got the fastest time in Australia, I broke the record for 100 metres for 13 [year old’s] .... at St Michaels, I broke every single fucking record. And then I stopped training because I have no work ethics, I hated training. I kept on racing but I didn't train, and then everyone just started beating me. Cos I didn’t train, I was unfit. Then I got kicked out...

Maja Do you sometimes miss being at that school?
Marcel All the time.
Maja Could you get back to being that fit?
Marcel Oh yeah.
Maja How come you don’t then?
Marcel No work ethics. Lazy, so lazy. The fact that I have to get up and go and train.

How are we to understand Marcel’s self-described laziness? Laziness can be understood as an act of defiance, displaying an equal amount of disrespect towards institutions as they themselves experience. On this point, Bottrell highlights that there might be more to the statement that school is boring, than simply a critique of the curriculum or academic shortcomings. Instead ‘school as boring’ may also be a euphemism for the combination of expectations of failure and inability to change the situation (Bottrell 2007). Or laziness can be a way to cope with the sense that “people like them were not an educational priority” (MacDonald and Marsh 2004: 157). We do not know what kind of support Marcel was offered at the private school, when he started falling behind. But it is reasonable to assume that Marcel lacked the resources to succeed. Giving disadvantaged young people scholarships without setting in place the support structures required for these boys and girls to succeed on such scholarships, further reinforces their feeling of unbelonging and marginalisation.

Another aspect of laziness might be founded in self-sabotage. It takes resilience to fail, and it requires significant emotional and mental resources to attempt in the first place (Ungar, Brown et al. 2007, Lewis 2016). Sabotaging oneself, when an opportunity to succeed is offered, can be understood as a strategy to avoid failure. In the absence of a strong support network, a robust sense of self-esteem and well-developed strategies to deal with failure, it may be too risky for a person’s sense of selfhood to risk failing. The choice not to care provides a comprehensible and logical self-understanding, and sidesteps the vulnerability in potential failures. But inherent in the choice not to care, is a narrowing both of aspirations but also of one’s opportunities for mastery and recognition. Marcel’s articulation of his laziness can be seen as a way to convey a story about himself, where he is the author of his own life, not simply a victim of circumstances. This finding is relevant, as it highlights what is gained and what is at stake in terms of agency and self-understanding by disengaging.
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The above section showed how laziness can be seen both as a response to a sense of responsibilisation for educational failure and as a survival strategy of defiance and a choice not to care. However, both apathy and opposition can be understood as a reaction to not feeling recognised and not acquiring a sense of belonging in the meeting with institutional judgement. The awareness of social difference combined with feelings of falling behind, disrespect and invisibility, confirms young people’s experiences of unbelonging.

Discussion - Apathy or opposition as acts of defiance

Two main strategies can be found in the young people’s narratives of coping with experiences of misrecognition and unbelonging at school: Apathy or opposition. Both responses involve absenteeism and presenteeism, low expectations towards their learning environment and a lowering of their educational aspirations. Some of the young people adopt an attitude of disengagement, and others choose to stand in opposition, and this appears to change the level of creativity and agency they experience.

This display of rebellion and resistance unfortunately advances the misrecognition the young people are experiencing from their teachers. In the process of opposition, the social critique articulated concerning the fairness and structure of the educational system becomes obscured, as the very practices underlining their opposition – disrespect for learning environments and absenteeism – is understood by the school as disengagement and disobedience. Hence, these practices reproduce the prejudgement the students are trying to resist. However, within the young people’s opposition against schooling and stereotyping is an attempt at reframing their marginal position and a desire for more positive representation (Bottrell 2007).

The experiences of being misrecognised and invalidated at school are, according to Garland (2002), a product of the instrumental logic prevalent in most educational institutions. Similarly, Smyth and colleagues argues that marginalised students are “given a clear lesson about their subordinated position in the school and the education system, often without any attempt to understand what was going on in their lives” (Smyth et al. 2014: 502).

It is clear that both the Green Valley and the City group struggle finding valorised roles for themselves within educational settings. Although the participants respond differently, ranging from anger, defiance, self-doubt, boredom and lack of interest, the sense of invisibility and lack of feeling connected is communicated in all the young people’s narratives. As school is a major site for the development of social esteem, being deemed unworthy of respect and recognition in this arena shapes individuals’ relationship with the broader society (Honneth 1996). The following section turns towards a different type of
social marginalisation experienced at school, stemming from the participants’ ethno-national difference.

**CULTURAL AND ETHNIC MISRECOGNITION - SCHOOL FOR THE MIGRANT GROUP**

A major theme emerging when speaking to the Migrant group is the importance of a local sense of belonging to ameliorate experiences of racism and negative stereotypes at school. As this section will highlight, in their meeting with racial misrecognition at school, the main coping mechanisms for this group are ignoring and normalising the experiences.

The value of education is reiterated by the young men, all of who have high hopes for their future education, wanting to study business, economics and architecture at university. In contrast, the young women place little value on education, but agreed that for men, education is important. Saadya and Aamori are relatively neutral about their school, enjoying school primarily for the social aspect. Babette, on the other hand, is looking forward to being free of the constraints associated with school.

Babette    I hate school.  
Aamori     Some subjects are bad.  
Babette    I don’t like it, I can’t wait to finish High School. It’s just hard work, you have to be... Yeah, I don’t like homework. And words that you can’t write... I don’t want to wake up in the morning.

For Babette, school is experienced as a daily humiliation, confronting her with her difficulties with writing and speaking English. For Saadya and Aamori, although school is not considered a major area of conflict, neither is school looked towards as an area of acquiring competence and recognition. Having English as their second language makes following classes and doing homework particularly difficult, and the support available at school is scarce.

A similar lack of support is experienced by Gabriel: “*In class you don’t really get that one on one, with the teacher. It’s just like over the white board, you can ask questions but, if you feel kind of dumb asking a question, you won’t, because there’s people there.*”

The fear of looking ‘dumb’ is further aggravated by a reluctance to stand out and be stereotyped in coming from the ‘Estate’ and for being refugees and Muslims.

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10 Refers to living in a public housing Estate, or a social housing neighbourhood in Australia, habitually associated with stigmatisation and poverty.
Chapter Six: Educational Experiences and Resistance to School

Saadya    Yeah, at school you feel different because all the white kids they don’t wear any scarf and they ask you a lot of questions about the scarf. They say why you wearing scarf, you don’t have hair?
Aamori    Some people say, why you different?
Gabriel   When it came to politics, some people didn’t like Muslims in my class, and I just found it kind of offensive, the way they spoke about Muslims, but like they might hear things on the news about Muslims, but not every Muslim is like that, it’s just judging a book by its cover. That really annoys me.

School confirms to this group that they are ‘different’ and further confirms their marginal citizenship status. This repeated confrontation with negative stereotypes about Muslims and ethnic minorities creates and strengthens a sense of loyalty towards their own community.

As their ethno-national difference is experienced as being made subordinate and demonised at school, it becomes challenging, in particular for the young women, to imagine a valorised role for themselves within the educational system and perhaps also within society. As discussed in Chapter Five, the young women and men relay highly traditionally gendered aspirations, which do not involve the young women attaining an education. Where experiences of being respected and valued at school can expand young women’s aspirational horizons, by showing alternative female versions of social citizenship, this opportunity is lost, as the young women do not experience a sense of belonging at school.

This group has a Somali background. The lack of respect and recognition of their ethnic and cultural difference creates a sense of ‘otherness’ and a divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Being ‘othered’ is a facet of their daily lives that is shared and reinforced in their collective narratives, however these stories are presented matter-of-factly, without strong anger or agitation. Below is an exchange where the three young men explain what it means to be ethnic in a ‘white country’.

Wade      Like okay, let’s say for example, I’m an African Australian and go for a job and a white guy is going for the same job, you have no control over that, they will give it to the white guy, you know what I mean, you have no control over that.
Gabriel   Yeah, you can have like the best experience, and the best degree, the other guy might have an undergraduate and can probably get the job.
Raad      Likes heaps of white kids they can get to a soccer team, they are crap, and they can get more playing time than you, and you think how is this possible, the team could lose you know. It’s not about how good you are, your skills, it’s about politics.
Although racism and prejudice is considered unjust and unreasonable, this group do not, unlike the City group, express an inclination to challenge or rebel against this. For this group being met with racism has become normalised. However, the participants seek to resist the denigrating image of themselves and ‘their kind of people’ by strengthening and highlighting their ethno-national belonging. In this context, being different can be seen as both a potential constraint and a potential resource for young migrants (Colombo 2010).

Saadya Any Australian people, they know you are not from Australia and they ask you, where are you from?

Raad Even if you born here, you can’t say I’m from here. You have to say I’m from Somalia.

Gabriel Yeah, I say I’m from here but my nationality is Somali. Even if you were born here, you don’t really feel like you are part of being Australian. I feel like going home to Africa, even though I was born here. I was born in [regional town in NSW], but I consider myself as an African. Yeah, Africa is home to me. I don’t know, you get constant reminders, like people ask you where are you from? Because you don’t really fit in. That’s one of the reasons we moved to here. Because we had family here. We were like the only Africans in [Regional town]. And it was a totally different experience, like mum and dad thought it would be best to live here. Then I would get to know my cousins more and then like get involved with an African community too. Because that’s our culture, where we feel like we belong.

The diaspora experience involves a heightened awareness of ethno-national difference. The experience of belonging to an African community proves to be a vital protective factor for these young people, as alternative types of belonging in other domains of social life, for example school or the broader Australian community, are restricted. On the basis of this pattern, the participants both claim their identity as different and uphold a strong type of belonging to their community. It is this belonging centred on difference that creates a strong sense of insiders and outsiders and could be characterised on an analytical level as ‘politics of belonging’ (Yuval-Davis 2011). This ‘politics of belonging’, understood as a construction of belonging to particular collectivities, constitutes a discursive resource through which people can claim forms of socio-spatial inclusion whilst resisting exclusion.

Discussion - Tension between local community values and mainstream futures

Although school belonging has been found to act as a protective factor against overt and subtle discrimination (Huynh and Gillen-O’Neel 2016), the group of young migrants are not able to utilise schools as a positive resource in their lives. The coping mechanisms of
Chapter Six: Educational Experiences and Resistance to School

the Migrant group, when faced with discrimination at school and in society at large, are twofold. On one hand, these encounters are normalised and to an extent accepted. This could be understood as a strategy to avoid the persistent feelings of discrimination and exclusion. On the other hand, these encounters create a further orientation away from broader society towards their African community where, as we will see in Chapter Seven, they feel safe and respected.

For this group, it seems that school is not a major field in their lives, neither for identity creation nor for establishing broader social connections, particularly for the young women. The young men, despite racism at school, are driven by what can be labelled an instrumental orientation towards educational attainments, seeing this as a source of ensuring future success but not an important arena for negotiating and developing social skills and competencies. For both the young men and women the misrecognition experienced at school ensures that the values and alternative horizons for action that might have been available here, are deemed irrelevant for ‘people like us’.

Macdonald and Merrill (2002) note that devalued groups tend to experience intersubjective misrecognition aimed at not just their social practices, but at their core values and beliefs. In this sense, the racism experienced at school, aimed at their diversity, nationality and religion, excludes and devalues the young people in a fundamental way (Macdonald and Merrill 2002). A necessary precursor for community participation is a sense of having one’s worth and values accepted and respected. As was argued in Chapter Three, the experience of wanting to be a part of society is nurtured through feelings of belonging and avenues of recognition. Seen from this perspective, it is problematic when welfare institutions such as schools do not fully include a diversity of minority ethnic groups, both in terms of securing equality of opportunity and social justice for all students, but also in terms of allowing students to develop broad social citizenship aspirations.

DISCUSSION - POLITICS OF BELONGING WITHIN AN EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

The ways the young people in this study narrate their experiences of unbelonging and misrecognition at school further challenges the construction of educational institutions as an “unproblematic mechanism for the creation of opportunity and the construction of productive subjectivities” (Farrugia, Smyth et al. 2015: 168). Similarly, the young people’s accounts show that for some groups, school is not an arena where mastery and recognition become enhanced and aspirational horizons nurtured. Five key findings can be drawn out from the exploration of the participants’ perceptions of school.
Chapter Six: Educational Experiences and Resistance to School

Firstly, the strongest theme is the alienating experiences at school felt by disadvantaged students, and the detrimental effect of this on young people's educational aspirations. As te Riele stresses, "school is an external force with much power over the direction a student's life can take" (te Riele 2004: 252). This chapter has shown the profound difficulties disadvantaged students face in challenging their marginalised positioning, as these positions are insistently reinforced in their meeting with the educational system. Along similar lines as other educational research, this chapter show the ways disadvantaged young people, for a variety of reasons, go on to develop a "robust identity for themselves against school" (Smyth and McInerney 2013: 52).

Secondly, the chapter highlights the problematic role of alternative education. Although the young people attending alternative education had encouraging experiences, for many attending an 'alternative school' did little to counter their sense of disconnectedness, failure and rejection they experienced at mainstream school. Ultimately the feeling of being unfit for the system and incompetent as a learner remained for most of the young people. The problematic nature of alternative education has been highlighted by numerous researchers stressing the stigmatisation, alienation and exclusion experienced (Bottrell 2007, te Riele 2007) as well as the limited useability of the more practically orientated credentials (Zyngier 2003, Wegerif, Littleton et al. 2004, Smyth, Robinson et al. 2013). When focusing on schools as arenas where young people come to develop their capacity to aspire, another concern presents itself. Zyngier argues that alternative education's focus on practical real-life curriculum serves to unintentionally further disadvantage the already disadvantaged students, by focusing on 'basics' instead of actively engaging their intelligence (Zyngier 2003). This 'busy work' might keep the students occupied, but neither engaged nor connected. Moreover, this type of curriculum further disempowers the marginalised students by reaffirming their own low expectations.

To facilitate the process of developing aspirations, education needs to be intellectually challenging, socially supportive, relevant and able to cater for difference (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997, Sarra 2003, Appadurai 2004, Worth 2009). Schooling that leaves disadvantaged young people uninspired and disconnected, further limits the type of exterior connections they might have been able to create with society. Although the cultural and social complexities that impede on young people's academic performance must be taken into consideration, a sole focus on young people's barriers may induce institutional low expectation and social misrecognition as well as "sabotage a plan to foster achievement and build hope" (Sarra 2003: 4). Although this chapter presents the participants' perceptions of their schooling, and does not take into account the perspectives of the teachers, it is worth noting that narratives of teachers actively questioning or 'interrupting' the young people's limiting self-beliefs and low expectations were a rare occurrence.
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Hence a third theme is the lack of meaningful interaction between disadvantaged students and their teachers. Most participants do not feel that much effort was put into understanding the reasons behind their school disengagement. We cannot know the degree to which the teachers support and encourage the young people, but we can establish that school left lingering feelings of being “unwanted, misunderstood, labelled, blamed, pressured, and yelled at” which was pitted against a deep-seated longing to be “listened to, given choices, respected, and helped” (Cassidy and Bates cited in Smyth, Robinson et al. 2013: 497). In addition, the sharing by teachers of the necessary knowledge, experience and encouragement which is vital in developing a broad sense of self-understanding and aspirations is absent in the majority of the young people's stories. It is worth mentioning, that when the ways in which school processes alienate disadvantaged young people from education is highlighted here, the intention is not to blame teachers. All of this takes place in mainstream school settings where teachers are struggling with large classes, high pressure to achieve quantifiable learning outcomes and very scarce resources earmarked for assisting disadvantaged students. Further, this chapter draws out the young people's understanding of their engagement with school and as such is not an unbiased account of how the teachers think or behave.

A fourth finding in this chapter is the apparent difference in reaction to similar school experiences between the City and the Green Valley young men. Where the young men and women from Green Valley blamed themselves for their failures at school that was not the case for the City group, who aimed their anger towards the institution. Deschenes, Cuban and Tyack (2001) claims that the increasingly individualistic way schools are structured, teaches students to blame themselves and internalise their educational failure. This finding resonates strongly with, especially, the stories from the Green Valley group. The City young people's rejection of and contempt for school, on the other hand, is a rarer finding within recent sociological studies (for older examples of this see Willis 1977, Brown 1987). The City young people's refusal to accept ascribed subordinate status is shown in their opposition and critique directed at their schooling, analysed in the chapter as strategies of apathy or opposition. Furthermore, as will be described in Chapter Seven, this groups' strong sense of collective identity and belonging within their peer group acts as a protective factor, counteracting some of the internalisation of failure.

A final finding relates to the lack of capacity of mainstream educational institutions to cater for students' diverse approach to learning (Zyngier 2003, Butler, Bond et al. 2005, Bond 2010, Myconos 2011, Raffaele, Fields et al. 2013). Likewise, the role that schools play in alienating and marginalising students has been well documented in Australian as well as international research (for example Fine 1991, Dwyer, Stokes et al. 1998, Ball, Maguire et al. 2000, Trent and Slade 2001, te Riele 2004). These findings were echoed in this study as several participants experienced not feeling met as learners and lamented the educational
system’s inability to value alternative ways of learning, and diverse expressions of mastery and skilfulness.

**CONCLUSION**

As was seen in this chapter, for marginalised young people, school is problematic in a range of ways that go beyond pure educational concerns, but also encompasses significant relational and social challenges. Many of the young people in this research are at the verge of disengaging fully from education, not just mainstream education but from learning environments all together. Three predominant strategies for facing these barriers were identified in the narratives of the City participants; disinterest, opposition and a combination of the two. These strategies involved varying degrees of powerlessness, creativity and resistance. However, a fourth strategy was found among some of the participants from Green Valley and the Migrant group, that can be said to be an instrumental orientation towards school. These findings of working-class students' instrumental accommodation despite general alienation from school are consistent with numerous studies (Ball, Maguire et al. 2000, Coffey 2001, Evans, Rudd et al. 2001, MacDonald and Marsh 2004, Smyth and Hattam 2004). Ascribing to an instrumental orientation towards school and hence equating education with higher chances of getting an (interesting, well-paid) job however, did not necessarily mean that future studies were pursued. Some participants simply did not believe in the accessibility of those kinds of futures for 'people like me'.

Although the three groups of young people in this study face different types of disadvantage (ethno-national difference, rurality and social marginalisation) all participants narrated their experiences at school as a place of misrecognition. Hence, school continues to play a pivotal role in creating or negating belonging and recognition for these groups. School has the potential to offer disadvantaged students the opportunities to participate and flourish, which is likely to impact upon both their wellbeing as well as their ability to face the challenges and disadvantage experienced outside of school. School’s ability to challenge misjudgement and stigmatisation of affected groups and provide positive recognition of students, weighs heavily upon this. Despite the general appreciation of the importance of gaining an education for one’s future, the young people in this study turn away from school and instead seek out local communities, to create an alternative to the belonging and recognition deficit experienced at school. The next chapter will analyse these other avenues of belonging and recognition.
Chapter Seven: Communities of Being as Horizons for Action

Introduction

In seeking to understand young people's social citizenship aspirations this research centres on establishing a deeper understanding of what shapes disadvantaged young people's largely negative experiences at school and their strategies for coping with these experiences. The previous chapter investigated narratives from young people's largely negative experiences at school and their strategies for coping with these experiences. This chapter examines sites in which these groups claim recognition and belonging and thus provides a contrast to experiences at school. Hence, this chapter analyses the young people's local opportunities for belonging and the availability of local communities of being. However, each of these sites of connection, safety, belonging and recognition have a relationship with horizons for actions in several different ways – many negative. This chapter will outline forms of recognition and belonging provided by the young people's communities; show how these communities limit and shape future becoming and horizons for action; and lastly compare similarities and differences across the groups.

Despite prevalent discourses that marginalised young people lack connections, this chapter demonstrates that overall these young people have connections with different kinds of social groups. The participants are all part of highly homogenous groups, with tightly defined boundaries and social practices offering a corresponding homogeneity of influence and experiences.

YOUNG PEOPLE'S LABOUR TO STAY CONNECTED AND SAFE IN DISADVANTAGED NEIGHBOURHOODS

This section analyses the restrictions experienced by the Green Valley group. The ways in which investment in different types of communities has benefits, as well as consequences for belonging, are demonstrated in two main dynamics. Firstly, this is exemplified in the rural young women's search for connection and visibility, which leads them to join male-dominated peer groups. The circumstances of these young women are characterised by feeling unsafe in both the public and private sphere. One of the strategies the young women employ to deal with this lack of safety is to develop a form of ‘tough femininity’. This is despite, as demonstrated in Chapter Five, the centrality of traditional gender aspirations to how these women perceive of their future. Secondly, the community impact is seen in the normalisation of drug-use. For the Green Valley group, drug-use is both a connecting and a problematic social practice, to the extent that many cannot envision belonging to their group in the absence of drug-use. In this context, drug-use can be
understood both as a response to social isolation and as a social practice of connection. These dynamics will be drawn out in this section, focusing on both what is gained and what is jeopardised in terms of horizons for action.

_Tough femininity as an alternative way to belong_

Feelings of containment and connection are expressed by the young people when discussing living in their rural town. The young women describe Green Valley as an unsafe neighbourhood, where one can easily become the victim of violence. Gaining a sense of belonging to a group, as well as a reputation for toughness, offers some safeguarding against this violence. Katie is part of a friendship group of young men that meet up most nights, hang out at each other’s homes and routinely do drugs. This group of young people have known each other since primary school. In high school, they were known as the ‘Smoker’s group’. Tara hangs out on the streets of Green Valley with a bigger group of mainly young men, where they get drunk, have fun, take drugs and get into fights, in particular with young people from rival neighbourhoods. In Tara’s narrative, she describes herself as one of the most respected members in her group, called the ‘Crew’. This position in the hierarchy comes with certain perks, such as being protected from violence, as well as free alcohol, cigarettes and drugs. As we will see, both the young women experience their groups as offering safety, security, respect and connection.

Tara

_Respect is a big thing I reckon. I’m very respected, yeah, like, I’m mates with heaps of people on the streets, and I’m like highly respected. Well, there’s a lot of people that hang on the streets. And you know the food chain, I’m like top, so I’m like highly respected. I can walk through Green Valley easy as. And if I say, if someone wants to hurt her [points to Katie] in Green Valley, they’d be like no, that’s T’s friend.

Maja

_How did you get to be so respected?

Tara

_Fighting and stuff (...) Ahm like, I can walk through Green Valley like a breeze and if I want a ciggie I can be like “give me a ciggie”, if I’ve got no money, or my boyfriend wants weed, I’d be like “give me some weed”, and I’d just get it, it’s an easy way to live._

Tara frequently mentions the importance of feeling respected. Being respected relates to the sense of visibility afforded to her in the group, here she feels she is able to be _somebody_. The language Tara uses when describing the ‘Crew’ is what would normally be associated with being in an army, such as ‘brotherhood’, loyalty and mutual enemies. However, there are certain rules associated with this belonging.

Tara

_There’s boundaries. Like respect, like you’ve got to respect one another. You’s_
all have each other’s back, and if someone comes along that they are going to have your back and you’re going to have theirs. It’s sort of like the army, you know how they’ve all got each other’s back with their guns and stuff. It’s like that (...) Like me sticking up for someone on the streets. Like if they need my help. Like if someone from another town came in and they were like, they are going to bash me, or threatening my mate, then I’d have to like have a word with them.

Maja How does that make you feel?

Tara Wanted.

For Tara, fighting is a practice through which she gains a feeling of being visible, valuable and wanted. Belonging to the ‘Crew’ offers protection and recognition for particular forms of competences centred on being threatening and aggressive. However, this protection only works in local places, where a person is known personally or by reputation. In this dynamic, being respected by one’s reputation anchors people to the community, as this respect does not have legitimacy outside the local area.

Tara recognises that her decision to be part of the ‘Crew’ is highly consequential for subsequent processes of becoming, in that the pressure on her to uphold a ‘tough’ image then excludes her from other form of competences, for example taking a job:

Tara Yeah that’s why, personally, I will find it hard to get a job, because I’ve always been this big tough girl, that’s why, if I’m thinking about getting a job, standing in a shop, and I’ll be like ‘what do you want, here’s your change’. No.

Being a ‘tough girl’ offers a very narrow type of self-expression which markedly excludes Tara from other areas of recognition. Furthermore, the sets of social practices and competencies gained here are not readily transferrable to other areas in life. In most workplaces and educational institutions, the competences associated with strength and being willing to fight will not only be unwelcome, they will most likely be to one’s detriment.

Family life stands in contrast to the sense of connection, visibility and respect found in the ‘Crew’. Both young women relate having very problematic family relationships:

Tara When people drink at my house, they’ll punch on and I’ll stop it, like I’ll pull them away. Like my brother and family and friends, they’ll punch on and I’ll pull them away and they will like never say thank you. We had a lot of family dramas over like drugs and money. Just shit. So, I was like, once the bullying at school happened, all that stuff happened at school, I met everyone in Green Valley. Like every day when I used to catch a bus, my
mates knew people, and they knew people and they ended up meeting me and then we all ended up hanging out. Making plans and just got to know each other, we felt like a brotherhood.

As Tara seeks to escape her turbulent family life, she enters another field where much the same social patterns are practiced. What is notable here, is that the resources that Tara developed to cope with the violence at home, become an asset on the street. Unlike at home, where she is on the receiving end of violence, on the streets she is no longer the victim, but can utilise her reduced concern for physical safety to her advantage.

Stories of unbelonging interlink with stories of belonging, as the young women associate family difficulties, feeling misrecognised and undervalued, as the catalyst for finding a group to which to belong. For Katie, family life is accompanied by a different type of hurt, primarily a lack of understanding.

Katie Yeah, like my sister she lives next door, she was all fine with me and then she found out I smoked drugs, and now like I’m a low-life to her. They don’t speak to me, I’m not allowed to see my nephew, because I’m a low-life and get nowhere, and they sit on their arse all day getting Centrelink and ripping my dad off, but yet I smoke bongs daily. I get my education, I’m getting A’s in my report, I work part-time, but yeah I get nowhere. I get judged by it by my family.

The experience of feeling misunderstood is not just related to family interactions, but more broadly, to interactions with the community.

Tara When I used to hang out in the streets, the cops would think you know, oh she’s just a low-life, hanging out in Green Valley, but I felt like I belonged there, more than I would at home. And they didn’t see it that way, they would see it like, oh she’s just a little rat.

Although, at first appearance, the Green Valley young women give the impression of being excluded on many fronts, they are also included in communities where they are valued and where they experience a sense of place. These places of meaning offer opportunities for negotiating and developing types of mastery and responsibility. However, the young women are aware of the consequences of belonging to these groups, because being met with judgement and misunderstanding by family members and society at large, is an inherent aspect of this connection. The experience of finding a place to belong is thus coupled with a sense of stigma, which may further cement their experience of exclusion from the mainstream. Returning again to the concept of social citizenship, these limited
avenues of gaining a sense of place, also foster a complicated relationship with broader society.

**Future becoming and gender identification**

The above section has shown the ways in which the young women from Green Valley have created a sense of respect and safety within their local communities by joining male-dominated groups. However, the young women’s search for connection and emotional security within the ‘Crew’ and the ‘Smoker’s group’ pose challenges for them in terms of future becoming and gender identification, as this section will highlight.

Despite these young women rejecting female peer groups and the forms of femininity that appear to be available in the small town, both of them make use of highly gendered discourses to make sense of their role within their groups. The young women use terminology ordinarily associated with family to describe their friendship groups; being a mother-hen, belonging, caring for each other, and establishing a feeling of ‘brotherhood’.

Katie

I still don’t belong at home, I belong more with my friends than I do at home. Because like my friendship group is made out of people that had nowhere to go, and we all found each other. So we’ve all been through shit, and we’ve all had trouble. Like our friendship group, we were all alone at one stage, and then we all found each other and we’ve just remained friends. It’s pretty cute. They are good boys. They are all older than me, but they are all like my babies. Because like I’m the only female, so I’m kind of like mother hen. I’m the type that would turn around and go “pull your fucking head in” and stuff, and pull them into line, because I’m the female of the group.

In the absence of experiences of responsibility, respect, and competence at home and at school, these young women invest their time and energy in an activity that provides precisely that, underlining the pivotal role of friendships in young people’s lives. Both young women take on an interesting role in their friendship groups, as both are either the only women or one of few. On one hand, the young women convey feeling and behaving like boys, being respected as a brother by the group members and rejecting femininity (as described in Chapter Six neither of them want to have female friends). On the other hand, being a ‘mother hen’ and ‘telling the boys off’ is associated with a more traditional mother or older sister role. Taking the role as the ‘mother hen’ to a group of young men appears to be Katie’s avenue to feelings of responsibility, family and care. While the social patterns of these groups can be said to be propagating and supporting specific forms of exaggerated ‘rough’ masculinity (heavy drinking and drug-use, fights and violence, motorbike riding) the young women still slide into the subtle patterns and expectations traditionally
associated with femininity, such as the care-taker, the disciplining mother or the one that needs protection (in the case of Katie).

Yet, the ‘Crew’ and the ‘Smoker’s group’ are inadequate sites of gender identification in many ways. The quotes below are from Tara, recounting that in line with her becoming older, other avenues of citizenship have emerged, relating to more traditional working-class femininity. As Tara gradually starts to pursue other more ‘mature’ interests, her mother’s behaviour towards her changes in positive ways.

Tara  Yeah, like dad, he wouldn’t care less, like if I did drugs he would be like come over and we’ll do it together. But yeah with my mum, I’ve put her through a lot of stress and now I can tell like, the way she talks to me and she’ll talk to me about things that she never used to. Yeah, she actually talks about mum and dad’s divorce, because she like, sees my maturity. Like sometimes my mum will tell me, these past couple of months you’ve changed or through the past year, you’ve changed and I’m proud of you and stuff, and I’m like yay!

The feeling of being worthy to be her mother’s confidante is for Tara a motivating and regulating factor guiding her behaviour. This is an example of how, throughout the many transitions young people make, the right support from trusted allies, given in a form that offers recognition and validation of the young person, can greatly support and expand their horizons for action. For Tara, in her social citizenship negotiations, the most significant field of identity creation has been belonging to the ‘Crew’, where her main avenue of recognition and mastery is linked with physical ‘rough’ social practices. However, fields of belonging transform over time.

Tara  Me and my boyfriend, we both like sort of settled each other down. He used to be homeless and that’s when I first met him, he asked me out when he was homeless and then we slowly started like, getting our act together really. But like when I first start going with my boyfriend, and we started staying home, I’m like oh, I want to go to Green Valley, I’m so bored.

Tara is facing a sense of tension as alternative avenues of recognition become available outside of her involvement with the ‘Crew’. The competing types of recognition and respect obtainable require that Tara stay at home with her boyfriend more regularly and lessen her drug-use, both of which are practices that will diminish her recognition and respect within the ‘Crew’. The two arenas can be understood as offering competing modes of self-understanding, self-expressions and competence, one associated with a ‘tough girl’-image and the other a more traditional model of adulthood, involving adult responsibilities and intimate partnership. Tara’s diminishing investment in the ‘Crew’ is partly compensated by an experience of competence in the domestic sphere.
The case of Tara is an illustration of the dynamic relationship between individual agency and social processes. Choosing where to invest one's time and energy requires a weighing up of the evolving, encouraging and discouraging factors both relating to wellbeing and recognition in the moment, but also relating to the changing importance placed on different avenues for the construction of social identity. This section has highlighted that, although the choice to invest in a field can be seen as a weighing up of options and opportunities, the degree and type of choice is dependent on the availability of material, emotional, social and cultural resources. As was highlighted in the above section, Tara’s material and relational embeddedness plays a defining role in her ability to envision and move towards a life without drugs. This also brings to the forefront the inequality of resources available to some groups of young people. The motivation behind Tara’s choices might be enhanced belonging and recognition, but the nature of such choices is structured in terms of local context, gender and social class.

**Rural living: Boredom, stagnation and drugs**

In the case of the Green Valley group, one of the main stumbling blocks for their wellbeing and self-expression is the limited access to alternative communities. This is a group that in many ways live in risk situations (understood as situations placing young people in risk). These risk situations contain, among other things, unsafe neighbourhoods, easy access to drugs, limited opportunities and boredom, behavioural and mental health issues, troublesome family relationships and weak attachment to the educational system. The isolation and lack of alternatives experienced by this group highlight the processes and mechanisms by which problems and inequalities are organised for rural young people. This section focuses on the relationship between boredom, isolation and drug-use for the Green Valley group.

The young women are part of groups that are centred on alcohol and drug consumption to such a degree that Katie worries whether the friendships would last were she to end her drug-use; “It’s like, what is there left to do?” (Katie). This sense of lack of alternatives to drug-use is also acutely felt by the young men from Green Valley.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maja</th>
<th>Is there anything to do around here?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>No. And if I’ve got weed I smoke bongs and I’m like this is boring. But if I get drugs, I’ll come home from school and smoke drugs and sit on the couch watching a movie or something, and that’s just boring. It’s so boring, I’d rather go to school, go to work, earn some money, provide for myself, and like you know, get my mind off things a bit. Doing something worthwhile.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Cash is articulating a sense of emptiness and boredom; his life feels like a series of mostly pointless events, rather than meaningful and forward moving. Equally, Dale experiences Green Valley as offering very few opportunities for young people outside of drug-use: “I find that it’s really boring where I am living at the moment. Cos I am just like by myself and stuff.” Below Cash and Katie discuss this sense of stasis when using drugs.

Maja What’s the biggest barrier standing in your way?  
Cash Nothing, oh drugs, mmm. It’s not progressing. Does anyone else feel the same way? Like your life is not progressing?  
Katie I feel like that, like you do heaps of stuff but you still get nowhere.  
Cash Like when I get stoned, I know I don’t have a job, I don’t have money, I don’t pay rent, because I’m living with my brother. I should be paying rent, but I don’t pay rent. And when I get high I think about all those things, and I’m like, I’ve got nothing to show for my life, sort of thing. I’ve had a bad experience with drugs, I reckon it’s fucked my life up a bit. As I said I don’t see a future, when I’ve had the drug. I just feel shit and guilty.

Cash voices how his sense of hopelessness and self-judgement is exacerbated by his drug-use. Cash does not have much capacity to plan beyond his basic need to survive, and has little idea how he might change his situation.

The young men participating from Green Valley, unlike the young women, have not been able to seek refuge in a local community. As was explored in Chapter Five, the young men voice a sense of loneliness and lack of hope, which is not present to the same extent in the young women’s narratives. Despite the limitations placed on future types of becoming for the young women involved in street-based groups, the young men are potentially placed at even greater disadvantage by being socially isolated. In the absence of relational belonging, young people’s horizons for action and scope for choices are compromised.

Discussion - Becoming somebody in a bounded community

An appreciation of the communities available to young people during challenging times helps us understand their choices as a continuous negotiation between the individual and their social world. What stands out in the stories of the rural women is the vital role the absence of respect and connection plays in their lives, and how the search for this orientates their choices in particular ways. As such, the practices of agency for the young women, their responses to both active and passive exclusion, are highly structured by the environments that they inhabit. Unfortunately, this labour to stay meaningfully connected is vastly unrecognised by family and societal institutions, or leads to further stigma and exclusion.
The struggles over the gendered meaning of youth identity are one of the key themes for the rural young women. This is evident in the young women's struggle to 'become somebody', within the local context of gendered peer rivalry. Gaining a reputation for 'toughness' grants them a sense of agency, belonging and safety, but is associated with a degree of ambivalence. Similar to Dillabough and colleagues' findings (2005), “tough femininity” in disadvantaged neighbourhoods acts as high-status forms of sub-cultural capital. However, these forms of practice towards attaining respect and visibility also serve to constrain horizons for actions. Despite the rejection of traditional femininity in the present moment, the young women's imaginings of their future (as described in Chapter Five) involve highly traditional modes of femininity tied to the family and motherhood. The young women's search for socially located belonging within peer group, in turn stands in tension with avenues of alternative female social citizenship.

Locality and space is prevalent throughout the young people's stories, expressed both as loyalty towards Green Valley and a sense of social constraint, seeing the rural town as both spatial confinement and containment. The lack of spatial mobility due to living in a 'dangerous' neighbourhood is an example of social disadvantages for marginalised youth (Dillabough, Wang et al. 2005, Harris 2013). Where some young people are able to claim a strong sense of local belonging and substantial power as locally recognised 'citizens', and thereby solve their immediate misrecognition and unbelonging problems, these strategies may be costly, as they are both highly stigmatised externally and locally bound. It is clear, however, what is gained for the young women in participating in these communities in terms of security, visibility, connection and respect.

Local disadvantage is connected to not having access to activities and experiences that young people living in less isolated areas take for granted (Wyn, Stokes et al. 1998, Wierenga 2009). This section highlighted how local disadvantage affects the types of self-understanding young people are able to construct. The uneven distribution of opportunities for participating in organised activities and broader teenage networks for rural youth limits the types of self-expression they are able to experience, which is a particular concern for the young people excluded from mainstream education. As was demonstrated in this section, despite the strong sense of local belonging available to the young people, these communities offer limited alternative pathways or avenues of social citizenship.

**YOUNG PEOPLE’S SEARCH OF VISIBILITY AND RESPECT**

Chapter Six showed how the City group became marginalised through their school experiences. This section turns towards the City group’s struggles to find a sense of themselves in response to mainstream stigma and low expectations. This section
demonstrates how the young men turn to their peers for recognition, habitually through acts of oppositional agency (for instance transgressions as a claim for recognition and autonomy), via inclusion in the ‘Lad’ group and graffiti culture.

Despite the young men turning towards a marginalised culture as a source of belonging, the section also explores the negative side of this community as identified by these young men. There is a tension between authenticity and social integration indicated in a resistance to some of the normative demands associated with being a Lad, including restricted expressions of masculinity. As this section will highlight, the young men’s community can be understood as an ordered universe of meaning, constructed in opposition to a dominant middle-class, and while some middle-class values are rejected (studiousness, lawfulness, particular forms of adulthood) others are aspired to, for example those associated with particular kinds of consumption.

**Being a Lad as a form of collective resistance**

As we saw in Chapter Six, the City group shared a longing for autonomy and freedom, a longing which enticed them to join the Lads community. While they share belonging to a ‘street gang’ with the young women from Green Valley, in contrast the City participants do not articulate the same sense of active exclusion from their family environment. For them hanging out on the streets and in parks with a large group of friends, is more associated with a pull factor (towards a sense of enjoyment and excitement) than a push factor.

The young men define themselves as Lads, a sub-culture prevalent in the suburb within which they live that, among other things, is distinguished by their style in clothes. Clothes preferred are brands such as Polo, Canterbury, Gucci and Nike and items favoured are trainers, tracksuit pants and baseball caps. Other signs of belonging to this sub-culture are wearing polo shirts with their collars up and all white baseball caps. As such, Lads are easily distinguishable from other groups of young people, which, combined with doing graffiti, makes them targets for the police.

The City group describes how they would meet up at Town Hall or in a local park every night with a large group of primarily young men, to have fun, get drunk and do graffiti. Here the constrain of everyday life would temporarily be lifted and a sense of rebellious freedom gained.

Sam  We would meet in Leura Park, behind the cop station. You just go because it was fun. The worst nights would be when it was like 10 people there. The best night would be when everyone was there, we were just having a good time. We were not even starting anything, we were just running around between us. There was this one time we had rolled up pieces of paper and we were just hitting each
other with them. That’s how fun it used to be. It was just fun.

Marcel One time we were hitting each other like on the legs with branches and leaves and it stung like crazy. It was such a fun night.

Although the main reason the young men gather is to experience community, comradery and enjoyment, fighting is a normalised part of the group’s life, and the City men were both perpetrators of violence and vulnerable to victimisation by others. Fearlessness is the ultimate avenue of recognition in the Lad’s culture, both a source of excitement and a way to prove oneself to the other members of the group.

Sam City, drink, fight, run away from coppers. Every night. Alright I will tell you a little story, there was a time where we got into a fight with four big steroid junkies... oh yea, yea, that was so funny.

Marcel That was because of me. These guys were like “give me your Canterbury shorts” I was like ‘what Canterbury shorts, I am not wearing any.”

Sam Cos like he was saying that we are Lads. They were like gym junkies, they were like bigger than [name of youth worker]. So, we were about to punch-on.

Marcel So, I went and got Sam. We were dead-set 50 people and we came around the corner and we were like, which one gets the bottle first.

Maja How many were they?

Sam Four.

Maja And you were 50?

Sam But that’s because they were massive. Hardly anyone jumped in. It was you, me, [other group members]. The other ones were just watching. Most of them were drunk.

Marcel I would jump in when I was drunk, I don’t care.

Sam What happen, my mate Sunny he got a bottle and pegged it, and he just missed the guy’s head, and then we all just started wrestling. My mate was wrestling one of the bigger guys so I came in and shouldered him.

Marcel He went flying bro.

The Lads live in a violent world, where willingness and ability to fight is a prime avenue of gaining cultural legitimacy. A core aspect of the Lads is the size of their group. Because they act together in large numbers, they are able to fight much older and stronger men or raid supermarkets. Marcel, Kaleb, Mike and Sam recall with glee, how they would raid supermarkets, all 50 of them running in at the same time, throwing products on the ground in a frenzy, whilst stealing whatever they could grab. A strong sense of group solidarity was created by breaking the rules together and the young men recalled feeling free and unconquerable; “A huge group of people. Can you imagine that? Like all of us, 50-60 boys trying to walk down the street. It’s intimidating” (Sam). The need to be
Chapter Seven: Communities of Being as Horizons for Action

intimidating can be understood as a desire for a sense of visibility and power, against a pervasive feeling of being controlled.

Kaleb All I want to do is just like (sticks a finger up).
Marcel All you want to do is just have fun in life.
Sam Just want to be at peace man.
Kaleb Yeah, I don’t want to just sit in school for like eight hours, five days a week and like you know, then go to university and then sit there for like twelve hours a day and stuff.
Maja What would fun look like?
Kaleb Just doing what you want, freedom.
Kylie Getting drunk.
Sam When we say like do whatever the fuck we want, doesn’t mean we are going to go bash a cop or something. We only do that because they try and stop you from doing what you are doing and just like get the fuck out of the way cunt.

It is the experience of breaking the law that creates the Lad-identity, as lawlessness is seen as an expression of freedom, carefreeness and rebellion. Stories of bravery and close-calls, as well as tricks of the trade were shared between the participants in regard to stealing. As with the tales of fighting, a certain element of bragging was involved in these types of storytelling. Whether the City young people do indeed engage in the level of crime and violence they indicate is difficult to ascertain, but the fact that these stories were shared to garner admiration, recognition and respect demonstrates the values of the group.

For the Lads, belonging is created through the social practices in the group, but also embedded in the constraints and injustices experienced in their interaction with ‘the system’, school and the police.

Marcel My cousin, the coppas came, they just said jump in, we’ll take you home. He got in the car, they took him to the park and just fucking bashed him with a baton.
Sam They will look at you like you are shit.
Leanne Even me, I don’t think I look very suspicious or anything, but I’ve been pulled over so many times and just like been treated horribly because I’ve asked questions, or why am I getting interrogated, it’s like they just expect you to be...
Marcel It’s like you don’t have a right to ask a question.
Leanne I did that to a cop when he pulled me over, just because I was holding a camera and he asked me to check my camera, so I got pulled over just because I was holding a camera, and because obviously I’m a teenager so they think that we are always just getting into trouble and stuff.
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In the face of police power, confiscation and searches, of feeling type-casted and stigmatised at school, the young people create a counterculture revolving around respect and being known, and a type of physically orientated masculinity. In this context, the Lad’s culture can be understood as a subculture. As Smyth and colleagues explain; “If young people’s voices are not allowed to develop within healthy social structures that assist in making decisions and choices around their own education, futures and lives, then they will seek them out regardless, and these identities may not be healthy ones” (Smyth, Robinson et al. 2013).

However, as Lovell (2001) notes there are ‘restricted markets’ for masculinities “which celebrate the physical body and the attributes of bodily strength” (Lovell 2001: 24). In many social arenas, these markers are seen as deficits not competences. Fatefully, the symbolic markers that signal to others that they belong to the Lads subculture, also help mark them as targets for the police. In this context, the social protest aimed at misrecognition and disadvantage not only goes unnoticed, but also works to further reaffirm their negative social identities and marginal position.

This section has shown that while the social practices can be understood as a reaction to an experience of an unjust, restrictive, police-dominated society, the extent to which the Lads are able to link their frustration to a positive self-understanding, involving possibilities and a movement towards a chosen identity, is limited. The young men are unable to envision an alternative, meaningful way of being part of society. However, the world of graffiti offers different avenues of competence and mastery. It is towards this world that the chapter now turns.

Graffiti and mastery

A major part of the young men’s spare time is spent doing graffiti. The graffiti culture, much like being in a ‘gang’, is organised in terms of competition and hierarchy and provides another form of resistance towards ‘the system’. But graffiti is more than just an act of defiance for the young men: it is also an important avenue of respect, mastery and autonomy. Graffiti as an area of mastery and competence will be the focus of this section.

In the young men’s narratives, graffiti is described as unrestricted freedom:

Sam: When I do graffiti, I just feel like I have a free spirit. It is like when I am upset, I just go jump on a train and do whatever I want. It’s like having that

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11 Being caught doing graffiti is the main reason these young men are now being case managed by the police.
feeling that you are free. You know the government is not watching you do anything, you can do whatever you want. If you get caught you are fucked, but like if you don’t, you just get that awesome, like that hectic feeling. You just feel like you are free, like no boundaries, you can do whatever the fuck you want.

Marcel  Yea straight out. I just get the fuck away. What is the point of doing drugs and shit, I can just go do that.

Graffiti is a source of interest, belonging and joy. Unlike theft and fighting, graffiti is an avenue of creativity and self-expression for the young men. The young men describe graffiti as a world with its own rules, filled with intensity, risk, competition and fame, requiring both risk-taking and lawlessness. As the City young men have been doing graffiti since they were 12-13 years of age, they have gained a certain reputation and respect for it within their community. It is clear from the young men’s stories, that to gain a reputation as a graffiti ‘writer’ required willingness, discipline, skill and a substantial investment of time and money. These young men did not lack commitment when it came to dedicating themselves to an activity that felt meaningful and worthwhile.

Sam  What the best feeling is, is when you know you are finally progressing. Like when you start out you are shit. Yea, like people aren’t really born with skills, like some people are amazing dancers, like some people don’t have that but maybe for them their escape is “maybe I can be good in graffiti.” Because you can learn how to be a good graffiti artist. Yea, and then people compliment you. Like “that big piece was hectic, I wonder who that is” and I will be like “that’s me.” Like it’s also a feeling of respect, you know? I remember I did a piece in Enmore, just behind the cop station. We were on the train me and my mate and we were talking to Kaleb and his friends and then he said “oh, did you guys see the Vanished piece?” and I was like “that was me and my mate that did it, that was us.” It felt good.

The quote above speaks to the sense of visibility gained as a competent graffiti writer. While graffiti is an activity that can create both respect and value, it is also a type of recognition that can easily be lost, if one does not invest the required time. The young people’s school performance and at-risk status can be understood in the context of their investment of time and energy in the world of graffiti. Notably, Lad and graffiti cultures are both highly hierarchical communities. Although the young men express a strong desire for autonomy and self-government in the face of perceived repression from school and the police, their means of resisting such repression takes the form of joining highly structured communities.
Chapter Seven: Communities of Being as Horizons for Action

In the world of graffiti, the young men gain respect based on their hard work, skill and determination. This is a world with its own rules, filled with intensity, risk, competition and fame - this is ultimately a world of self-creation. While graffiti leads to certain ‘pathways’, for instance being case managed by the police, when discussing what creates wellbeing for the young men, the world of graffiti dominates their narratives. While graffiti appears to have enduring importance, other aspects of Lad culture have decreasing importance for these young men. These aspects will be explored in the next section.

Negative sides of belonging

As we saw in the previous sections, the Lads community offers recognition for very particular types of competencies, primarily revolving around physicality. Here certain types of self-understandings and horizons for action are encouraged and developed, potentially jeopardising alternative types of belonging. One of these alternative possibilities is employment. In general, employment, now or in the future, was not only considered irrelevant, but understood as submitting to societal dominance, as illustrated in Chapter Five. During the workshop, employment became a source of tension amongst the group, with the value of employment being seen differently by some participants. This tension became evident when Sam, pushing up against the boundaries of what is accepted in the group, admits that he would not mind getting a job in the future.

Sam I want to be working [in the future]. Yeah, I want a job, in retail, anything I can get my hands on. I want to finish my HSC as well. Even though it sounds stupid.

Marcel Gay!

Sam Shut up. I'll stab you in the throat, you will have two fucking holes.

Sam articulating an interest in more mainstream modes of adulthood is met with insults from the other young men. This tension demonstrates the limited basis for gaining respect in the group. This constrain is reiterated by Marcel:

Marcel Everywhere you go, it's not about how good of a friend you are or something, it's about how good you can fight. Just going anywhere. Nowadays everyone knows everyone because of social media, if you go to a party or something, they look down on you if you can't fight, they look up at you if you can.

Marcel understands himself as more than just a fighter, and longs for opportunities to be seen and recognised as such. The young men's narratives suggest that within the Lads group, members gain recognition in highly instrumental ways, for example for one's
usefulness to the group (by being a competent fighter). Although the young men have gained respect and belonging within the group, the narrowness of legitimate self-expression eventually becomes a concern. The negative side of belonging as a Lad is visible in the demand for aggression and the sacrificing of other avenues of belonging, such as one’s future employment or athletics career (see Marcel in Chapter Six). The young men have started to question some of the social practices surrounding the Lads community.

Marcel: It was fucking slack, because even if another person is picking on us, you get like, every single boy wants to punch you.
Sam: Dead set.
Marcel: My cousin right, we were just drunk. And he can’t handle it. He just comes up to some random guy and just punched him. For no reason. And then the guy he just picks him up, and throws him in front of a bus while the bus is moving. Just missed him. So, then we got 15 boys and they just jumped down and bashed him. It’s fucking slack.
Sam: Yea, but he shouldn’t have done that to [your cousin].
Marcel: What would you do if someone just came up and punched you in the head?
Sam: I would turn around and smack him bro. I would’ve fucking chuck him in front of a bus. That’s what we used to be like, we never gave a shit. I just find it stupid now. I don’t go out as much anymore, I stay home with my misses.

Behaviour that once was an avenue of enjoyment is slowly starting to feel less meaningful. However, as can be seen in the quote above, the value placed on hyper-masculine practices is still very much present in Sam’s language.

This section shows how the experience of belonging for the young people alters over time, as the importance placed on these communities changes and new avenues of belonging become available. The young men and women reflectively assess whether they feel contented in a given place and group in relation to their life course and whether the investment made here, and the recognition and competence gained, continue to be favoured and valuable. As we will see in Part B of the analysis, these changes are primarily driven by their involvement with the youth program, which offers alternative avenues of recognition, such as those revolving around helping others and becoming strong and fit. Of course, despite the degree of reflexivity and weighing up of options, these are choices within limits (te Riele 2004) as some young people experienced an absence of meaningful alternatives. This example illuminates how the agency of the young people is structured according to local social processes and opportunities and highly embedded within their everyday practices.
Discussion - Tension between authenticity and social integration

In dealing with hardship, young people’s communities play a crucial role. This section has emphasised that although some young people ‘fall into’ criminal communities, others seek them out as a means to articulate their resentment towards experiences of being denied the opportunities available to others (Bottrell 2009). Subcultures can be understood as a reaction against social exclusion and marginalisation. On the topic of transgressing youth culture, McDonald (1999) argues that feelings of repression and limited autonomy are the main motivation behind young people's rebellion: “The lack of autonomy (...) leads young people to invent a leisure culture around the search for the authenticity and autonomy denied (...)” (McDonald 1999: 147). This is comparable with the experience of the City cohort, directly associating the oppression felt at school with the desire and need for freedom expressed in graffiti and transgressions. Correspondingly, what the young men gained in this group spans from simply fun and ‘something to do’ to a sense of belonging, resistance and agency.

Where mainstream areas of youth participation such as educational institutions are seen as places of misrecognition, instead, participation and inclusion into local communities provide opportunities for mastery, and contexts for identity work and life skills for the participants. What may be perceived as anti-social, non-participatory behaviours, are also the essential arenas for negotiations of social citizenship and self-understandings. Further to this, young people can use youth cultures and communities to create meaningfulness and manageability in their ‘insecure transitions’ (Stauber 2010). Stauber argues that when young people are embedded in a community of others who recognise the legitimacy of its members' endeavours, it allows for a sense of control over their identities, and a sense of coherency (Stauber 2010), which is particularly important for young people outside formal education and employment. Although young people’s communities are important arenas for enhancing a sense of belonging and recognition, this section also drew out how these communities in many ways place limits on its members, for instance due to the restricted markets for physical types of masculinity outside these communities.

Comparing these findings with the narratives of the young men from Green Valley, it appears that the participants with weak links to a community experience less resilience and well-being, and higher degrees of anxiety and hopelessness, compared with those who are strongly embedded in a local community. However, the City group show that high levels of connectedness and belonging do not necessarily lead to lower levels of crime and delinquent behaviour. This suggests that it is not low levels of social capital and belonging that lead to crime, rather it is the types of belonging, communities and social practices obtainable that may create a pathway to crime. This finding underlines the importance of recognising young people’s networks and the likely transitions and pathways they are able to forge. This aspect will be further explored in the following section, that focuses on the pathways made available through inclusion in an ethnic community.
Chapter Seven: Communities of Being as Horizons for Action

**CULTURAL EMBEDDEDNESS AND BEING ‘OTHERED’**

The young immigrant group could be said to hold a fragile sense of belonging to broader society, a belonging that must be fought for and continually re-established, pegged against a robust ethnic and cultural minority belongingness. However, this ethno-national belonging stemming from the local African community presents different opportunities for the young men and young women. For the young men, ethno-national belonging presents opportunities for external mastery, for instance through leisure and education. Traditional masculine identities are promoted, and whilst this is prescriptive, these align with mainstream ideals of success. The feminine identities available to the young Somali women, in contrast, provide fewer opportunities to expand external social connections and interests.

*Ethnic identification and limited mainstream avenues of connection*

Being a migrant, almost by definition, involves a sense of being ‘othered’ (Correa-Velez, Gifford et al. 2010). Commonly, people from a migrant background bring with them roots, social relations, religion, lifestyle and social patterns from their country of origin. Therefore, a fundamental aspect of being a migrant is being confronted with comparatively different social practices in one’s host country. Living near to members of one’s ethnic community, experiencing a sense of belonging to this community, coupled with opportunities to participate in one’s new country, are important factors for becoming established in the new country (Correa-Velez, Gifford et al. 2010). The participants from a migrant background all expressed having very positive feelings of community belonging and a high degree of place attachment to their local African neighbourhood.

Unlike the Green Valley group, the group of young Somalian participants enjoy living in their neighbourhood, express feeling safe and supported there and convey a high degree of connection to the social life in the neighbourhood. Most of the participants from the Migrant group had been born overseas, unlike the City group, where although many had come from culturally diverse backgrounds, all were born in Australia. All participants in this group live in or around a public housing estate, and have a Somalian background, and both were key factors in their narratives. They articulated gratitude towards the support and belonging available in their local African community, but also noted the firmly prescribed social practices concerning behaviour worthy of respect and recognition.

Wade

In some cases, if you do something wrong, [people from the local community] can give you advice, it’s not always like a bad thing, so they just tell you to not do it in the future, just like give you advice on a better path, or if you need help, they are there for you. I mostly think it’s good because you just have that constant support. Which is good.
These participants convey a deep-seated sense of commitment and connection to the worldview of their ethic community. Stories about dishonourable behaviour and great successes of the people within this community are shared, creating a pathway to follow. Nevertheless, this strong sense of belonging also has a negative side, as antagonism and patterns of group control can be hard to escape; “The word goes around fast” (Gabriel). The participants are mindful that non-conformity will lead to criticism, rejection and stigmatisation, and express a high degree of consensus regarding how one would get a bad reputation within the Somali community.

Gabriel	Going to jail.
Babette	Smoking.
Aamori	Drinking.
Saadya	Pregnant without married.
Gabriel	Africa parents, they talk.
Babette	Everyone knows each other.
Aamori	They tell everyone, you know my son, what he did, he drink alcohol, he smoke, she got pregnant without any husband, ah, nooo.
Babette	They talk too much.
Saadya	You can’t go out, the shame you know, everywhere you go, you pregnant, how can you go out, my mum tell everyone, oh my God!!

This group of participants do not see parties, drugs and alcohol as a plausible option, and in some ways, hence less of a concern. In particular the women, but also the young men, would be disgraced and excluded if they were found smoking cigarettes, or using drugs and alcohol. Compared to the Green Valley and City group, the migrant young people are law abiding. This also presents an alternative representation of Somalian young people, countering the largely negative depicuring of this group, and the corresponding moral panic, so often seen in mainstream media (Casimiro, Hancock et al. 2007, Dhanji 2009). In part, the strong normative demands within the community mean that these young people are unlikely to transgress. On many indicators, these young people are successful according to mainstream criteria and, as shown in Chapter Five, have well-developed visions for the future, highly aligned with conventional ideals of success.

This group express a relatively low degree of belonging to the Australian community, combined with a high degree of belonging to their local community. Although Gabriel attends university, has some success as an artist and knows how and when to apply different cultural codes in different context, his experience of difference in Australia is ultimately one of setback and difficulty.

Gabriel	It’s like here, being with your own people gives you that belonging. If you are like the only African family in an Aussie community, like no matter how much
you try, you aren’t going to feel like you are part of that community. You are always just, I don’t know, a step behind.

This sense of difference was also evident in this groups experiences of racism and misrecognition at school, as discussed in Chapter Six. As a consequence, the Somali participants hold a complex view of belonging and face a dual sense of exclusion. As Aamori notes; “You don’t belong either here or there. Middle”.

This section has highlighted the double side of belonging for the young migrants. Despite the limited scope for alternative self-expressions and scrutiny of behaviour, it appears the local community provides a sense of protection and connection against the exclusion and racism experienced in their meeting with broader society. The analysis continues by exploring the gender dimensions of the opportunities provided by the local community.

**Local opportunities for developing interests and mastery**

Hobbies can broaden a person’s interests, create networks and social connections, provide avenues of mastery and recognition and in many cases, expand external connections with the world (Worth 2009). This section interrogates hobbies and interests as opportunities for self-expression, showing the gendered ways in which the migrant young people are able to create external connections.

Wade and Raad are eagerly engaged in sports and practiced daily on the basketball court with their friends. Besides sports, Gabriel is also involved in street art (legal graffiti) and spends a large portion of his time drawing and promoting himself as an artist. The group of young women however, convey living a largely domestic life, revolving around the home, family and close female friends.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Activity or Reflection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maja</td>
<td>I have some questions about what you do when you are not at school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gabriel</td>
<td>Yeah, I usually have a concept, like posters or being a photographer for events, so I’m always busy, just like building up my skills as an artist. I like doing architectural stuff. Or play sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saadya</td>
<td>Housework and watch TV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Babette</td>
<td>Just watching TV, staying in, having fun with family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maja</td>
<td>But no sports or activities or things like the ones the boys mentioned?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aamori</td>
<td>Well mostly, African girls, they don’t play sport.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saadya</td>
<td>Yeah, African girls are lazy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maja</td>
<td>They are lazy, how come?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saadya</td>
<td>I don’t think about that.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The young women express a narrow range of desires and interests, both in terms of what activities they engage in at the moment, but also in terms of desires for the future. Notably, the labelling of African women as lazy, is not said in a derogatory way, rather the young women express finding hobbies and attending sports pointless. Even after plenty of prompting, the young women cannot think of any activity they would like to try, or a travel destination they wish to visit outside of Somalia, if money and time was no obstacle. Although the young women do not state feeling under-stimulated, the quote above suggests that their version of a women’s life does not entails activities outside the domestic sphere.

The everyday life of young unmarried women is predominantly a passive waiting phase before (married) life could begin. This passivity is demonstrated in the ways these young women discuss how they spend their time. These young women live with their brothers or other relatives and have a high level of responsibility within the home for cleaning, cooking, shopping and caretaking. Their primary arena of mastery and recognition is found in relation to the family. As explored in Chapter Five, establishing a family of their own is central to the young women’s imagined futures, and their only perceived opportunity to attain adult responsibility and autonomy. In contrast, the young Somali men express pursuing more individualised orientations towards the future involving sports, arts and higher education as Raad expresses: “I want to go to college, play basketball, enter NBA, get married. In that order”.

Fraser’s comment that adulthood is equated with full personhood in terms of the recognition of actors as ‘full partners in interaction’ (Fraser 2000: 113) is of relevance here. The Somali young women can be said to experience a recognition deficit in that achieving ‘full personhood’ is delayed till motherhood and marriage is achieved. The more classic forms of recognition attained through education, independence and full-time work appears unattractive for the young Somali women, as a pursuit of these would involve a potential deferral of their aspired-for social achievements. Although the normative basis for recognition is equally fixed for men and women in this group, when considering the level of transferability of competencies to alternative arenas, the young women appear to be especially disadvantaged. The following section proceeds further with this interrogation of the creation of gendered aspirational horizons.

Gendered avenues of recognition produce gendered aspirations

The main avenue for recognition and feeling valuable for the young women is through the means of domesticity. Finding a good husband is central to the young women’s perceived life-chances. Nevertheless, both the young men and women from the Migrant group desire marriage and wish for between 10-12 children. In fact, even in their worst case future scenarios, all participants still envision themselves married (but to a 'bad husband'
or an ‘ugly wife’) as Raad say: “Okay, if everything goes wrong. I’m broke, I get married to an average looking wife, live on the streets, become a drug dealer”. For Wade, it is the thought of his wife earning more than him that qualified as a worst-case scenario: “I’m still married, but to a rich girl. Yeah, I’m broke, then you get supported by your wife”. Saadya, however, thinks her worst-case scenario would be to marry a bus driver.

Even when prompted, none of the participants can envision a future that does not entail marriage and children.

Babette Don’t get married? But we want children.
Saadya I have to get married, I have to!

The young men and women share very compatible visions of men and women’s future contributions and role within the community. This involve a notion that a women’s life is easier than the life of a man.

Wade With girls, your thing is very easy though, you can find a rich guy and your life is set. So, no problem for you.
Raad When you broke, girls are desperate for any guy.
Wade Yeah, ladies can still get away with it, if they are broke. It’s harder for a guy to be a gold digger, than for a lady be a gold digger.
Gabriel A woman has just got to find the right guy.
Babette Yeah that’s true.
Wade Some people work, like picking up the chairs. There’s more women than guys here, but it’s likely that we will get called to pick up the chairs.
Raad True, that shows that we are always expected to do, that’s the same thing you know, everything has got the same amount of, you can’t do whatever you want.

As can be seen in Raad’s comment, men and women live highly structured lives and have fixed, gender-defined responsibilities and tasks, “you can’t do whatever you want”. This involves men taking the financial responsibility for the family. For women, being able not to work was considered a status symbol, as not having to work denotes a wealthy husband. It appears that women only work out of necessity, whereas work for men is an important avenue of identity creation.

Gabriel If you have money, she doesn’t have to work, stay at home.
Babette Yeah, if you are a good man, yeah.
Wade I make her stay at home, she stay at home.
Raad If you want to go to chill with a friend, she’s allowed to.
Maja So, you don’t want your future wives to work?
Wade Okay, if I make millions of dollars and then she goes and work like at a bakery,
what the fuck is the point, I’d be just like, what do you want, I’ll pay you double to stay at home.

Raad It’s common sense.

Wade Let’s say you are working, your man is working, who is going to be cooking?

Babette Yeah, exactly, who will look after the kids?

Gabriel Yeah, we have different cultures and stuff, so let’s say Africa, so for most ladies, the man has the responsibility to bring the food.

Saadya You just stay home.

Babette Exactly yeah. So, you stay home and cook and with the kids, and the guy just do whatever he do.

Aamori Yeah, if my husband say, you have to stay at home, and look after the kids, I will do it, I’m not going work.

Again, we see how gender roles are ‘common sense’. Yet the young people also articulate an awareness that their culture is different from the mainstream, and that these are the values of ‘African’ men and women. When other cultural practices are mentioned, for example men taking parental leave and caring for their children, none of the participants think this is a feasible or desirable solution.

Maja In Denmark, many men take parental leave, men take 6 months off from work to take care of their children. If you go for a walk in Denmark, you will see heaps of men pushing prams around the park.

Wade No way!

Gabriel Are you sure about that?

Saadya That’s crazy!

Raad Oh man, men pushing prams around. That’s wrong.

Although the participants are exposed to different cultural practices, for example, via social media and television, the suggestion that gender roles could be different is considered bizarre. The idea of men as caretakers is so far removed from their cultural belief, that it is considered absurd and unrealistic. As Wierenga highlights: “Narrow definitions of ‘people like me’ reinforce the boundaries, sharply demarcating what information becomes relevant” (Wierenga 2009: 62). Information about, and exposure to, men and women with different parental practices and gender roles is disregarded, as these stem from a culture dissimilar to their own. Of course, it may be difficult to challenge such strong group norms in focus group settings such as these. Whether the participants would be articulating equally strong opinions about men’s role in bringing up children in one-on-one interviews is hard to know. However, these statements do highlight the group norms concerning male and female roles.
Chapter Seven: Communities of Being as Horizons for Action

Discussion - Local belongingness and mainstream exclusion

Longing for the place left behind is a permanent condition of many migrants (Ilcan 2002). The sense of displacement is palpable for the migrant young people. This section has highlighted that for young people with a migrant background the desire, willingness and opportunity to engage in their host society is highly influenced by structural factors and tied to the broader social environment, particularly how open and socially inclusive the structures of the host community are perceived to be.

From the young people’s perspectives, it appears that within their social milieu, opportunities for enhancing ones’ chances for adult recognition are best sought through traditional gender-based patterns and practices. Life is planned along a continuum that stretches from child to youth to adult, and recognition is granted based on social categories such as parent or provider. In this sense, the Migrant group stand out compared to the other two groups, which displayed a more flexible continuum, where decisions are more often taken according to “situational and contextual needs and desires” (Rosa 2003: 19). Belonging as a migrant, at least for these young people, offers a well-trodden route into adulthood.

Although the migrant participants have extended intergenerational networks, the level of diversity within these networks are limited, and thus also the availability of a broad range of female and male role models. The complication that potentially arises here is whether these more traditional patterns of practice, based on a single male bread-winner model and a stay-at-home wife with numerous children, is feasible and sustainable in contemporary Australia. Economic change coupled with the increasing uncertainty of the labour market has seen a demise of the traditional notions of adulthood involving male-breadwinners, and brought new notions of female adulthood and a rise in women’s employment (Smyth and Buchanan 2013). The tension here for the young women, besides the availability of good, high-earning, Somali husbands, is that their patterns of practice is neither particularly flexible, portable or adaptable to different social settings. The intersection here between communities and cultural practices on one hand, and broader structural factors outside the individual’s control on the other hand, potentially leaves these young women in a vulnerable situation.

As was seen in the sections above, belonging can be understood as a protective factor for people in their multiple life transitions, but where one belongs, and to what kind of community, has implications for the young person’s future becoming. Colombo argues that for migrants to be able to utilise their ethnicity as a resource, they need to be supported to recognise the importance of their ties with their community, tradition or family, whilst being provided with the resources to act differently, if some aspects of this ethnicity are experienced as too constricting (Colombo 2010). It may be that youth
programs could be well placed to provide such resources that may lead to a broadening of horizons for groups like this, as will be discussed in Part B of the analysis.

**DISCUSSION**

The wish to belong contains intrinsic struggles as people balance out the need for belonging with the desire for self-expression, distinction and the right to be oneself. As we have seen, most of the young people succeeded in creating or seeking out local communities, despite the multifaceted complexities of recognition and misrecognition in their everyday life. The types of belonging the young people were able to create, however, had consequences in terms of their opportunities for self-expression, agency, well-being and capacity to aspire. Belonging to a community also included a notion of sameness and in this, a misrecognition of difference. In-so-far as the young people desired to belong, they were also required to assimilate to the language, practices, values and behaviours of the community, preventing to a degree the expression of alternative identities. The tension between being a part and being distinct was continually played out for the young people, bringing to the forefront the processual aspects of belonging.

The group of young migrants stand out compared to the other two groups. They pursued a culturally recognisable and highly gendered pathway to adult types of recognition and competencies, and as such articulated the least amount of vulnerability or resistance. Due to the strong cultural and social identities, these young people could be characterised as having robust identities and a solid sense of local belonging. In comparison, the City and Green Valley participants had to actively seek out or create opportunities for enhanced belonging and avenues of recognition, which continued to involve significant identity work. It appears the migrant young people have less need to find a sense of place, as their sense of place and worth is confirmed within their local community. Although the identity work required for the Migrant group can be argued to be less complicated compared to the two other groups, many of whom were fuelled by a desire to remedy a recognition deficit, the opportunities for self-actualisation and agency was equally limited for the group of young migrants.

Only few participants were so isolated that a sense of a surrounding community was absent. Those were the young people who voiced the bleakest future scenarios, if they engaged with their future at all. Considerations regarding future meaningful social citizenship seemed pointless in the absence of a sense of value in the present. Void of a sense of belonging, the young people struggled to make sense of the social world in which they lived. Here we see how the inability to locate oneself within a community inhibits the capacity for agency, creativity and autonomy. The absence of any perceived opportunities or sense of belonging creates a life characterised by ‘no forward movement’, a standstill
without a meaningful present or a desired future. For marginalised young people, their belonging and recognition experiences often stunt and shape their becoming.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has dealt with the question of how young people on the margins – who all experience different degree of restrictions on their access to conventional processes facilitating social citizenship – achieve safety, visibility, connection and respect through engagement with local communities and places of meaning. While this search was born out of different struggles (struggles at school and family displacement, being denied autonomy, searching for self-determination and enhanced belonging, struggles with racism and misrecognition), parallel for all groups is the search for recognition and belonging within the boundaries of the local structural conditions. Although each of these sites provided recognition and belonging for the young people in particular ways, they also have a relationship with horizons for actions, as the identifications of ‘where I belong’ and ‘people like me’ shape social practices and patterns of meaning.

This chapter has drawn out the positive and valuable aspects of youth communities, as well as the ways in which these same communities can entrench structural positionings and immobility. While communities can help young people make sense of, and indeed resist inequalities, as was the case for the City group, they can also shape and reproduce the very same inequalities. The analysis has shown how young people’s mental and emotional horizons are powerful symbolic resources. They create permissions for creativity and self-expressions, while defining what people believe lies outside their realms of practical possibilities. The following chapter provides a discussion and conclusion to Part A of the Analysis, by investigating how experiences and feelings of belonging and recognition influences the participants’ emotional and mental horizons for action.
Chapter Eight: Discussion Analysis Part A

PLACES OF MEANING, BELONGING AND SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP

Social citizenship aspirations evolve in the arenas young people share with others and combine a growing consciousness of the self as a sovereign person, with the interconnectedness of oneself to others in society. As the key question of this research concerns how social and structural embeddedness shapes and restricts future aspirations for social citizenship, this summary and discussion section will elaborate on the key findings concerning the participants’ capacity to obtain the relational, structural and cultural resources drawn upon to gain belonging and recognition, and identify how this shapes their aspirations.

Belonging is a multidimensional concept which can be situated on several analytical levels. The practical sites through which belonging and recognition/misrecognition is experienced and social citizenship is practiced can be divided into macro, meso and micro levels for analytical purposes. The availability of modes of belonging for the participants on all three levels will be summarised below, as relevant to the thesis question.

**Macro level**

A first analytical level is to understand how people construct belonging to particular collectivities (Yuval-Davis 2006). As a site of belonging, the macro level refers to engagement and identification with larger ‘imagined’ communities such as nation states and ethnic communities. In Honneth’s terminology this is the site for solidarity.

As also argued by Ansell, although young lives are lived in the day to day of the local, their immediate social environments are tied to and shaped by broader global processes (Ansell 2009). Three key structural factors help make sense of the young people’s sense of macro level belonging, all representing different aspects of marginalisation. These include patterns of global migration and how young migrants are received in Australia; rural decline and place-based disadvantaged; and dimensions of urban social exclusion.

The classic framework of developing citizenship and belonging is challenged when analysing the experiences of ethnic minorities and migrants living within diasporic communities. The young people with a Somali background have more complex experiences of belonging, characterised by belonging as well as non-belonging, by nearness and distance, a balancing act between creating new belongings whilst maintaining old belongings. For young people with a migrant background, the capacity and willingness to engage in society is highly influenced by the broader social
environment and structural factors, including the openness and social inclusiveness of the host community.

We see clearly the conditions established by the host country in the mixed experiences of the Somali young people. On one hand, this group are faced with negative stereotypes about Muslims and ethnic minorities in their day to day interactions, which undermines a macro level sense of belonging to their host national community. On the other hand, they experience a high level of local belonging to their neighbourhood. A similar finding has been made by Sernhede (2006), noting that young people with a migrant background develop an orientation towards locality alongside a strong transnational orientation. Sernhede argues that the excluding, often hostile discourses aimed at ethnic minorities in relation to national communities are critical to understanding migrants’ sense of local belonging, as the neighbourhood becomes an alternative place to feel safe (Sernhede 2006).

Of course, notions of belonging do not have to involve choosing one national community above another. New and old belongings and attachments to places can be combined and take primacy according to the circumstances and phases in a person’s life (Levitt and Schiller 2004, Colombo 2010, Christensen and Qvotrup Jensen 2011). Although multiple belongings are customary for most people, the combining of a diverse set of often opposing social practices, religions, lifestyles and roots in the country of origin and the host country can be less than straightforward. As we see in the case of the migrant young people, the social practices associated with these ethnic-national differences are negotiable to varying degrees, depending on the context and the gender of a person.

Rural young people’s lives are tied to the social and economic changes in their community (Farrugia, Smyth et al. 2015). In Australia, regional communities struggle to adapt to the decline of manufacturing and primary industry, a decline often exacerbated by neoliberal policy regimes. This creates mutually reinforcing cycles of economic decline, loss of infrastructure and services, population loss and job loss, high levels of youth unemployment and enduring challenges of access to education (Gabriel 2007, Wierenga 2011). For rural youth, most educational and employment opportunities are located in cities (Cuervo and Wyn 2014), meaning that a pursuit of conventional avenues of success often involves mobility and geographical migration. Negotiating these circumstances and their future aspirations involves, for the Green Valley group more so than the other two groups, a decision to stay or to go. However, none of the participants envision leaving Green Valley, despite the awareness that staying within their rural town also means being isolated from alternative forms of recognition, mastery and experiences.

Much literature on rural living focuses on community and boredom as an experience dominating the lives of rural youth; the combination of close and supportive communities and ‘nothing to do’ (Glendinning, Nuttall et al. 2003, Sercombe 2006, Evans 2008,
Chapter Eight: Discussion Analysis Part A

Farrugia, Smyth et al. 2015). However, the Green Valley group in this research also experience social and personal hardship and hence their narratives generally lack the positive features of rural living in the forms of identity, solidarity and support. Sercombe notes the difficulties facing rural young people lacking social capital: “Young people can find that their horizons are shrinking along with their town. It can be hard to see a future other than the one already narrowly prescribed” (Sercombe 2006: 11). Where geographical inequalities exclude the Green Valley group from the opportunities and choices of a globalised youth, the social and economic marginalisation of this group robs them of a sense of place. This double disadvantage is palpable, not just in their arrested horizons for action, but also in their lack of hope for their future. As Pilkington and Johnson (2003) argue:

“If peripheral youthful ‘choices’ are restricted at the material level, we also need to raise questions of mental and emotional horizons, of active fantasy, of planning, but also of hope and despair” (Pilkington and Johnson 2003: 276).

The lack of access and resources associated with rural living thus both impact on quality of life now, on future life chances, and on the capacity to aspire beyond these limited horizons.

The Green Valley group of participants’ social positioning is arguably the most precarious of all the groups, both due to the level of marginalisation experienced because of structural insecurities, rurality and class, but also the profound personal and social disadvantage, which inhibits their capability to engage in meaningful reflexivity regarding their place and stake in the future. This finding corresponds with a study by MacDonald and Marsh (2005) on young people growing up in neighbourhoods with a declining local labour market and widespread youth unemployment. MacDonald and Marsh document how their participants cease to engage in reflexivity regarding their future, due not to lack of reflexive ability, but because of the meaninglessness involved in trying to reflexively manage a life leading nowhere (MacDonald and Marsh 2005). In comparison, the City group are able to establish a collective culture of resistance that acts as a protective factor, whereas the migrants generate a sense of protection in their localised, cultural belonging. Both strategies create a sense of place and meaning.

Through the young people’s narratives, the analytical chapters show how the dimensions of social exclusion – those linked to lack of access to information and resources, and limited exposure to alternative participation opportunities, relationships and activities available to most people within society – are related to future low aspirations. For the City group, the main structural features bearing down on their lives and opportunities are the physical environment and their dealings with the school and criminal justice system. The City group respond to the dominance, stigmatisation and misrecognition experienced in their dealings with these institutions of socialisation and social control with an adversarial
attitude towards society and its institutions. This situational response making possible certain kinds of collective resistance cultures, is seen in their street-fighting, alcohol abuse and crime. However, seeking to claim resistance towards the institutions they experience as dominating and controlling them through these types of social practices, makes them a target of further stigmatisation and attempts at control by the police and school personnel. Similar to the findings of McRobbie (1978) and Willis (1977) young people's forms of resistance are shaped by their community in ways that often end with conformity to pre-established community roles. In this, young people's identity work, whether resistant or acceptant, often plays a part in reproducing the collective classed and gendered structures within which they are nested.

**Meso level**

Belonging on a meso level refers to the association with collective organisations, for example welfare state institutions and membership in collective identities or groups of people with similar values or common interests. Belonging as a synonym of collective identity is the site of rights in Honneth's perspective, and the sphere of local belonging, local citizenship and identities in relation to everyday expressions of gender, class and ethnicity. On a meso level, young people's educational and informal leisure settings are the main sites for their social citizenship negotiations.

As a primary site of engagement with one's social identity, the young people's experiences at school have proven fundamental to all the participants, shaping their worldview, sense of worth and willingness to engage, not only at school but also with society. In their meeting with the educational system, the young people are habitually deemed unfit for the system, with little appreciation of what might be happening in their lives. As Smyth and colleagues also find, “it is their actions, behaviours, attitudes and values that have been systematically misunderstood, with the young person being blamed for their own disengagement” (Smyth, Robinson et al. 2013: 497). A similar conclusion emerges in this study. The participants' school experiences are saturated with fear of standing out, feeling 'othered', and being unable to gain a sense of belonging or mastery at school. This creates a reluctance to engage with adult society of any kind, and further strengthens the young people's orientation towards their own peer communities. Overall most of the participants' school experiences lead them to believe that their voices, interests, security and well-being were not a priority within educational institutions.

As we see, the participants seek to fill the recognition deficit experienced at school through alternative forms of belonging. Communities are established around common interests and identities such as Lads or Graffiti sub-cultures. Some of the participants, mostly from Green Valley or the City, seek out peer-groups centred around gaining respect, safety and connection through physicality and fighting, where the Somali
participants, to a great extent, can rely on a well-established, local African community and the value attained here through traditional gendered subjectivities.

There are two sides of belonging to an identifiable group; a side that is selected, claimed and wanted and a side that is unwanted, ascribed or positioned (Bottrell 2007). This is present for the three groups as they seek out and claim aspects of belonging to the Lads, the ‘Crew’ or the African community. This involves assimilating many of the norms, practices and values of these communities, although these in many ways further entrenches their position on the margins. Within the young people's struggles against misrecognition and demand to be seen for who they are, we also find “a struggle for chosen, and against unchosen, social identities” (Bottrell 2007: 608). As such, for all the participants, belonging to marginalised communities also involves attempts to counter the negative stereotypes and misrecognition of these same communities.

The analytical chapters highlight that the degree to which young people's communities of being are homogeneous or heterogeneous, restricted or diverse, or exclusive or inclusive does not primarily influence the level of belonging experienced, but instead the types of mastery and recognition available, and the types of self-understanding and self-expression nurtured. Within locally bound, homogenous communities, dominant worldviews and social patterns are rarely challenged. In this, communities mediate young people's transitions, by supporting or curtailing access to opportunities and social resources, closing down some possibilities and resources and opening up others.

**Micro level**

The micro level is the most intimate level encompassing the familial context, close friends and intimate partners, the site of love in Honneth's terminology. This is the domain of daily practices and is mainly based on face-to-face relations. Micro level belongings construct social distinctions in relation to whom you identify with. The psychological dimensions of relational belonging are found at this analytical level.

Close friends and family are young people's primary sites of belonging, and the most fundamental avenue in gaining a sense of oneself as valuable and deserving of respect and recognition. In terms of belonging, close family members are significant, not just on a physiological developmental level, but because they mediate access to the external world and local communities, and assist young people in making sense of the world and their place within it (Wierenga 2009). The presence of close personal and social ties varies greatly among the participants. Some have close ties with family members and these are sought out for advice, guidance and support. For others, the lack of interest and understanding from family members is a repeated source of distress and anguish. Family is
a more stable reference for the Somali group, although many of these pivotal family members live in Somalia.

The young Somali women take a high level of responsibility within the home, articulating the home and housework as an avenue of competence and recognition. However, an awareness of the wellbeing of other family members is prevalent in all the young people's narratives. Several of the young people include their parents and other family members in the considerations for their future, highlighting the ability to financially, practically and emotionally support them, or to make them proud, as a vital factor in their future aspirations. This relational investment shapes and constrains their mental and emotional horizons, for instance seen in a reluctance expressed by the young Green Valley group to move to another town.

CONCLUSION

Social citizenship aspirations concern people’s capacity to envision a life that holds value for them and to take action towards attaining this life. The young people's narratives demonstrate how their vital need to find a fit in their social surroundings, affects their aspirational horizons.

Communities of being create social microcosms involving negotiations over social patterns, values, rules and legitimate ways of being and acting. Focusing on young people's participation in localised communities, coupled with their alienation from and resistance to other contexts, such as the school environment, contributes to a fuller understanding of the complexity of how structure and culture operate in the lives of young people. The empirical findings of this research demonstrate how the choices of young people are best understood in relation to their material and community embeddedness, as the everyday practices drawn upon to make sense of and navigate life transitions, encounters and circumstances are created here. The young people's resistance and sense of agency, in relation to social identities, has proved central to how they perceive their choices.

The thesis now turns towards the second part of the analysis, investigating youth programs as sites for belonging and social citizenship negotiations. By focusing on the relationship between marginalised young people's aspirations and the institutions that seek to help facilitate these, the conditions for marginalised young people's inclusion into equal membership in society will be brought into view.
Analysis Part B

Part B of the analysis – Chapter Nine – turns towards the youth programs frequented by the participants, raising the question: Given what has been established about how the mental and emotional conditions for individual self-realisation and social citizenship aspirations becomes shaped and stunted, how are these aspects engaged with within youth work settings? To analyse the subjectivities being encouraged within these programs, this chapter will investigate how the youth programs define the challenges of the young people along with the proposed ‘solutions’; in other words, the ideologies underpinning the work performed. This chapter is based on interviews with case workers and program managers of three youth programs, as well as supporting documents about the aims and ideology of the programs.

Importantly, Chapter Nine does not aim at evaluating the effort of the individual workers, nor whether they meet their aims, but focuses instead on critiquing features of the programs, such as the operation and funding. The argument made in this chapter is that problems may arise when disadvantaged young people are pressured into unproblematised structures and activities run by poorly resourced community organisations, and that the potential of youth work practice may be compromised under these conditions. This again limits youth programs’ ability to meaningfully engage with marginalised young people’s social citizenship aspirations.
Chapter Nine: Citizenship Aspirations Nurtured within a Youth Work Setting

Introduction

Although the focus of two of the programs is educational re-engagement and addressing academic barriers, and the third program is aimed at crime reduction, all three programs focus on reintegrating disadvantaged young people into broader society. While creating a strengthened sense of belonging, participation and connection with the local community was a stated goal of all programs, a tension was found between providing a platform for youth advocacy on one hand and mainstream integration on the other. Williamson speaks of this tension as the double role of youth work practice, between emancipation and control (Williamson, 2011). This conflict between young people’s social circumstances and aspirations, in other words between the youth ‘lifeworld’, and the demands and expectations of public policy or the ‘system world’, will form the analytical framework for this chapter. The objective here is to create a richer understanding of how young people are supported by societal institutions such as youth programs, and what they are supported to be and become.

The argument made here is that if programs working with people’s aspirational horizons focus solely on educational outcomes, without understanding how experiences of belonging and recognition shape aspirations, they will be working with incomplete and decontextualised accounts. This in turn may lead to the development of thin and simplistic understandings of young people’s challenges by ignoring the complexity of their situations. These incomplete understandings may further come to limit how social welfare institutions work with young people and thus the potential for positive effect of these interventions on young people requiring support. This thesis suggests that any work with disadvantaged young people would benefit from recognising not just young people’s future goals, but the foundations on which these goals are created.

YOUTH TURNAROUND

Progressive and final outcomes

Youth Turnaround is placed in Green Valley and supports early school leavers and those at risk of disengaging from school to re-engage with education and training. According to internal documents, the mission statement at Youth Turnaround is: “Leading communities in creating environments where young people can achieve purposeful futures through economic, social and civic participation”. In this vision, “Enabling
progress and improvement are the most important aims” which are achieved by “starting where the young person is” and “moving at the young person’s pace”.

The program is targeted towards 13-19 year olds and involves regular case management and activity-based programs. Youth Turnaround is a federally funded program and subsequently, as part of the funding contract, the program is assessed on their outcomes. The funding guidelines require Youth Turnaround to work with between 201 and 249 young people per year and achieve a similar number of outcomes (progressive outcomes or final outcomes). The final outcome the workers are striving towards is assisting young people to reach thirteen weeks of engagement with education. The progressive (or ‘soft’) outcomes can be related to personal development, improved family relationships, improved health and wellbeing, improved behaviours or working on any of a list of identified barriers to school engagement (i.e. indicators of strengthened connections or re-engagement).

Each worker is required to reach 50 outcomes a year and since not all clients finish the programs (or reach an outcome), the workers take on more than 50 clients yearly to ensure their targets are reached. The workers explain, that although it is quite difficult to attain a final outcome, achieving some of the soft outcomes is relatively uncomplicated. Below the Program Manager explains this seeming contradiction.

Program Manager We have progressive outcomes and final outcomes, so the final is quite concrete, you have to have evidence for those. But the progressive outcomes are like soft outcomes, they’re much more subjective, so it might be improved self-esteem, it might be improved socialisation skills and you can do that in a number of ways. Those final ones can be quite difficult because young people, for a lot of them, it’s hard to get them to go back to school and for some of them, just staying there for thirteen weeks is really difficult. So, some of them will leave and then find another course, and they kind of course hop. So, you can’t really say, they are not really re-engaged. So, we tend to choose outcomes like strengthened engagement which are a bit more easy, they are not so black and white.

There is an interesting doubleness for the workers in achieving set outcomes. Although the soft outcomes could be said to be both ambiguous and challenging to quantify (e.g. quantifying improved confidence, motivation or engagement), achieving a soft outcome is, according to a worker, as easy as making a phone call to the school “that would be ‘strengthened school engagement’” (Case worker 2). Reaching a final outcome however, was considered both exceptional and problematic due to its definition of ‘re-engagement’. As the workers explain, a final outcome could be a false indicator of re-engagement, as
attending school for 13 weeks did not necessarily lead to improved student achievement or engagement.

The problematic nature of outcomes-based work is that the outcomes are both constricted in their aim and relatively easily attainable (when focusing on soft outcomes), simultaneously directing the work and lowering the bar. As the focus is school reengagement, the risk is that other issues in a young person’s life becomes sidestepped, such as those deemed too demanding, time-intensive, difficult to change or unlikely to produce an outcome. Noteworthy, this prioritising is driven by the business and funding model, not the workers themselves, as identified in the quote below.

Program Manager: I think the most common problem that I see with the team is, because they are all welfare trained, social work trained, and then you have like a business model where they have to reach outcomes, they are quite torn. So it’s quite difficult for them, they just want to do the best by the young person, but then they have to have outcomes, and they have to exit them, maybe when they don’t want to, you know what I mean, like we could do a lot more with the young people. So, it means finding the balance, doing as much as you can and getting your outcomes and leading them through because you’ve got to take on new young people.

The above quote highlights a central tension between the worker’s professional principles and the business model guiding the work performed. Welfare workers have traditionally been concerned with quality of work, not quantity of outcomes (Dahl 2009). A major dilemma confronts the workers; how to prove the effectiveness of their pedagogy and practice within a framework of ‘countable’ criteria for success, whilst remaining true to their professional values and the cornerstones of youth work practice. Research suggests that this tension is a major contributor to burn-out and stress for workers within the welfare sector¹² (Fattore and Mønsted 2012). Additional complications arise in the combining of outcomes-focused work and strength-based pedagogy, as the following section will discuss.

**Strengths-based approach and goal setting**

As discussed in Chapter Two, youth policies and service delivery habitually focus on risk indicators such as teen pregnancy, crime, substance abuse, early school leaving, antisocial behaviour and so on (Kelly 2007, Raffaele, Fields et al. 2013). This focus has been deemed a

¹² The issue of misrecognition of welfare workers and their professional identity under New Public Management funding models lies outside the scope of this thesis.
Chapter Nine: Citizenship Aspirations Nurtured within a Youth Work Setting

‘deficit approach’ as the emphasis is on measuring and managing identified risk factors attached to an individual young person, in order to avoid undesirable social outcomes (Bond 2010). The critique aimed at the deficit approach is that the person becomes defined in limited and instrumentalist ways (Kerka 2003, Bond 2010).

In contrast, a strengths-based approach aims at addressing unmet or unfulfilled needs by including environmental, social and structural factors, which might affect a young person’s ability to engage with the education system and express their capabilities (Myconos 2011). Strengths-based case work adopts an ecological approach, taking into consideration the interactions between people and their surroundings, and more broadly emphasises a person’s connectedness, social participation, sense of personal responsibility and self-esteem (Eccles and Gootman 2002). The importance of recognition of the other, their worldview and circumstances, as a first and foundational aspect of the work was stressed by the workers. Below is a quote from a case manager discussing how seldom the young people experience feeling listened to.

Program Worker 1

Sometimes it’s little things, it can be little things that make a big difference. Often it’s they don’t like a teacher and we can do things around that, so they can be swapped out of that class. Whereas they’ve never realised before that they could, so it can be little things and we help them with whatever it is that they want to do. And I think that’s why it ends up being successful, because it’s driven by them.

Maja

Are the young people used to being asked what they want?

Program Worker 1

No, they are not at all. Especially not in a mainstream school. No. And I don’t know how many times schools refer young people, and we will say, have you asked them why they might not be attending, but nobody has asked them why.

A particularly positive aspect of working within a strengths-based framework is, according to the workers, valuing young people’s perspective, including their understanding of their situation. The assumption is that young people are best helped when services focus on their capabilities and assets. While not easily measured, giving young people the recognition that is often missing in their lives is a central component of youth work. A strong theme coming out of the literature (Wierenga 2009, Juul and Høilund 2015) as well as the interviews with both young people and youth workers, is the importance for young people in having adult allies, of being encouraged, supported, seen and valued. Youth Turnaround goes some way in providing this.

The workers and the young person fill out a ‘Re-engagement Plan’ together, that comes to form the foundation of the later meetings. Here future goals, steps towards achieving
these goals, and the expected completion date, are captured. As Shannon (youth worker) explains:

**Program Worker 2**

We are driven by what it is that they want. So that's why it's different for each young person. So, they write down their goals and we really focus on what it is that they want, or what would make their life better, what would make school better.

**Maja**

Is setting goals an easy process?

**Program Worker 2**

Yea. Ahm, not with all clients, no, sometimes they can't, they just cannot give you anything. They have no idea. I suppose we just talk about their likes, interests and a couple of ideas that they've thought of (...). As long as they can give you a couple of interests, they might just say they are interested in animals or they like looking after kids or something like that, then at least that gives you a little bit of an idea of what they like to do or might want to try.

The workers indicated that the goal-setting process is generally straightforward, as long as one interest or strength could be identified, a starting point was found. This approach has a clear benefit in that the young person's voice and preferences are recognised and respected. However, the ‘Re-engagement Plan’ pays little attention to the actual decision-making process, other than the assumption that when a strength is located, the young person will evaluate the range of opportunities available to them and then make a choice which matches ability to opportunity. This involves a simple, rational process, where the biggest barrier is lack of knowledge on how to achieve one's goals. However, the process of aspiring is rarely a linear, logical process. Furthermore, not all young people are accustomed to aspiring, as Maria explains in the quote below:

**Program Worker 3**

A lot of them come to us without any ambition, they’ve just given up ever having a future or their family situation is such that there’s generational unemployment, you know, they haven’t known parents who have been regularly employed, they have no grandparents who have been regularly employed. They come from that sort of environment. So, having high aspirations for themselves or ambitions in terms of a vocation, is quite foreign to some of them.

Although the inequalities bearing down on the young people are explained primarily as personal or family characteristics, the negative impact of such social embeddedness is thought to be further reinforced by living in a small rural town. Below two Case Workers discuss the community influence on the young people.

**Program**

It's like a rural community, it isn't isolated but the community actually
Chapter Nine: Citizenship Aspirations Nurtured within a Youth Work Setting

Worker 3 isolates itself in a way, there are people there that have lived there for generations, the young people don’t want to go to school outside of Green Valley, they want to stay there, their parents want to work and move locally, it’s a very geographically focused community, they are comfortable there and they are uncomfortable moving out of the community.

Program Worker 4 In Green Valley, they kind of seem like they are in their own little world down there and like they are so far from everything else. To the young people it does seem like a long time away. What they see around them is that people, they drop out of school and they might go on the dole. If they’ve had no other role models in their life, it’s almost like they fall into this little world. Big ideas of what’s possible isn’t so accessible to them.

The workers are conscious of the young people's, at times, arrested frame of reference and the impacts this has on how they see their own capabilities and strengths (e.g. the young people living in 'their own little world' and having few role models). However, as the emphasis is on meeting young people where they are, mobilising their own interests, aspirations and plans towards a future, the young people's aspirations are seldom stretched.

The balance the workers are required to strike between accepting and recognising the young people's version of their lives, their dreams and aspirations, whilst also challenging the young people's limited self-understanding, is a difficult one. Below is an example of this tension.

Program Worker 1 I had a young male who wanted to do a Cert II in Retail because his mate was doing it. He's totally not into retail and I knew that he wouldn't enjoy it, but he was dead set on doing it, because he wanted to do something straight away. I knew that he wouldn't last long, but it was free for him and he wanted to do it. He started the course and within a week he decided he didn’t want to do it anymore and stopped going. So, that was just that process of going, okay it didn’t work, why didn’t it work. So, before he completely dropped out, it was a case of what can you do to get yourself to the course, all those sorts of conversations, and of course he didn’t want to be doing it, but he needed to realise for himself, that he needs to be doing what he wants to do for himself, not just because a mate's doing it.

Certificate II in Retail Services is a qualification that provides the skills and knowledge for a person to be competent in a range of activities requiring basic retail operational knowledge.
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Whether the worker, in the situation mentioned above, should have challenged the young man in his aspiration to do a certificate in Retail, sensing as she did, that this may lead to another non-completion, or let him go through with his plans and be rewarded with a learning experience, is a delicate decision to make. The worker’ interpretation of strength-based work involves non-interference and non-judgement of the young person’s wishes, including not challenging his aspirations. Most workers from Youth Turnaround reiterated this view, stating that they aimed to not impose values on clients, but instead mobilise learning around the young people’s interests and aspirations. This approach may be problematic when taking into consideration how young people’s local context, socioeconomic background and narrowness of social and personal connection shapes and stunts their aspirations. It can be argued that searching for strengths and interests without actively trying to broaden the young people’s self-understanding, then risks reinforcing narrow imaginations of the young people’s capabilities (Smyth and McInerney 2012).

This critique of the limitations of the approach that drives Youth Turnaround echoes the structuralist approach discussed in Chapter Three, as the ‘Re-engagement Plans’ creates solutions to problems understood primarily in individualised ways. These plans and action steps hold the young people accountable for reaching their goals, and construct the problem in individualised ways by simultaneously focusing on personal or family characteristics whilst sidestepping structural inequalities. As was discussed in Part A of the analysis, growing up in a declining rural town, belonging to a bounded, isolated community, and having limited exposure and opportunities to develop broad modes of citizenship, dovetail to create stunted aspirations and imaginations about the future. In this context, a focus on forward orientated goals and positive agency, without attention to structural limitations and the mechanisms that structure opportunities and aspirations, can be seen as a form of misrecognition. These types of low expectations play out in highly gendered way, as the following section will discuss.

**Gendered expectations and gendered preferences**

As we saw in the section above, young people’s aspirations remain largely unchallenged within a strength-based pedagogy. This section investigates further how the youth services engage with young people’s aspirations and how this comes to draw boundaries around what the young people are encouraged and supported to become. This issue becomes heightened when we consider the gendered dimensions of working with goal setting and aspirations.

Maja Do you ever find that the young people have low expectations about what they can do?
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Program Worker 2

Not really, they all have quite high expectations. The ones that don’t really know what job they want, they might have already planned that they just want to be a mum, which is good as well, still a goal. They just want to have a family and be a mum. Some of them are quite young. Fourteen or fifteen, they know that’s what they want to do, so that is their ultimate goal.

Program Worker 3

I found that a lot of the young women that do want to be mums, they want to do child care, which is okay, so we will work on doing child care then until they are a parent. But I suppose we let them try whatever they want to try and learn that way. Some of them come from very big families and a lot of children and probably have a young caring responsibility themselves. (...) So, you know they’ve been a carer for the younger brother or sister, so it’s been a big part of their life and I suppose they feel really capable to do that particular thing.

In the excerpt above, the youth worker’s statement that “they all have quite high expectations”, is understood in the context of the strength-based framework; whatever the young person might wish to do, should be respected and is thus considered a ‘high expectation’. The above exchange highlights how gendered imaginations of citizenship play out in youth work settings. Here the young women’s self-identified strengths (child caring) is likely chosen based on limited exposure to other forms of female social citizenship. This brings into question whether aiming to be a young mother in this instance, can be considered a genuine choice, or rather an expression of adapted preferences based on limited exposure. The argument made here is not that deciding on early motherhood is not a valid choice. However, the absence of other possibilities, limited social and personal interests and ways of perceiving oneself and ones’ future makes this a problematic goal. As Gordon and colleagues (2005) argue: “choices may appear to be free, but are framed and curtailed by structural and cultural boundaries including social class, gender, ethnicity, embodiment and sexuality” (Gordon, Holland et al. 2005: 86). Here the narrow definition of re-engagement, as well as the drive towards reaching an outcome, hamstringsthe workers in employing a wider focus in their work with the young people.

The gendered dimension of the soft burden of low expectations is played out for both the young men and women. The workers indicate that young men are often directed towards a trade, whereas young women are habitually encouraged to step into either private care roles (becoming a mother) or public care (becoming a child care worker). These gendered expectations are also visible in the activities run by Youth Turnaround. The identification of groups of young people with ‘nothing to do’ has initiated two gender-based activity groups, one focused on physicality and the other on appearance.
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Program Worker 2  We’ve got stuff like boxing groups, tools for trade which is a trade-based group, we’ve got beauty groups for girls. Our reengagement co-ordinator will form them around the needs, so if there’s a group of boys that aren’t doing much you might make a group around things that they are interested in or just depending on the need and the age groups, and ways to link them back into whatever you want to link them into. We were recently doing a boxing one, which is at a martial arts centre and that one had a lot of interest, mainly males, I think we had one female [...] There was a group of young women with nothing to do and we identified they all had quite low self-esteem, so we started this ‘hair and beauty’ activity.

It appears that what activities, information and opportunities are considered relevant to the young people is highly mediated by their gender. The opportunity for more meaningful participation from the young people, for instance by having input into what activities the program runs, or by providing feedback on the services, is lost under the highly descriptive way of working with the young people. The workers stay close to their clients’ current realities, self-understanding and social and personal interests when deciding on what programs and activities to run. These gendered understandings, carried by institutions concerning young men and women’s preferences and strengths, will likely contribute to gendered reproduction of disadvantage, as they structure what types of recognition and belonging becomes available.

Drivers behind the limiting imaginations of young adults

The above sections have emphasised the complicated, delicate and challenging nature of working with disadvantaged young people’s aspirations. As the workers are restricted in focusing on school reengagement, as opposed to broader notions of achievement and human wellbeing, limited assumptions about the capabilities and preferences of young people are in danger of being reproduced. What seems to undermine strength-based practices (despite the good will of the staff) is the outcome-focused, managerialist prerogative funnelling the workers into particular ways of working with the young people. Three aspects of service design drive this.

1. Outcomes-based focus (funding requirement)
2. Lack of proper participation from the young people
3. Inadequate funding within a low wage sector, with no funding earmarked for staff training, and limited possibilities for recruitment and retention of highly skilled and highly trained workers (Sercombe 2004, Fowkes 2011, Fattore and Mønsted 2012).
It is a significant challenge for youth services to constantly prove their effectiveness to funding bodies by focusing on quantitative measurable criteria for success. As has been argued above, it is the logic underpinning the work performed which drives these inefficacies, not the workers' logic. Increasingly, Australian and international scholarship has argued that one of the greatest pitfalls of outcomes-based practice within the welfare sector is that results are sought or reached in the fastest and easiest way (Sercombe 2004, Fowkes 2011). This has been shown to affect disadvantaged citizens the most (Sercombe 2004, Fowkes 2011, Møller, Iversen et al. 2016).

An outcomes-based model dictates not only where workers should focus their attention when working with disadvantaged young people, but comes to influence the patterns of welfare services (Dahl 2009, Juul 2009). These institutionalised value patterns direct the types of subjectivities youth services recognise and encourage (goal orientated, educationally engaged individuals) and “constructs social and political reality, the problems and solutions identified as well as the various voices that compete to define the social reality” (Dahl 2009: 11). This is an example of how the funding model affects the work performed, constructs the problem as well as the solutions, and consequently the types of social citizenship youth programs seek to foster. Misrecognition arises when disadvantaged young people are pressured into unproblematised structures and activities run by poorly resourced community organisations, a topic that will be further unpacked in the next section.

**Discussion Youth Turnaround**

Youth Turnaround’s strong point can arguably be said to be the central placement of the young person’s voice, by recognising and respecting how the young people see themselves and their situation. However, this section has also directed analytical attention to less obvious forms of misrecognition. These were witnessed in three interrelated areas. Firstly, it is present in the institutionalised value patterns born out of outcomes-focused funding, that come to direct the types of subjectivities the youth services encourage. Secondly, these can be seen in the instrumental and simplistic understanding of how aspirations are engaged with and raised for marginalised young people. Thirdly, misrecognition is visible in the gendered conceptualisation of citizenship, through the promotion of particular feminine and masculine types of self-understandings. These three aspects combined can be said to produce institutionalised low expectations.

Reducing young people to their goals and their strengths is arguably just as reductive as reducing young people to their deficits, when this is done without a consideration of the mechanisms through which opportunities and preferences are structured. Within this type of goal-focused youth work, the future is continually drawn into the present, whilst the present may not be given adequate consideration. As we have seen in Part A of the
analysis, many of the rural young people struggle in attaining a sense of security, connection and belonging. These concerns, for the time being, mostly outweigh the matter of their educational achievements. Seen from this perspective, persistently prodding a person to think about their future careers without addressing their other life properties, can be seen as a type of misrecognition.

This raises issues of the ambivalence of recognition practice – on the one hand it is vital for disadvantaged young people to have a voice and feel respected and visible. But on the other hand, when re-engagement is defined narrowly as educational re-engagement, within a tight time frame, it restricts the areas the professionals can work on by inadvertently pushing some of the young people’s priorities and circumstances aside. Due to time and finance constraints, and potentially a misinterpretation of strengths-based work, the vital chance of engaging young people in developing a critical and broader perspective on their social and cultural circumstances, and thus challenging their often limited self-understanding, is lost. In this context, the element of providing a platform for youth advocacy is absent, and the program can be said to focus purely on mainstream integration. Returning to Williamson’s understanding of effective youth work practice (Williamson 2011), highly instrumental youth work (such as targeted educational reengagement programs), acts mainly as a mechanism of social control, not of change. The following section investigates how Zig Zag Club deals with this tension.

**ZIG ZAG CLUB**

Zig Zag Club focuses their work on young people from a migrant background between the ages of 12 and 25 and is located within a suburb with a high concentration of economically disadvantaged and culturally diverse youth. Of the three youth programs, this is the one with the lowest funding, only having one paid worker and a handful of volunteers. The aim of this program is to “provide specific support for students whose first language is not English” and to “help with planning tertiary education and career pathways, and with job application skills”14. As there is only one paid worker, there is no individual case management or specific goal-setting. The general goal is assisting young people overcoming barriers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program Worker 1</th>
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<td>In terms of barriers, English language would be one, I suppose by nature of coming from diverse backgrounds, like many of them are from refugee backgrounds, the disrupted education they have had impacting on their ability to keep up with their peers at school, as well as living in public housing has a challenge for many young</td>
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14 Sourced from internal document
people in that when things are tough for them, it’s easier for them to access drugs and alcohol and get engaged in some of the stuff that happens, like violence, petty theft, and things, which we’ve been noticing. I suppose too, intergenerational poverty would be another, like not having role models, like a parent, not being able to secure employment by nature of their English language skills and therefore the younger people not being able to aspire to anything much.

The youth worker appears to have a quite different perspective on the young people’s challenges than the participants themselves. During the workshops with the Migrant group, issues with drugs, public housing, violence or intergenerational poverty were never mentioned. On the contrary, the Migrant group emphasised ways through which the African community provided positive role models and general support. The worker may harbor preconceived ideas about the circumstances and challenges the young people in the program are facing. However, due to the small number of participants from this program involved in this study, it is also possible that the worker’s statement reflects the circumstances of other young people in the program.

Zig Zag it is a highly participatory and youth-led program run on a shoestring budget. This program is also the only of the three which has a steering group of young people. Although all programs are loosely focused on education and employment pathways, the club also runs community programs, for example cooking classes, first aid, budgeting and ‘How to get a licence’ workshops. The topics of the workshops are decided based on requests from users and mostly facilitated by volunteers. The homogeneity of the young people in terms of cultural and ethnic background means that the programs are highly targeted towards the concerns of people with a refugee background.

Program worker 2 I suppose the workshops don’t have a particular aim to get them participating in society, they are just sort of activities that we run that we think would be of benefit. That they would like. We encourage them to engage in volunteer activities as well, linking them into the community.

The majority of volunteers and tutors are from the local African community, many of whom have previously been frequenting the program. A sense of progression is achieved by having older students take on roles as tutors. Another aspect is facilitating volunteering opportunities for the older students.

Program worker 1 We’ve had quite a few young people that we work with, work with the local Government. So, not paid work, but they become youth
ambassadors for the local Government and also some of the young people have done leadership courses through the University, as well as those volunteering opportunities I mentioned earlier, where the young people have the opportunity to tutor even younger students.

The combination of being run mostly by local volunteers, being youth directed and providing opportunities for tutoring roles, places this program further towards the advocacy platform of youth programs (Williamson 2011). In this program, the youth ‘lifeworld’, their interests and self-understanding can be said to be prioritised over the demands and expectations of public policy or the ‘system world’. In this regard, the immediate and vocational social citizenship aspirations that young people bring with them can be said to be nurtured. How Zig Zag Club works with young people’s aspirations differs from the approach taken in Youth Turnaround, as the next section will discuss.

**Ethnic identity and educational aspirations**

Despite the placed-based disadvantage that many of the participating young people face, the group of young people using this program could not be characterised as disengaged from school. Due in part to the self-referral aspects, this program mainly caters to young people who present with a level of motivation and the ability to undertake self-directed learning. Unlike the majority of the young people attending Youth Turnaround, many of the young people at Zig Zag Club have clear ideas about what they want assistance for and what they desire for their future. On the other hand, the participants might lack the networks that could facilitate and enable these aspirations to flourish.

The worker suggests that the users of this program can be characterised by having high levels of aspirations. Many of the young people in this program hope to become doctors, dentist, engineers or businesspeople. As also noted by Naidoo (2015), higher educational attainment aligns with a commonly shared set of norms and values within many migrant families, as this is seen as a prime pathway towards a better future. However, at least for the young people participating in this study, having high aspirations only seemed to apply to the young men. As discussed, the young women held different types of aspirations relating primarily to marriage and motherhood. It seems the program workers forget about the young women in the programs, when discussing aspirations. Again, this is an example where nurturing types of female social citizenship beyond those tied to domesticity is ignored or simply forgotten.

These high expectations, nonetheless, come with their own set of challenges, as the worker recounts:
A young person arriving in the country at the age of fifteen, having never been to school, but wanting to become a doctor. It’s not an unrealistic aspiration to have, eventually it’s quite possible, if the person is studious and dedicated enough, but often they want to do that as soon as they finish high school, they want to get straight into a course that needs a really high score. The way we deal with that, the expectations of the young person and sometimes the parents have that expectation too, so just sort of talking about alternative pathways with the young person. Say for example the young person could get into nursing or could get into allied health and do that for a few years while their English literacy skills build up and then they could transfer into medicine if they get good enough scores. We try not to trample on the hopes of that young person, but often there are unrealistic expectations of becoming a lawyer or a doctor after being in the country for two years.

Where Youth Turnaround has adopted a non-interference and non-judgement approach to young people's aspirations, Zig Zag Club gently challenges these, at least for the young men, if they appear unattainable. Alternative pathways and more realistic options are suggested as part of the tutoring. This is likely beneficial information for new migrants, as they may not have much knowledge of the Australian educational system and labour market.

**Discussion Zig Zag Club**

Zig Zag Club assists young people to acquire valuable skills for active citizenship, such as enhanced literacy skills, employability and life skills as well as offering opportunities for broader skills development and volunteering. Further, Zig Zag Club acts as a hub for the local African community, especially beneficial for the local young women who have limited opportunities to socialise outside of their home and school context. However, seen from the perspective of facilitating the development of broad notions of social citizenship, as is the focus of this thesis, despite these valuable contributions, several factors are problematic.

Firstly, the underlying premise, that young migrants need to be better connected with the local African community, might be partly misplaced. Based on the accounts of the young people themselves, many of them struggle more with seeing themselves belonging to broader society, and attaining a valorised role for themselves within the Australian society.
Chapter Nine: Citizenship Aspirations Nurtured within a Youth Work Setting

Secondly, it can be argued that this traditional notion of active citizenship attained through voluntary activity in the local community, despite its obvious benefits, is somewhat one-sided as the more complex issues relating to the macro-level social and economic inequalities which structure young people’s opportunities are overlooked. Considering the highly gendered social citizenship aspirations expressed by the Migrant group, as discussed in the previous chapters, the notion of volunteering and internship as a way to enact citizenship, may appeal largely to the young men. This is in part related to the funding. As the current funding only allows for one paid worker, much of the program activities are run by volunteers, requiring the program to draw on local resources and skills. In this situation, an opportunity is lost in exposing the young people to different modes of practices, beliefs and knowledge and thus potentially interrupting their known-world and broadening their connections.

From a service perspective, the needs and requirements of the Migrant group differ from the other two groups, as this group is not disengaged from school but instead can be considered disadvantaged due to their migrant status. This group of migrant young people are all well-adapted, responsible and capable. Although there is a definite place for youth programs seeking to strengthen migrant young people’s cultural roots and prevent experience of unbelonging, based on what the young people from this group said about their multiple experiences of unbelonging and misrecognition in their meeting with the broader Australian society, a youth program that actively sought to break down the segregation and cultural barriers between mainstream Australian and Somali young people might have been more beneficial. Finding a balance where young migrants are encouraged to draw strengths from their ties with their community and tradition, whilst being supported in changing or resisting the aspects that are too defining or constricting, may better assist young migrants in broadening their horizons for action.

POLICE AND CITIZENS YOUTH CLUBS

Changing the environment

Where both Zig Zag Club and Youth Turnaround rely on young people self-referring, attending PCYC is a requirement for the young people from the City group, as they are being case managed here. Similarly, the workers at the two other programs emphasise that the programs are participatory and driven by the wishes of the young people. PCYC’s workers, instead, have very clear objectives (reducing crime in the area by 60%) that they acknowledge often initially go against the wishes of the young people. The broader mission of PCYC is to “get young people active in life” and to “work with them to develop their skills, character and leadership” (PCYC Annual Report 2014). How the program will reach these targets however, is left open to the program workers.
Chapter Nine: Citizenship Aspirations Nurtured within a Youth Work Setting

As mentioned earlier, this chapter is not an attempt to evaluate the efficiency of the three programs regarding their stated aims. Instead, the focus of this chapter is to investigate how the youth programs engage with the aspirations that young people bring with them, and in which ways the young people’s aspirational horizons are challenged and reinforced in this meeting.

According to a program worker, the biggest challenge for the young people is their social environment, suggesting that the main challenges are structural as opposed to individual.

Program worker 2 You are your environment, so if you are hanging around, like obviously all these guys do robbery, so what we do is try and take them out of that environment and try to introduce them to say, good kids, at the Youth Centre, go to the library, do fitness, take them out of that environment, put them in a good environment. Hopefully they network with new friends, start hanging out with these people instead of those people. And me being there, I can oversee it, I’m not being like a parent, I supervise the activities. I run the boot camp, I run the basketball activity, I supervise it when we go to Jamberoo or when we go to the movies or stuff like that, and I can see them interacting with good people, and I can tell you right now that these new friends don’t do crime.

The perspective that ‘you are your environment’ challenges the more individualised explanations dominant in youth policy, and this understanding is also visible in the solutions sought to address the young people’s concerns. In addition to the young people being case managed, the program is also open to other youth in the area, providing a space for them to be with their friends as well as to undertake physical exercise or other sports activities. As can be seen in the quote above it is a deliberate strategy to not run programs specifically targeting youth offenders. Instead the programs are designed to appeal to a broad range of young people, in particular young people with ‘healthier’ interests and hobbies, which might be able to role model different values and social patterns. Altering disadvantaged young people’s micro and meso level belonging is an aim of this PCYC program.

Program worker 1 What we are trying to do is change the stigma for that young person. In our demographic area it is very multicultural, so there is some segmentation in regards to cultural groups, but when we go to the Youth Centre, they are from all over the world, they are from the Middle East, South East Asia, Africa, and we all work together. The thing is, if you get a group of people together, often they will stay in their segregated groups, but if we are doing an activity we split them up into different
groups, we just number them off, 12345, 12345, so they don't stay with their friends, and they get to do an activity with new people and that interaction builds up a friendship, that first name basis. That's what I'm all about, just getting to know someone new, having that first name, that interaction, when you walk down the street, you will say hi.

Although the young people's individual barriers and issues are taken into consideration, the main priorities for the workers at PCYC are changing the young people's values and social environment. Here the priority is on assisting young people to attain a broader sense of belonging, by breaking down ethnic segregation. In contrast, Youth Turnaround focuses on the person's specific challenges and barriers towards school re-engagement and Zig Zag Club strengthens, rather than challenges, ethnic segregation. Another point of difference between the three programs is that PCYC, unlike the other two programs, actively seeks to impart altruistic values on to the young people, as the next section will discuss.

Altruistic values and positive role models

PCYC does not aim to be either youth-led or participatory, and instead the program workers hold highly normative ideals that they seek to instil in the young people. Besides reducing crime, the promotion of active participation in the wider community, learning the value and meaning of community membership, and acquiring new 'healthier' friends, hobbies and interests are the main objective of PCYC. To achieve these objectives, the young people are asked to undertake charity work aimed at helping homeless people or other disadvantaged groups. It is hoped that by learning to appreciate the struggles, needs and circumstances of others, the young people will develop a broader perspective on their own lives. A recognition of the limited self-understandings or 'known-worlds' of the young person has motivated these types of activities. The quote below is from a worker reflecting on how the young people respond to undertaking charity work.

Program worker 1 To be honest, at first when you first mention it to them, it’s a bit airy fairy, they are like ah, but when they are on the ground and they are doing it, and they are having those conversations with these people, then it brings back the reality, and they support what we do. Sometimes when you communicate with them, because obviously they are young, they live in shoe boxes, they only know what they’ve been exposed to. Not that I want to expose them to bad, I want to expose them to reality. So, with my guidance, I expose them to what may happen ten years down the road. To help in their eyes, open up from the tunnel vision.
Chapter Nine: Citizenship Aspirations Nurtured within a Youth Work Setting

The charity work is also a means of endowing the young people with the skills and capabilities for community change and leadership, challenging the young people's self-understanding as victims: "Instead of just being at the arse end of stuff happening to you, like all of a sudden you are like, I helped those people". This is also part of a conscious attempt to empower them to see their own value in society.

Program worker 1
I'm helping out the Typhoon Relief in the Philippines, so in doing that, I show to them not only are we changing people's lives here, we are helping people overseas and some of the guys go, hey dude, my family are struggling over on Samoa, and I say, let's send them clothes. And now their family overseas are like, a year ago you were going to go to jail and stuff, now you are helping communities overseas, he is a leader, and he is sixteen, helping people twice his age. Then he gets a sense of achievement (…) then he's going to be like that’s mad, let’s do more. Let’s finish school so maybe I can do more stuff back overseas. So, I dream big, I don’t dream small. I’m a big thinker, so I want my young people to be big thinkers with me.

In this sense, the charity work is also part of building the young people's dreams and aspirations, by developing something for the young people to be proud of. This is in acknowledgement of the extensive lack of recognition and positive reinforcement in the young people's lives, which is believed to lead them to pursue avenues of recognition and mastery that are both illegal and limiting for their futures.

Program worker 2
So, a massive thing with young people that we are facing is graffiti. Because you network with people, they do a massive piece like on the train line, that they will see every day, wow, we all did that together, let’s do another one, because the only reinforcement that they get in their life is people know that they did that and they get a pat on the back from their friends and they are proud of that. But what my goal is, let’s be proud of doing something positive, let’s be proud of helping out the homeless people.

Socially located value patterns, to which many of the young people ascribe, stand in tension with the notions of citizenship advocated by the workers at PCYC. Changing the values of the young people, by reorientating them towards a set of ideals about good citizenship and desirable futures, involves providing alternative avenues of mastery and recognition. This includes breaking down limiting ideas about ‘who I am’ and ‘where I belong’. Engaging young people in broader societal issues such as undertaking volunteer work, is hoped to facilitate social reflectivity by enabling a more critical engagement with their social and cultural contexts. The program also seeks to broaden young people's aspirations in several other ways, as we will see in the following section.
Chapter Nine: Citizenship Aspirations Nurtured within a Youth Work Setting

Raising aspirations through exposure - Creating change through practice

Three elements of youth work practice are observable in the workers’ stories. These include: firstly, recognition and positive reinforcement; secondly, the opportunities for experiential learning and practical skills; and thirdly, exposure to alternative worldviews and citizenship practices. These three aspects also indicate areas where PCYC stands out compared to the other two programs. These elements will be discussed below.

Positive reinforcement and recognition for alternative behaviours is a cornerstone of the work. The program workers work towards inspiring the young people to undertake more physical exercise, stop smoking and eat healthier food. Most of the activities run by PCYC are centred on getting physically fit and healthy, both as a goal in itself, but also to give the young people alternative habits, networks and interests. Setting goals and reaching them is used as a way to build confidence.

Program worker 1

Some of our young people, I’m not lying to you, if I ask what’s the greatest thing that I’ve done in my life, and some young people struggle to give you an answer, because they haven’t finished high school, they dropped out of their footy class, they’ve never won anything and they give me no answer and that breaks, not to be soft, but it breaks my heart. You’ve been alive for fourteen years and you can’t tell me something that you’re proud of achieving. You come under my wing for a year, let’s achieve you getting fit, let’s achieve you getting a driver licence, let’s achieve you having perfect attendance at school, let’s make a difference.

In the above quote, it appears that the worker has relatively high expectations of the young people, most of them requiring a significant behavioural change. After setting the goal, significant positive reinforcement and time is spent supporting and enabling the young people to reach their goals.

The second factor is providing opportunities for experiential learning and practical skills, as many of the young people are identified as lacking fundamental life skills and knowledge about society. The program workers seek to teach the young people a broad range of skills for living, based on the belief that aspirations rise through exposure and change through practice.

Program worker 1

You learn from doing, I do stuff on accounting, no one teaches [that]. At school we spend all those hours learning stuff, no one teachers you how to save money, no one teaches what’s important, things to buy, no one teaches how to set up a phone plan, no one teaches you about health care, no one tells you about credit cards, banking systems. Like if I could rewrite the schooling system, everyone would be doing social economics, like
learning about Medicare and how to use it, what Government services are available, like Centrelink, what are we eligible to have, they are the things that we should be learning. I’m teaching these things to my young people. In developing adults, besides my goal of crime reduction, all that kind of stuff, you take on all the social issues. Cultural, male, female, social, economics, education, everything.

The worker and the young person will spend time together, ‘hanging out’ and undertaking day-to-day activities such as doing grocery shopping, simultaneously imparting healthy eating tips on the way. Here the young people will be introduced to local shop owners, and local police in an informal manner. By getting to know the local shop owners, it is hoped that the young people will learn to understand, appreciate and respect the circumstances and priorities of others, which might minimise future theft and burglary – in particular in the local community.

The third factor identified in the workers’ stories is exposure to alternative citizenship practices to broaden their horizons. The workers identify that the young people need to change from one set of social practices towards another.

Program worker 1 To be honest the social image, kids think that’s cool [to hang on the street and do crime] and when you say, I’m good with my mum, that’s something that they won’t brag about. [...] But these guys are still at the park, where as you are going places. That’s why I say to them, it’s very important that you achieve your goals, and they say why, no one cares, my mum doesn’t care, my mum doesn’t say thank you. I say, I say thank you, because if you get to where you are going to go, I’m telling you, your mates will follow you man. You can be a positive influence just like I’m being a positive influence to you.

Here the young people’s worldview and citizenship practices are actively challenged. This involves encouraging the young people to take on a narrative as community leaders and role models and in many cases develop new communities: “My roles is to open up their eyes to see what we can do for the community, appreciate it, and get out of that tunnel vision, because some of them are very segregated” (Program worker 1).

As PCYC primarily offer young people a space to pursue healthy interest, centred around physicality and sports, very few women attend the programs voluntarily. The lack of female participation is noted by the workers. To address this inequality, the club plan on running a weekly program purely for young women, focusing on getting fit and learning self-defence skills. It seems the club struggles to envision anything besides physicality as the foundation for support. Although it is not the stated aim of PCYC to interrupt
traditional gender roles, exposing young people to new, healthier, social practices could include challenging limiting social gender patterning. The youth program seeks to provide the young men with a more constructive pathway away from criminality by offering recognition through exercise, body building and competitive sport. However, providing the young women (also juvenile offenders) with alternative pathways to contributing to their communities as active citizens seems to be sidestepped or assumed to be more uncomplicated. Here an opportunity is missed to challenge the critical lack of imagination and creativity regarding young women’s contribution to society outside the realms of ‘passive’ notion of feminine citizenship.

These three elements of youth work practice (recognition and positive reinforcement; opportunities for experiential learning and practical skills; and exposure to alternative citizenship practices) seem to function best when embedded within trusted relationship of care and recognition. The next section turns to this underpinning aspect of youth work.

**Change through relationships**

A fourth element that appears to underpin this program is building relationships of trust by being a consistent presence in the young people’s lives.

Despite the problematic aspect of the program, such as the narrowly defined, traditional understanding of citizenship being fostered, the young people using the program report gaining great benefits from the program and most have significantly altered their transgressive pathways. As Marcel notes on why he now chooses to attend the program voluntarily; “It keeps us off the street, keeps us out of trouble”. Whilst on one hand, the program has very normative understandings of desirable futures worth pursuing, the young people also receive positive reinforcement, encouragement and maybe, most importantly, care. This is also noticeable in how the young people speak about the workers (bearing in mind that this group of young people use kind words very sparingly): “He is kind (Kylie), “he is different, he generally cares (Sam)”, “he is not a dick-head like other police’ (Kaleb), “when you have done something wrong, he doesn’t shout at you, he tries to talk to you about it” (Marcel), “I like to talk to him, if I have done something or am in trouble” (Mike), and Leanne “talking to him, yeah, it’s really useful.” This sense of being supported and cared for stand in contrast to the rest of the young people’s lives: “Everywhere you go, you get put down” (Marcel), “I get told a lot of shit things, people just put you to your lowest” (Kylie).

Furthermore, in the young people’s banter with the workers, teasing them about the constant advice to eat brown rice and stop smoking cigarettes, it is also clear that despite the obvious tension between the current lives and values of the young people and the values the workers are seeking to pass on, there exists a transparency and honesty
regarding exactly what the workers want the young people to become. Both, often contrasting, beliefs and values co-exist in an environment of mutual respect. It is likely that as the young people experience receiving respect and recognition, they might not feel coerced into changing. This also demonstrates young people’s willingness to cooperate and participate, if elements such as connection, respect and recognition are present.

**Discussion PCYC**

Three crucial elements of youth work practice can be drawn out from the above sections. Firstly, note the relational element of youth work practice involving the continuing and constant encouragement and informal interactions. Secondly, observe the opportunities for experiential learning facilitating the attainment of practical skills and ‘know-how’. A third element involves the acquisition of what can be labelled critical, reflective citizenship education. Here the young people’s worldviews and citizenship practices are challenged and broadened – without misrecognising the young person’s way of life. These three aspects of youth work practice are only observable within PCYC, mainly due to time and funding constraints limiting the type of work that could be undertaken at Zig Zag Club and Youth Turnaround. These examples point to the opportunities and strengths of youth work that operates within a broader framework.

Overall, the relational and practice-orientated aspects of youth work are being prioritised at PCYC, while seeking to use practise and exposure to change young people’s aspirational horizons. Altruistic values are learnt by doing as well as role-modelled by the workers.

The interdependent nature of young people’s lives, the recognition of how communities shape young people’s choices and young people’s search for enhanced recognition, are all acknowledged and engaged with in the program. Three examples illustrate this relationship. Firstly, PCYC is seeking to broaden young people’s self-understandings by giving them new avenues of recognition through charity work, exercise, healthy food and achieving goals. Secondly, new avenues of belonging are created by breaking down segregation, increasing the young people’s social connections, and facilitating inclusion into new communities based around different interests. Lastly, new social practices are role modelled around community engagement, kindness and respect. These elements appear to create the conditions for exposure to new avenues of social citizenship, for building confidence and broadening the young people’s horizons for action. The overall aim here is noteworthy as being not educational reengagement, but to ‘build adults’.

When comparing the youth programs, three aspects make PCYC stand out. Firstly, PCYC is the only program that is not voluntarily frequented by all the participating young people; secondly, PCYC does not rely on short-term funding and rigid outcomes reporting; and thirdly, the objective of this program is crime reduction, not school re-engagement.
Chapter Nine: Citizenship Aspirations Nurtured within a Youth Work Setting

These three aspects pose particular opportunities or challenges for how the workers are able to work with the young people, as this chapter has highlighted. Where the lack of voluntary involvement from the participants might initially have been a hindrance in terms of building relationships, the fact that PCYC are able to work more holistically and more broadly with the young people, means that this initial difficulty is overcome. PCYC’s ability to focus more holistically can in turn be attributed to the untargeted funding and the broader aims.

Although PCYC appears to be the program most actively seeking to broaden young people’s social citizenship aspirations, PCYC is also the most prescriptive and least participatory of the three youth programs. PCYC have highly normative ideas about the good life, desirable and undesirable futures and what constitutes a good citizen. It is likely that this type of program is particularly beneficial for certain types of young people, who already subscribe to particular types of values, centred on physicality (values that correspond with traditional working-class, masculine, Christian norms). Although the program in many cases significantly expands the young people’s worldviews, these are expanded in quite particular ways. Whilst the program does offer the young people a broader vision of themselves and their role in society, and challenge their self-understanding, the young people are also being funnelled into highly normative notions of citizenship.

However, based on the young people’s feedback and comments, programs like these appear to both provide mainstream integration as well as recognition and advocacy. These elements seem to correspond with, and extend upon young people’s search for connection, respect, visibility and safety.

**DISCUSSION - YOUTH PROGRAMS’ ABILITY TO MEANINGFULLY ENGAGE WITH MARGINALISED YOUNG PEOPLE’S SOCIAL CITIZENSHIP ASPIRATIONS**

Youth settings are venues where ‘tacit learning’ for citizenship takes place as young people are supported and encouraged in their transition towards social majority (Hall, Williamson et al. 2010). Although the three youth programs included are aimed at different groups of young people, and operate under different pedagogies, all programs share the goal of facilitating agency and transformation in the lives of their clients.

This chapter is not an attempt to evaluate the efficiency of the three programs, but seeks instead to investigate how the local understandings and the social processes mediating individuals’ choices and aspirations are acknowledged and worked with differently, within a youth work setting. In particular, it has examined the opportunities for youth programs to concurrently acknowledge the structural barriers young people are facing, and recognise their current strengths and capabilities, while seeking to broaden their self-
understanding and aspirational horizons. Where Part A of the analysis investigated how young people’s material and social embeddedness shapes horizons for action, this chapter investigated how these horizons for action become challenged or reinforced within youth programs.

Whilst youth work is often valued for its contribution to social order and ability to change a range of ‘antisocial behaviours’, this study points to the significant contribution that youth work can make in terms of broadening young people’s social citizenship aspirations. However, two elements have been found in these cases to hinder this opportunity: targeted and goal-centred practice. Additionally, as discussed in Chapter Two, youth programs are increasingly required to fit young people into existing social categories or statuses such as NEET or at-risk for funding and reporting purposes (Batsleer 2013, Coussée 2016, de St Croix 2016). The siloing of young people according to their main ‘risks’, seen in, for example, programs targeting ‘out-of-school’ youth, members of youth gangs, or youth coming from ethnic minorities, may minimise young people’s opportunities to forge connections with a wider group of young people. Considering how many of the young people in this study experience a homogeneity of influences, and struggle for social position within bounded communities, the siloing of young people in programs targeting people with similar circumstances may, ironically, further curtail their horizons. Instead, a more helpful focus may be to seek to assist young people in broadening their external connections and ways of feeling valuable and respected. That means going beyond the young people’s ‘strengths’ and goals and beyond the habitual understanding of class and gender appropriate aspirations, by changing aspirations through practice and exposure.

Of course, re-engagement programs such as the ones included in this study may not at all be representative of, or acknowledge the diversity of, youth programs in general. However, the increasing emphasis on targeted youth work combined with the short-termism in the funding of projects, suggests that an increase, rather than a decrease of such types of youth programs is likely to occur (Batsleer 2013, Coussée 2016, de St Croix 2016).

As highlighted by other researchers, youth programs can offer engaging and meaningful activities and provide young people with support, compassion, mentoring and relationship development (Futch 2016), all of which have been shown to improve young lives (Roth and Brooks-gunn 2003, Durlak, Weissberg et al. 2010). Youth programs can be said to act as intermediates between the micro level of the family and the meso level of a wider community. This intermediate position has been acknowledged by all the participating youth programs, and in one way or another all programs have sought to strengthen the ties between the young people and the local community. From a social citizenship perspective, there are positive elements within all three programs, where the programs work to broaden disadvantaged young people’s external connection with the world and their aspirational horizons. This is seen in for example Zig Zag Club’s facilitation of
opportunities for taking on mentoring roles and internships, in Youth Turnaround’s commitment to advocating on behalf of the young people, and lastly in PCYC’s charity work aiming to expose young people to different realities, building leadership and a sense of achievement. However, there are also problematic aspects within all the programs.

The strengths of programs such as Youth Turnaround lie in the recognition and support of the young people’s own understanding of their situation and preferences. These types of programs seek to build up the confidence and self-belief of young people by emphasising their agency and voice in a non-judgemental way. Nevertheless, such an approach is also problematic as the task of developing the capacity to aspire is largely ignored. As has been argued earlier, individualised ‘Re-engagement plans’ allocate the ‘aspirational deficits’ to personal or family characteristics. Within this framing, disadvantage is seen as an attribute of individuals and communities instead of a product of limited resources and structural inequalities (France 2008). Additionally, the emphasis within strengths-based work on meeting the client where they are at and focusing on their present, self-defined educational aspirations, may foreclose young people’s aspirations. More so, working with young people’s aspirations without engaging with the systemic, social and personal inequalities which structure young people's opportunities, can be seen as a form of misrecognition.

This stands in contrast to programs like PCYC, which simultaneously employs more holistic and broader aims, but also operates in more prescriptive ways, in terms of defining what it means to be a good citizen and what is worth aspiring for. PCYC appears to better achieve the balance of nurturing the process of aspiring, by meaningfully acknowledging how structural and social inequalities shape young people's aspirations, whilst also interrupting and challenging these. This can be seen in PCYC’s focus on changing young people’s avenues of recognition, and through this practice, reorientating them towards alternative communities and ways of being and doing.

It is within young people’s adapted aspirations that low expectations are found. Hart’s (2012) processual understanding of aspirations is of relevance here, as it challenges the habitual view of aspirations as a linear process that underpins many government-funded aspiration-raising initiatives. Where a linear understanding of aspirations sees the realisation of capabilities as determined and hamstrung by (low) aspirations, Hart argues that many disadvantaged young people are not free to aspire or have a limited range of aspirations (Hart 2012). The process of having moulded or adapted aspirations occurs when people modify their aspirations to suit cultural and normative ideals that may not express their full capacities nor their interests. From this perspective, youth work initiatives aimed purely at facilitating a certain kind of aspirations, such as the pursuit of educational credentials, are in danger of perpetuating institutional judgements and normative ideals about attainable futures for particular groups of marginalised young people. Based on the findings in this chapter, there are grounds for cautioning against the
strong focus upon concrete and ‘worthy’ aspirations, highlighting that the opportunities to aspire in the first place, should be prioritised when working with young people.

Aspirational horizons propel movement towards the future and as such are of value in and of themselves, regardless of whether these aspirations come to fruition (Worth 2009). The double-bind in encouraging young people towards aspirations that are hastily and unreflectively created and highly influenced by societal (low) expectations, is that these might not be fuelled by genuine motivation. The issue here is not only the limited aspirations being encouraged, but also the potentially slim chances of the young person actually attaining these adapted aspirations. Further, a narrow focus on raising educational aspirations, without considering and addressing the well-being of the person, including enhancing their sense of belonging and recognition, might not reflect the young person’s present priorities and may at best be a wasted effort, at worst an experience of misrecognition of the young person.

This chapter has demonstrated that youth programs have the opportunity to, in cooperating with young people, work to remove social and mental barriers to aspiring by expanding and enhancing avenues to social citizenship. However, programs that predominantly concentrate on the adapted aspirations of young people, by discounting the dynamic and inter-relational nature involved in the process of aspiring, miss this opportunity. Furthermore, such programs may instead reproduce misrecognition and social exclusion by promoting constricted types of social citizenship.

**Imaginations of citizenship within public institutions**

Citizenship brings into focus the notion of the rights of citizens to empowered choice around how they express themselves politically, economically and otherwise (Barbier and Ludwig-Mayerhofer 2004). Consequently, how people see themselves as citizens and in which way they are recognised by others and by institutions, impacts upon how they act to claim their citizenship rights. In this perspective, how disadvantaged young people are encouraged to see themselves and their future social citizenship becomes a question of equality. The challenge for youth programs is to create spaces for young people that enable them to feel connected as young citizens and feel motivated to contribute to society in a way that holds meaning to them.

As schools and other institutions of social integration can be considered essential arenas for self-realisation and justice, the experience of misrecognition and social exclusion within schools can be seen as the denial of citizenship rights (Jacobsen Hviid and Willing 2008). Young people who for a variety of reasons do not experience school as a site of recognition and belonging are potentially being denied critical opportunities to develop these. Honneth maintains that a person unable to gain social appreciation in their
meeting with societal institutions, is at risk of losing their sense of shared value and place in society (Honneth 2001). In other words, they are at risk of diminishing their social citizenship aspirations. Through this analysis of the types of social citizenship stimulated within youth programs, a critique can be aimed at the narrowness of how young people are supported to see themselves and their roles in society within goal orientated youth programs. In particular, the research has identified how institutional judgements about the good life attainable for certain groups of young people may instead lead to social exclusion and low expectations.

Recognition redirects the analytical attention to less obvious forms of suppression, such as disrespect, cultural domination and the normalisation, and disciplining practices, inbuilt in many welfare and educational institutions. Although having an education and a paid job can help people gain self-esteem and promote possibilities to participate as integrated members of society, problems arise when reengaging young people with employment, education and training become the sole aim of youth programs, overshadowing the recognition of young people’s own visions of the good life. On this, Honneth (1996) argues that welfare programs should recognise human diversity and our diverse ways of contributing to society, enabling citizens to be of value to and feel valuable to society. This would also avoid the authoritative assumption employed by many welfare institutions in their dealing with vulnerable citizens; that they alone know the prerequisites for the good life (Juul 2009, Juul 2010). In this, youth programs have the potential to establish new avenues for recognition by expanding a person’s options, autonomy and horizons for action. The findings from this research suggest that possibilities for enhancing young people’s aspirations are created by appreciating, understanding and working with young people’s longing for safety, visibility, respect and recognition. It is this particular perspective that illuminates young people’s active labour and their agency.

The young people’s accounts suggest that the search for enhanced recognition and belonging are continuous structured and structuring processes in their lives, demonstrating the limitations of neoliberal social policies that individualise responsibility for unfortunate life choices and low expectations. What can be seen in the stories of the young people are the processes through which social structures, institutional culture and social context create an unequal distribution of opportunities for recognition, mastery and belonging. As demonstrated in Part A of the analysis, many of the young people in this study describe feeling unable to succeed at school and personally in a way they both had aspired to and felt was expected of them. Additionally, most of the participants also lack the formal support structures meant to protect and enable them, placing them in multiple risk situations. Instead, the welfare institutions supposed to support the young people fail them on many accounts, by harbouring fixed ideas about their capabilities and neglecting to counter the “discrimination of lowered expectations” (Shade 2006: 208). To young
people who lack the personal, cultural or economic resources to make use of such opportunities, the full benefits of social citizenship may not always be available.

**CONCLUSION**

In the context of their meeting with welfare interventions, three central inequalities shaping the lives of disadvantaged young people in Australia can be drawn out here. The first aspect relates to how educational and welfare interventions imagine the potentials of particular groups of young people. We saw this in the normative assumptions about attainable (gendered) futures for disadvantaged women and men. The second aspect relates to the adoption of narrow and instrumentalist view of young people’s aspirations, that disregards how limited exposure, restricted avenues of recognition and few opportunities to develop a wide range of mastery stunts capacities to aspire. Third, the strong focus on educational attainments can be said to encourage the construction of reflexive, self-governing, aspirational young subjectivities, compromising the potential to develop more creative and broader notions of human achievement and a wide sense of social citizenship.

I have argued in this chapter that the point of greatest tension when working with marginalised young people lies in supporting their search for belonging and recognition, whilst also encouraging alternative types of participation. As was discussed in the sections above, the workers at PCYC seem to have found this delicate balance between proper recognition of the young people’s place on the margin whilst encouraging higher expectations. These high expectations are aimed at the young people’s quality of life and their broad avenues of self-expression and not restricted to their educational attainment. In this, the workers at PCYC avoid coercing marginalised young people into mainstream opportunities, despite clearly modelling these, unlike programs such as Youth Turnaround, which, despite the focus on strengths, appear to work within the limits off young people’s stunted self-understanding.

The crucial elements underpinning effective youth work practice appear to be: Recognition and positive reinforcement; opportunities for experiential learning and practical skill building; exposure to alternative worldviews and citizenship practices; and building relationships of trust by being a consistent presence in the young people’s lives. These four aspects were shown to be significantly compromised within programs affected by underfunding, short-termism and rigid outcomes reporting.

Where youth advocacy seeks to change the structural and material circumstances bearing down on young people’s lives, youth assistance endeavours to support young people to better fit into broader society. The capacity to strike the balance between advocacy and assistance, emancipation and control for youth programs, seems to be highly related to
Chapter Nine: Citizenship Aspirations Nurtured within a Youth Work Setting

the funding structure and ideology guiding the service. The implications of these findings for policy and practice will be discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter Ten: Discussion

Introduction - Nurturing social citizenship aspirations within youth work settings

This analysis started by investigating the different ways the participants engaged with the concept of their future. This set the foundation to explore how experiences of recognition and belonging shape young people's aspirational horizons. Hence the analysis turned to the participants' experiences at school, as a main institutional form for developing horizons of action. In general, the participants experienced misrecognition and unbelonging; this in turn created school resistance for some, experiences of marginalisation for others and a lowering of educational expectations for almost everyone. This dynamic suggests that young people who cannot, for a variety of reasons, establish a valorised place for themselves within educational institutions, may instead tend to seek out avenues of recognition and belonging where this is available.

Considering this, the focus shifted to the young people's alternative avenues of self-realisation, recognition and belonging. Although the young people can create avenues of connection, safety, visibility and respect through these other communities, the first part of the analysis highlighted the ways in which these communities have a relationship with horizons for actions in several different ways – many limiting. The second part of the analysis then investigated how youth programs work with young people's horizons for action, demonstrating how the crucial element of nurturing the process of aspiring was largely overlooked, and how young people's aspirational horizons were habitually left unchallenged. The combination of goal-centred and strength-based work resulted in many cases in a lowering of social citizenship expectations. Yet, the analysis also suggested the potential for youth services, which are not constrained by the limits of goal-orientated practice and funding pressures, to interrupt narrow self-understanding and encourage a broadening of ways of being in the world.

This chapter discusses the broader relevance of the findings presented so far, by drawing out the implications for theory, policy and practice. I begin with what this thesis suggests for understanding the links between inequality, subjectivity and agency. I then outline the case for a broad approach to understanding aspirations, through the lens of social citizenship and the related concepts of recognition and belonging, showing what such an approach can contribute to knowledge on the reproduction of inequality in youth studies. Policy implications of using such a framework are then discussed, including what these findings can offer the youth sector. The chapter closes with a discussion of the limitations of this study as well as some questions to consider for future research.
Chapter Ten: Discussion

**Negotiating mainstream aspirations whilst belonging on the margin – The impact of social context**

The findings from this thesis, like many others, do not support ‘underclass’ descriptions of the poor as being culturally and morally unique. However, the analysis has demonstrated a pervasive lack of belief in the attainability of conventional success for ‘people like me’ (Wierenga 2009), in the narratives of particularly the rural and city young people. The tension arose when the young people’s mainstream aspirations and highly normative imaginations for the good life, clashed with restricted opportunity structures, limited exterior connections with the world, and constrained exposure to alternative versions of social citizenship. It appears that normative models of ideal adulthoods and notions of citizenship are in tension with the realities of a life lived on the margins. The young people’s response to this tension was represented in their narratives in two distinct ways; either a strong desire to fit in, in highly conventional ways, or a rejection of mainstream notions of success. Both orientations have implications for the young people’s social citizenship aspirations.

This desire to fit in was indicated for some in wishes to get a job and establish a family as soon as possible. This can be understood as an attempt to counter negative stereotypes, and is in a sense only problematic when coupled with stunted imaginations about the types of futures attainable. As demonstrate in Chapter Five, the external and internalised push to fit in and ‘get on the right path’ leaves marginalised young people to see themselves and their future in very limited ways.

This research resonates with the significant body of theoretical and empirical work that has previously shown how future thinking is shaped by social structure (Brannen and Nilsen 2002, Reiter 2003, Anderson, Bechhofer et al. 2005, Hockey 2009, Colic-Peisker and Johnson 2012, Bryant and Ellard 2015). It also supports the work arguing that future thinking is highly context-dependent and often ethnically, class and gender specific (Willis 1977, McDonald 1999, Reay, David et al. 2005, Bottrell 2007, Threadgold and Nilan 2009, Wierenga 2009, Howard, Budge et al. 2010, Woodman 2011, Hart 2012). While there were many commonalities among the participants, as is to be expected, other social divisions shaped their experiences differently.

For example, the Migrant group’s exclusion from mainstream society creates a decidedly one-dimensional notion of social citizenship, which appears unchallenged in their day to day dealings with school and the local community. The City young people used a different strategy. Sensing that mainstream notions of success were unattainable for ‘people like me’, they rejected these as irrelevant and meaningless and ‘chose’ instead to focus on the rewards, recognition and support available in their peer group, despite their acute awareness of how these current choices would likely limit future options. As discussed in Chapter Eight, this rejection also contains elements of resistance and social critique,
coupled with a longing for visibility and respect. Seeking to attain more mainstream notions of success and conventional avenues of social citizenship would in many ways jeopardise this group’s avenues for recognition and belonging.

Ethnicity and class distinctions still make a difference, even among the disadvantaged and, in alignment with much scholarship in the field, the participants’ social citizenships negotiations are shaped by gender (Lister 2003, Lister, Smith et al. 2003, Hall and Coffey 2007, Hall, Coffey et al. 2010). Belonging to locally bound, disadvantaged communities appears to reinforce certain gender roles and provides few opportunities for these gender roles to be challenged. As such, what types of male or female citizenship identities were role-modelled and perceived as available to young people emerged as deeply connected to their local context. This led to a gendering of horizons of action, such that traditional gender roles were prominent in the way the future was imagined. There were also highly gendered ways of engaging in public space, such as the hyper-masculinity embedded within street-based communities and leisure, that subordinated women within these spheres. As the analysis showed, although many of the participants can be said to have a limited repertoire of gendered self-understandings to draw on, the communities for the young women offered a particularly restricted set of possibilities and opportunities for gaining visibility and respect.

Considering the above examples, Hodkinson and Sparkes are right that horizons for action can only be understood “in terms of the life history of those who make them” (Hodkinson and Sparkes 1997: 33). This research shows the ways that aspirations are anchored in people’s history, but also in their embeddedness within communities. Gender, age, class and ethnicity intersect in young people’s lives to provide different possibilities and constraints for establishing certain types of belonging and recognition. Yet these young people were also active participants in this process, working to enhance avenues of belonging within their communities of being. This shows that belonging is not something you have, but something you do, as belonging is continually struggled for by performance. I elaborate further on what this study suggests about youth agency below.

Structure, culture and agency - Why recognising the work young people do to belong matters

Hart (2012) emphasises the distinction between preferences and choices. Choices represent the actions taken and avenues pursued, although these choices may or may not fully reflect that person’s preferences. As discussed in Chapter Two, Hart divides a person’s ‘aspirational set’ into four overlapping fields - family/home, education, work and leisure/social life and assets (Hart 2012) and discusses young people’s goals and aspirations relating to these four fields. She argues that within young people’s realistic goals, we often find diminished or adapted aspirations, serving to protect them from social ridicule and
fear of failure. The capability to aspire thus links to the freedom to aspire, hence agency becomes central as the ability to pursue goals that one values requires both agency and possibilities.

As many youth scholars have highlighted, when the process of adapted preferences is overlooked or discounted, choice appears as a simplistic form of agency, as the limits placed on the choices of an individual become invisible (Reay and Lucey 2003). The capacity to aspire, to project ourselves into the future, is built on the “normative frameworks from which desire and imaginations of the future take form” (Worth 2009: 1053), and ultimately reproduce and reconstruct social inequality (Gordon, Holland et al. 2005). These understandings of aspirations are significant in highlighting young people’s capacity to project themselves into the future. However, the process behind aspiring still lacks specificity and can appear static. For instance, while Hart’s framework allows for insight into the freedom needed to develop capabilities and to choose to pursue a future one has reason to value, such conceptualisations do not tell us more comprehensively about how aspirations become shaped in a process of interactions with others. Although Hart argues for an acknowledgement of how aspirations are adapted, it appears as if aspirations are stunted against the will and agency of a person. In contrast, it was not that the young people in this study aspired towards futures they did not ‘really’ value. Adapted aspirations instead emerged due to limited exposure, restricted avenues of belonging and recognition and a homogeneity of community influence, leading to narrow self-understandings.

Discerning young people’s adapted aspirations from their ‘real’ aspirations is problematic. Aspirations are embedded, and moral judgements regarding the worth of different aspirations are difficult to escape. It seems that many frameworks employed to discuss young people’s aspirations simultaneously render the process behind aspiration formation invisible, despite the acknowledgement that normative frameworks affect aspirations. In contrast, I have suggested that aspirations are more than cognitive, but instead made up of people’s embodied and emotional longing for recognition and belonging.

Theoretically, this alternative focus that acknowledges longing to belong and creative action to enhance some types of belonging, highlights tensions in how aspirations are being conceptualised in accounts of social inequality (because of individual and community deficits) and in accounts of socially just responses to young people’s search for recognition and belonging. The experiences of the participants in this study cannot be sufficiently explained with either of the two dominant ways of understanding youth inequality, namely the culturalist and structuralist perspectives (Murray and Lister 1996, Bullen and Kenway 2006, Macdonald, Shildrick et al. 2014). The participants’ attitudes to education, employment and success were distinguished not by anti-employment arrogances as argued in ‘underclass’ theory (Murray 1994), but by largely conventional views about what constitutes a good life and the value of education and employment.
However, most lacked the support, resources, confidence and exposure necessarily to pursue these types of futures. The empirical analysis demonstrated how these limiting beliefs were continuously reinforced by their community, their peers, educational institutions and in some cases the criminal justice system. Both the culturalist and the structuralist perspectives miss this complexity and underplay the intricate webs of interdependence shaping young people’s lives and communities. As also noted by Bullen and Kenway (2006) this is due in part to highly essentialised and reductionist beliefs about some groups.

Societal groups become ‘othered’ or objectified within both the culturalist and the structuralist approaches, by the attachment of a set of economic and social characteristics to individuals and groups (Lister 1996, Lister 2004). Although many of the participants adapt their preferences to what seems attainable for ‘people like me’, thereby lowering their aspirations and horizons for action, in other instances they hold other kinds of aspirations or entirely reject the normative future deemed available. So, they are also, at times and in ways, resisting being ‘othered’. This intersection between young people’s agency and their material and relational embeddedness moves beyond the injunction that young people and their communities harbour aspirational deficiencies, a claim that locates the problem of disadvantaged within young people themselves. Further, the focus on young people’s activity to enhance belonging and recognition emphasise their resilience and agency, avoiding the tendency to view marginalised young people as simply victims. Rather, the findings from this study demonstrate that strategic efforts to create more inclusive societal institutions should best begin with a sociological analysis of young people’s access to recognition and belonging and the factors that influence young people’s imaginaries of legitimate social citizenship. I summarise how I have used and developed such a sociological framework for analysing social citizenship in the section below.

An alternative framework for conceptualising youth inequality: Social citizenship aspirations

This section highlights what the approach to social citizenship developed in this thesis can add to the established knowledge on the reproduction of inequality in youth studies, arguing that it can open new research agendas in comparative and critical youth studies (McLeod 2009, Dillabough and Kennelly 2010). I discuss the value of broadly conceptualising aspirations in social citizenship terms, which ties horizons of action to the search for ‘belonging’ and ‘recognition’.

Citizenship has been taken up in youth studies previously to highlight or problematise young people's participation patterns as well as their status and rights as citizens (Dillabough and Kennelly 2010; Harris 2015). Theorists within the sociology of youth have argued against the framing of young people as being incapable of, or indifferent towards,
participating in society, noting instead the ways in which young people are often excluded from social processes of participation (Harris, Wyn et al. 2010). For instance, Vromen (2003) points out that most of the existing literature on young people's participation can be criticised for its lack of relevance in accounting for how young people concretely practise participation. Although the call for recognising young people's participation patterns and citizenship practices is significant in emphasising how and what young people contribute (Collin 2008), for the participants in this study, at least at this point of their lives, the focus on their avenues of belonging and recognition were more able to capture how disadvantage affects young lives. Such a framework requires at least a partial re-conceptualisation of how citizenship has been understood in previous studies.

As discussed in Chapter Three, within the youth citizenship and participation debates there has been a tendency to conflate identity and citizenship, which lead to a highly individualistic way of understanding citizenship. Likewise, when all youth participation is understood as expressions of citizenship, the framework becomes too broad to meaningfully capture the limitations places on young people's opportunities. Instead, this study investigated young people's social citizenship aspirations, as opposed to their current citizenship practices. This allowed for the analysis to follow the participating young people's avenues of belonging and recognition, to see how these shapes and stunt their aspirational horizons. Hence, this study interrogated society's ability to minimise forms of disrespect and provide all with the chance (as far as possible) to pursue their visions of the good life. An understanding of the participants' conceptions of the good life also includes conceptions of necessary means to achieve this, and as such provides a potent framework for identifying the understandings that trigger actions (horizons for action).

The framework developed in this study allowed for certain social dynamics to become visible; how young people in times of social change achieve recognition, belonging and a sense of meaning. The social theorist Axel Honneth (1996) argues that recognition is a general prerequisite for the development of social functioning and wellbeing, and hence a necessary foundation for leading a good life. Recognition and the withholding of recognition functions as a mechanism for the upholding of privilege or exclusion, as a lack of recognition produces exclusion from full participation in the community (Honneth 1996). The focus on disadvantaged groups sharpened the lens towards how this process of social change plays out for groups of young people who in many ways are marginalised from conventional processes and institutions facilitating economic independence, recognition of competencies and a sense of one's role in the world. From this vantage point, social citizenship is not timeless and universal. Instead it is understood as the enactment of relational, embodied, situated and dividing practices and meanings alongside significant others, as opposed to universal, abstract rights and obligations as the

The concept of belonging, when applied to the study of youth, sharpens the focus on how aspects of exclusion, rootlessness and attachments to self-understandings and worldviews are negotiated between young people, their significant others and the institutions seeking to support them (Tilleczek 2011). Against the sociological preoccupation with the modern erosion of attachments to local places and communities in an increasingly globalised world, the concept of belonging captures both the powerful place-belongingness experienced by many young people living in bounded communities such as rural towns, migrant communities or localised housing commission estates, as well as the ways these are negotiated, shaped and valued by young people (Tilleczek 2011). Because belonging sharpens the analytical focus on the dynamic and multidimensional lives of young people through their embeddedness within multiple sets of connections and communities, beyond those related to education and employment, it provides a fresh perspective on patterns of inequality.

Where youth researchers have tended to analyse young people’s communities and engagement in subcultures as important forms of (transient) belonging or efforts for recognition (Thomson, Holland et al. 2004, Stauber 2010), I have turned the analytical lens towards how these types of engagement in communities shape social citizenship aspirations, often by limiting horizons for action. The enduring significance of young people’s material and social embeddedness is thus illustrated, without losing sight of young people’s active labour to achieve a sense of themselves as individuals. Furthermore, the narrow focus on selected subcultural social patterns tends to ignore the larger embeddedness of young people within a multitude of nested communities, often missing the complexity of young people’s lives (Woodman and Bennett 2015). Analysing young people through their appropriation of available cultural resources, such as this study has done, illuminates how they reflexively managed their structures position, without ending up in deterministic accounts of young people’s (lack of) agency.

The relational approach developed in this study allows for an investigation of the quality and breadth of young people’s relationships, in terms of what these relationships allow young people to be and become (Wierenga 2009). Such an approach includes asking alternative questions such as: Where does this person experience belonging? What are their available avenues of recognition and mastery? What personal, social and material resources can they draw on to find safety, connection, visibility and respect? What choices may compromise these aspects? How do they see their place in the world and can they envision a valorised place for themselves?

The findings from this study suggest, along with other scholarship (Shildrick and MacDonald 2006, Harris 2013), that some types of belonging may lock young people into
Chapter Ten: Discussion

poverty, drug-use, crime, social isolation and immobility. Here the concept of social citizenship aspirations can enable links between transition research and cultural research by highlighting how disadvantage shapes what avenues of recognition and belonging many young people sense as available, as well as the negative consequences of local community engagement. Further, the concept of social citizenship aspirations focuses not on aspirations as related only to the main areas of family, education, leisure and employment, but seeks instead to capture people’s longing to find a valorised place among their peers. Hence, a broader understanding of young people's future aspirations is developed, that emphasises the ways young people's long to feel connected and valuable in community with others.

Asking the above questions may be useful for policy makers and youth work practitioners. The concept of social citizenship also enables researchers to ask different kinds of questions about young people's lives and facilitates a more inclusive, less loaded conceptual framework for understanding the reproduction of youth inequality. Furthermore, the approach taken in this study ensures that how young people themselves make sense of their lives, and their place within it, is at the heart of the analysis. This involves appreciating young people's social and relational engagement based on their intrinsic value, as articulated by the young people. I turn to how youth programs could be enhanced by working within a framework focused on social citizenship aspirations in the section below.

**Policy and practice implications - Limited choices, constrained aspirations**

The sociological literature shows us that the policy changes made in response to recent economic and social changes (from Keynesian to neoliberal orientations) and the embedding of these new policy orientations in youth programs, have often failed to address the needs and concerns of young people (Ziguras, Duffy et al. 2003, White and Wyn 2004, Savelberg and Martin-Giles 2008, Giroux 2011). Newer research within the sociology of youth has argued that youth policies reduce social integration to labour market integration, further neglecting young people's perspectives and priorities (Black and Walsh 2015). Additionally, the strong economic focus on young people's transition to an economically productive adulthood tends to crowd out other significant issues for young people (Woodman and Threadgold 2014). Consequently, recent scholarship has critiqued youth policy discourses concerned with raising aspiration, for their inadequate conceptualisations of aspirations (Archer 2010, Holloway, Brown et al. 2011, St Clair and Benjamin 2011, Allen and Hollingworth 2013), and for being based on simplistic understandings of what shapes outcomes for disadvantaged young people (te Riele 2006).

So, the sociological literature is rich in critiques of the foundations of contemporary youth policies as narrowly framed and concerned with ensuring social control and educational
transitions. Yet, the questions of how these policies are operationalised within youth work settings and whether these initiatives correspond with the needs and concerns of young people have received less attention. This study contributed with a ground-up approach to understanding how young people’s aspirations become shaped within youth programs. I have attempted to challenge the ‘raising aspirations’ policy discourse by illuminating how social and material embeddedness come together in powerful and complex ways to shape young people’s aspirations. Furthermore, I have argued that these very policy assumptions lead to ways of working with disadvantaged young people that serve to perpetuate, rather than raise, aspirations.

Returning to what Williamson (2011) has labelled the tension between the dual roles of youth work practice between emancipation and control, this tension was evident for the workers involved in this study. The focus on individual targets and measurable outcomes strongly favoured the needs of the ‘system’ (Coussée 2012). As discussed previously, what characterises youth work, as opposed to other social welfare professions, is that the young person and their social context is ostensibly the focus of engagement. However, when the problems and solutions identified are located primarily at the personal level, and the locus of change is the young person (te Riele 2007), a sense of stigma, over-responsibility and hopelessness may be reinforced. Wyn (2015) suggests that successful and effective youth initiatives have in common a focus on “enhancing the nature and quality of the relationships that connect a young person with their world” (Wyn 2015: 58). Considering this, it seems crucial to safeguard the autonomy of youth work practice to ensure that disadvantaged young people find the services relevant to their needs and circumstances.

Public anxiety about ‘straying youth’ has become internalised within many of the young people’s future narratives. However, despite this fear of jeopardising their futures, many were not able to envision any alternative routes to adulthood or meaningful place for themselves within society. Hence this thesis proposes that to best support young people, initiatives need to be aimed more at nurturing their aspirations as broadly conceived (through the lens of social citizenship), not just their educational aspirations. Policies with such an orientation would recognise interdependences rather than independence and be engaged with questions of how to build a just society. Yet, how to work with disadvantaged young people to encourage them to feel that they have a place in the world and a stake in the future? Assisting young people in planning for the future will not suffice, as their social citizenship aspirations are deeply embedded in a sense of their place among ‘people like me’ (Wierenga 2009). By neglecting to recognise, and then actively seeking to interrupt and broaden, disadvantaged young people’s aspirational horizons, inequality is reproduced. Encouraging hope, choice and openness to a variety of possibilities may inspire a willingness to participate, a sense of a stake in the future and has the potential to radically broaden the scope of identification of ‘people like me’. Getting this right is integral to creating equal futures for all young people.
Chapter Ten: Discussion

**Limitations of this study and questions for the future**

Workshops with three contrasting groups of young people, as well as workers from the youth programs frequented by these young people, were the empirical basis for this study. This allowed me to illustrate the difference disadvantage makes to social citizenship aspirations. However, these methodological decisions leave several unanswered questions and considerations for further research.

Firstly, running only two workshops with each group represent a limitation for the study. I initially hoped to run three workshops with the same groups of young people, stretching over 8 months. This method would have allowed for a more participatory approach to data generation, for instance by discussing the preliminary findings with individual groups and to explore the young people's view on the differences and similarities across groups. This timeframe and the third workshop proved unfeasible for several different reasons. First, I was advised by the youth workers that the drop-out rate for these groups of young people is high, making it problematic to construct a research design contingent on three meetings. In addition, young people have many demands on their time, competing with attending a research workshop, however interesting this may be. Lastly, two of the youth programs had lost their funding by the time the analysis was prepared (as is unfortunately common in the Australian youth sector), further complicating the likelihood of returning to the same group of young people.

Workshops with young people were chosen as the key method in this study to utilise group-based communication methods in line with the epistemological understandings of knowledge as created collectively and in action. Further, the emphasis was placed on task-centred activities to give more control to the young people, so they would have some agency in terms of setting their agenda. This proved highly beneficial as many themes were discussed that I had not considered including in the workshops. Negative experiences at school, drug and mental health issues as well as crime and graffiti were among the themes that emerged because I gave control to the young people. In general, the more negative or limiting aspects of community belonging emerged through allowing the participants more control. However, such task-based activities require a great deal of the participants in terms of concentration, involvement and willingness to engage. Although such an approach proved valuable in allowing time and space for the unpacking of a reasonably abstract concept such as social citizenship aspirations, I would presumably have gathered different stories from the young people, had I conducted one-on-one interviews. During individual interviews, it might also have been easier to create rapport with the young people. My method instead encouraged collaborative processes, playfulness and negotiations that would allow for the unpacking of insight and illuminate the social embeddedness of the participants.
Chapter Ten: Discussion

The selection of three groups of young people and three youth programs, though important in revealing aspects of how inequality becomes reproduced in young people's meeting with societal institutions, does not provide a representative picture of either all youth programs nor all marginalised groups of young people. The data I have used in this study does not allow for broader empirical generalisation beyond the cases, but instead illustrates patterns and similarities across cases and facilitates conceptual development. As this thesis highlighted, most avenues of belonging and recognition are context specific. Research with other groups of young people living within different contexts could investigate whether the same patterns hold for other marginalised groups (tied to disability, sexual orientation, family formation, or lifestyle) and would add other insight. In addition, a comparison with non-marginalised groups of young people would illustrate, from a different perspective, the effect marginalisation has on horizons for actions. Secondly, my research design and choice to use qualitative case studies does not capture what difference aspirations make to young people's lives over time, or the longer-term impact on young people of their aspirational horizons. A longitudinal quantitative study, or an extended ethnography following young people into their adulthood, would be able to capture such insight.

My analysis has aimed to connect, at least conceptually, micro, meso and macro levels in exploring youth citizenship, illustrating the interwoven nature of the structural, institutional, interpersonal and personal dimensions of social life. To further analyse the complex interrelations between social citizenship identities and wider socioeconomic forces, it would be beneficial to compare these findings with social citizenship negotiations taking place in other settings such as within the family or the nation state. In addition, research that explores the consequences of transgressing the social norms within the young people's communities would add an important perspective on the significance of communities in young people's lives.

CONCLUSION

This study examined social citizenship as a reflection of the web of complex social relations and non-relations in the context of young people's lives. Employing a relational approach, I have explored citizenship, not in terms of rights and universal categories, but in terms of relational, situated and dividing practices. Such an approach has significant implications for how we understand both disadvantage and social citizenship. The inclusion of the concepts of recognition and belonging facilitated an analytical focus on the ways social interactions shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion, and ultimately the experience of being a young citizen. Through an analysis of the socioeconomic constraints that prevent some young people from accessing types of recognition and
Chapter Ten: Discussion

belonging, the integrated aspects of structure and agency became illustrated in a socially embedded way.

Further, I have proposed that youth programs that aim at strengthening young people’s healthy interdependence and supportive interconnection will encourage a broad sense of social citizenship, which may aid young people in creating comprehensive avenues of recognition and belonging.

Young people's search for connection, respect, visibility and safety, as demonstrated in the analysis, both opens and closes opportunities. It is the combination of structural and material disadvantage, personal and social networks and cultural practices of the local communities that make up the young people's horizons for action, and consequently their aspirational horizons. This study found that a major factor in the reproduction of inequality lies in the fact that disadvantaged young people rarely receive the type of support aimed at developing their capacity to aspire and broaden their horizons for action.

By employing an analytical focus on the impact of social embeddedness as well as a more grounded exploration of young people’s sense of agency on the process of becoming, the dangers of youth policies and programs operating with individualistic, limiting conceptualisations of aspirations can be avoided. Policies framed by a commitment to enhancing young people’s social citizenship (including their areas of belonging and recognition), rather than their educational transitions, will be better placed to assist young people facing challenges. Encouraging hope, choice and openness to a variety of possibilities may inspire a willingness to participate, a sense of stake in the future and has the potential to radically broaden the scope of identification of 'people like me'. Getting this right is integral to creating equal futures for all young people. I turn to this in the short concluding chapter.
Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

Introduction

At the beginning of this thesis I introduced the idea of the soft bigotry of low expectations as the opposite pole to unrealistic aspirations in a spectrum of individualising responses to the impact of disadvantage on youth. In this thesis, I have sought to establish an alternative understanding of young people's aspirations through a relational investigation of their areas of belonging and recognition. This study reinforces and builds on a body of work in youth studies that has turned to relational understandings of subjectivity and analysed the importance of belonging. I have built on this work in two distinct ways. Firstly, by showing how the types of belonging the young people in this study could create affected their horizons for action, or their capacity to aspire. Although a lack of belonging was not a major concern for many of the participants, the high levels of cultural homogeneity within the young people's communities shaped and limited types of belonging and avenues of recognition available. Secondly, I have demonstrated how these young people act to enhance a sense of belonging, and how this opens certain choices and foreclosed others. Belonging and recognition are deeply socially and materially situated. The immediate need for recognition and enhanced belonging took priority over sovereignty and more expansive forms of self-expression for all the participating young people.

This thesis builds upon key literature concerning the framing of disadvantaged youth and how youth programs can engage with these young people. Youth issues are often framed within the discourses of ‘deficits’ and ‘at-risk’, both highly influential on youth policies but also critiqued from critical youth studies scholars. I have highlighted contradictions within dominant discourses of welfare initiatives for social inclusion and the needs of disadvantaged young people. By turning to how youth programs are responding in this context, I showed that assumptions about deficits in young people lead to individualised interventions that penalise vulnerable citizens. While youth work traditionally opposes the deficit models of young people, the focus on correcting anti-social behaviour and encouraging school reengagement often serve to reinforce rather than oppose this at-risk understanding of groups of young people. Although strength-based practice is a valuable starting point for youth work, seeking to facilitate young people's choices without acknowledging the limits of their horizons for action, in many cases reduces young people's potential. Without a solid sense of recognition and feeling valuable, and a sense of belonging that opens to possibilities instead of turning inward, the foundation on which to build future aspirations becomes unstable, and the activity of future planning meaningless.
The study set out to explore firstly how disadvantage shapes aspirations, and secondly how youth programs can engage with young people’s social citizenship aspirations. This short final chapter will provide a synthesis of the empirical finding and conceptual framework to provide answers to the four research questions.

**Synthesis of empirical finding and answers to research questions**

Four research questions have shaped this investigation. Firstly, I asked how experiences and feelings of belonging and recognition influence disadvantaged young people’s plans for the future. For the young people who took part in this study, there is a strong link between belonging, recognition and horizons for action (defined broadly as social citizenship aspirations). This relationship can be illustrated through the participants’ narratives of their school experiences. School proved fundamental to all the participants, shaping their worldview, sense of worth and willingness to engage, not only at school but also with broader society. In their meeting with the educational system, the young people were habitually deemed unfit, with little appreciation of what might be happening in their lives. In many cases the young people disengage from school to self-protect from a lack of opportunities and misrecognition, cultivating instead a sense of belonging and recognition where this is available among their peers.

These findings indicate that when investigating young people’s subcultural belonging, a view towards what the young people are simultaneously excluded from, creates a more nuanced picture of young people’s circumstances and how their social citizenship aspirations are formed. These young people’s ‘alternative’ communities of belonging mean that they miss key access to information, resources, and services and have limited exposure to the alternative participation opportunities, relationships and activities available to most people within society.

The empirical material I have presented suggests that low societal expectations concerning disadvantaged young people’s social citizenship can reinforce inequality, by placing limits on young people’s aspirations and the ways they see their role in society. As such, for the young people in this study, low aspirations did not seem to be the cause of marginalisation, but rather largely an effect of marginalisation.

Consequently, I investigated how the young people’s communities negate or create aspirations for social citizenship. I have shown that the avenues of connection, visibility, safety and respect available to the young people were strongly socially and materially situated. Although the young people’s aspirations were substantially shaped by the opportunity structures available to them, their relational and social embeddedness proved just as significant. Further, the types of belonging available through local peer communities had a relationship with future becomings, often by narrowing opportunities,
as many of these communities reinforce certain social practices such as graffiti and crime, which may come to jeopardise other forms of recognition. The young people's chosen communities served as an important counterpoint to the sense of lack of belonging they were experiencing in their meeting with societal institutions. The types of recognition the young people could forge within their local communities served to create connection and visibility but were often both stigmatised externally and highly locally bound. In many cases, these young people do not have the economic or social resources which would allow for easy transitions towards less stigmatising types of belonging and recognition and the broader social citizenship aspirations this makes possible.

The young people's accounts suggest that the search for recognition and belonging are continuous structured and structuring processes in their lives, reflecting the weakness in individualising responsibility for unfortunate life choices and low expectations in neoliberal social policies. Instead the young people's accounts indicate that conceptions of how marginalised young people's aspirations are invoked, fostered and stunted needs to consider two central factors; firstly, how young people's longing for connection, respect, visibility and safety shapes choices and preferences; and secondly, how the social and material embeddedness of young people shapes horizons for action. The analysis in this thesis highlighted that it is in the interplay between these two factors that young people's mental and emotional capacity for self-realisation and social citizenship is formed.

Gender, class, cultural and ethnic factors were found to clearly play a defining role in these young people's aspirations, with the specifics shaped by community context. Youth programs can intervene in these situations, potentially creating a more equal distribution of opportunities to develop skills and abilities that will lead to young people's self-realisation and integration.

Hence the study subsequently focused on how youth programs engage with the aspirations that young people bring with them. The analysis emphasised three central factors shaping this engagement. Firstly, how welfare interventions imagine the potentials of disadvantaged groups of young people. This was shown in the normative assumptions about attainable futures that underpinned the programs. Secondly, the adoption of narrow and instrumentalist views of young people's aspirations within youth programs was problematic. There was a tendency not to acknowledge how limited exposure to ideas and restricted avenues of recognition stunt young people's capacity to aspire. Finally, the strong focus on educational attainments within many youth programs appears to compromise the potential to develop creative and broad notions of human achievement, which may be meaningful and useful for young people facing challenges.

The fact that the task of nurturing disadvantaged young people's aspirations in the instances investigated in this research fall on youth workers, speaks to the level of failure experienced within the educational system. Nonetheless, this study argues that youth programs are well positioned to work with young people to remove social and mental
Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

barriers to aspiring, by expanding and enhancing avenues to social citizenship. However, this potential is compromised for the programs in this study by funding requirements that limit how youth workers can work with young people. Outcome-based work was found to engage young people in very narrow ways. Programs that predominantly concentrate on the adapted aspirations of young people, such as outcomes-based work, habitually discount the dynamic and inter-relational nature of the process of aspiring, thus missing the opportunity to enhance social citizenship aspirations.

Finally, I turned to the ways disadvantaged young people's aspirational horizons are challenged and reinforced in youth work settings. This study demonstrated how young people's social citizenship aspirations can be shaped and adjusted in their meeting with welfare professionals and public institutions. The youth programs investigated in this study appear to neglect the opportunity to challenge social prejudices concerning types of appropriate futures for young people, by focusing on attainable futures as opposed to encouraging critical thinking towards futures worth aspiring for.

As noted above, class, culture, ethnicity and gender, shape young lives. Unfortunately, prejudices regarding class-based, cultural and ethnically appropriate interests and needs were often reinforced within educational programs and youth services. Although promoting a widening of diverse notions of valuable social citizenship practices should best include positively recognising the diversity of young people's culture-based differences and capabilities, the negative consequences of the homogenisation of values and identities that take place within bounded communities should also be acknowledged and challenged. In the case of gender, this study found few examples where the dynamic between gender and aspirations was actively challenged within the youth services. In the absence of a language to make visible the effect of limited valorised roles for women in society, imaginations of female social citizenship largely related to the home and motherhood.

This study indicates that disadvantaged young people may not seek the services of the welfare system, as many reported having had negative experiences with public institutions. Considering this, it seems crucial to safeguard the autonomy of youth work practice to ensure that disadvantaged young people find the services relevant to their needs and circumstances. The coupling of targeted funding and social policy goals with youth services is problematic, as young people's concerns and priorities easily become neglected.

In the introduction to this thesis, I asked whether there are discrepancies among the self-understanding and values of the young people, the values subscribed to and shaping their communities, and the social citizenship aspirations that the youth programs seek to foster. Surprisingly, there is a high degree of correlation between the limited horizons for
action of the young people in this study and how they are being encouraged to see themselves and their capabilities within the youth programs.

Shared critical enquiry into aspirations and society, and the broadening of personal and communal connection points, is difficult in programs based foremost in easily measurable and discrete outcomes. The commitment to engage young people in alternative imaginings concerning their role in society, as opposed to simply reinforcing and entrenching existing social relations, seems lost when programs are too closely aligned with the agenda of the State (such as those concerned with anti-social behaviour and school reengagement). This study argues that youth programs that neglect to acknowledge the mental conditions for self-realisation and social citizenship, and actively work on broadening aspirations and self-understanding, are in danger of contributing to entrenching young people’s position on the margins.

_The difference disadvantage makes to the development of social citizenship aspirations_

Overall, this study set out to investigate the difference disadvantage makes to the development of social citizenship aspirations and what this means for youth programs that aim to work with young people’s aspirations. I have argued that in the cases investigated here, this difference is best understood through an analysis of the denial of valorised subjectivities and the limits placed on their avenues of self-realisation, recognition and belonging.

As a conceptual contribution to the field, I have aimed to develop a richer understanding of aspirations, using the concept of social citizenship, drawing on the related notions of belonging and recognition. This thesis arrived at an understanding of social citizenships as plural and emerging, meaning that social citizenship is understood as a process that is continuously negotiated, not as a universal point of arrival. Social citizenship is (re)created and articulated, rather than a destination or a status of adult independence, as it is often depicted in policy discourses. This type of citizenship has been operationalised as having two elements: recognition – represented empirically by the concepts of respect and visibility; and belonging – represented empirically by the concepts of connection and safety.

This relational framework of social citizenship requires at least a partial re-conceptualisation of how citizenship has been understood in previous studies. As was shown in the first part of the analysis, a major form of misrecognition affecting most of the participants came in the form of low expectations. Low expectations act as a form of elusive institutional power/misrecognition that plays out in the establishment and unquestioning acceptance of beliefs about the capabilities of certain groups. These beliefs
often become embedded within ways of understanding oneself and one’s place in the world. Many of the participants were surrounded by family members, institutions and communities that held very limited ideas about the young person’s capabilities. More so, many of the participants’ engagement with youth programs resulted in the reproduction of some forms of low expectations, habitually masked in the language of strength-centred practice. The thesis argues that the soft burden of low expectations limits young people's self-understandings in subtle but powerful ways.

Through this perspective, we see the inadequacy of simple individualistic models of explaining aspirational horizons in social policy in neoliberal states. Looking through the lens of aspirational horizons, this research highlights the more intangible factors behind intergenerational inequality, by showing how avenues of recognition and belonging shape the context for social action, by making available certain ‘options’ and ‘choices’ to the young people. However, the analysis also demonstrated that young people are not simply victims, nor insipidly reproducing dominant social practices or singular notions of citizenship offered within homogeneous cultural groups. Instead, young people are actively labouring to enact their lives within their nested communities.

**CONCLUSION TO THE CONCLUSION**

Understanding young people's longing for recognition and belonging offers an alternative approach to comprehend young people's horizons for action and provides a way to work with and challenge young people's aspirations. I have used this to providing a holistic understanding of what creates young people's self-understanding, values and attitudes and how these go on to shape aspirations in all facets of life, including education, employment and personal relationships. Building on this understanding, I have developed an argument for working with young people in a context of recognising how their local world and relational and structural embeddedness influences their horizons for action, whilst actively challenging their self-understanding and social citizenship aspirations, as a potential framework in this regard.

The research presented in this thesis indicates that the sociological preoccupation with documenting young people's capacity to plan in times of uncertainty may miss how societal low expectations limit young people's mental and emotional conditions for self-realisation and social citizenship. Future aspirations are shaped and limited by a complex intersection of social and material embeddedness, place-based disadvantages, educational inequalities and institutional pressures, processes which escape linear constructions of aspirations promoted by contemporary educational and welfare interventions. This study suggests that a major factor in the reproduction of inequality lies in disadvantaged young people appearing much less likely to receive the type of support aimed at developing their
capacity to critically aspire and broaden their horizons for action. These findings have implications for empirical and policy studies of youth citizenship as well as for youth work practice. My research makes clear the limits of an emphasis on measuring the achievement of predetermined markers of transition such as educational reengagement within youth policies and programs. Instead, it is essential to pay greater attention to how social and community embeddedness shape experiences of inclusion and exclusion. This is how youth research and youth work can play a greater role in creating a more equal future.
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APPENDIX A: FIRST WORKSHOP

Introduction (5 min)
Warm-up exercise (15 min)

Exercise: Drawing your future - desired, probable and undesired futures (90 min)

In this exercise, I would like to talk about your future plans and where you see yourself going. In particular, I think it would be interesting if we play around with the ideas of three types of future scenarios.

1. The first one is your idea of the Perfect Future. How do you hope your future is going to look? If we are dreaming big dreams, how would your version of the best and most ideal future look like? What would you be doing, where would you be living, who else would be there?

2. Then there is the Likely future. If we are being realistic, how is your life probably going to look in 10 years? Again, who will be there, what are you doing, where are you living, what activities are you involved in?

3. And the last would be your idea of an undesired future, like a Bad Future you don't want. What are you hoping isn't going to happen? What would you be doing? What would be a bad job, a bad place to live, surrounded by the wrong people, a really bad future scenario.

I have brought some papers and pens. Let's start with the Perfect Future. Can I get you to either draw a picture or write some words or both, about what that life would look like?

All three drawings are made, and the participants present their three drawings to the group individually, and place them in front of them on the table.

Example discussion prompts:

1. Looking at all these different futures we have in front of us, are there any similarities? Let's start with the Likely Futures, let's all put that picture on top – A lot of you picked (leaving/staying in the neighbourhood, owning a house, getting married, having a job, time with friends) in your likely future? Why is that? How important is that?

2. Let's move to the Ideal Futures (put that on top). In terms of the Ideal Future – what would prevent you from actually doing that (getting that job, that house, the boat)?

3. In terms of the Bad Future – is that something that worries you? Is there any of what you have described you are scared could happen to you?
Appendixes

4. If we look at all the Likely Futures and compare all the girls’ drawings to the boys’ (Physically move the Likely Futures pictures by the girls together and the boys together). Is there any difference between the likely future of males and females? Why is that? Why do you think that (xxx) is more important to women/men?

5. Now I would like to talk about whether you feel you have control over where you are going and your future. How much do you think is it your decision what is happening to you and how much are other people or situations influencing you?

*Session Evaluation (10 min) Love, Hate, Change*
APPENDIX B: SECOND WORKSHOP

Introduction (5 min)

Warm-up exercise (15 min)

Recap (15 min)

Last time we spoke about what a good life looks like. And you told me that such and such was important to you in terms of your future. Did I get that right? Have you thought more about that? It is interesting because when I spoke to the other group, such and such was mentioned as important. Does that resonate?

Exercise: Personal qualities you need in life to do well (30 min)

In this exercise, I have given you each four blank cards. I would like for you to think about four personal qualities, you think you need to do well in life. Thinking about what a good life is, what qualities do you need to get that life.

The personal qualities are written on labels and presented individually to the group. The participants were then asked to place all the labels and qualities in the middle of the table and together prioritise the six most important qualities a person needs to do well in life.

This exercise was followed by a discussion on what facilitates the development of these qualities, and where the responsibility for developing these qualities lies.

Group discussion: Mastery and recognition (45 min)

Examples of questions.

1. I’d like to talk about how it’s like to be part of this program. Why are you attending this program? What is the best part/worst of this program?
2. What would you like more or less of?
3. What do you do when you are not here?
4. I would like for us to talk about what you are really good at. Something that makes you feel good about yourself?
5. Now I would like to talk about what you really love to do. If time, money and transport weren't an issue, what would you do more of? Explain to me what is so good about that? Who do you do that with?
6. What prevents you from doing more of that?
7. Can you think of an incident where you felt really appreciated and good about something you were doing? Maybe with your family, your friends, at school?
8. Have you recently felt like you were playing a useful part in something? Some circumstance or situation where you felt you were playing an important part?

Session Evaluation (10 min) Love, Hate, Change
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW GUIDE PRACTITIONERS

1. Can you please describe to me what it is you do here?
2. How long have you been in this role?
3. How long have you been working in the youth sector?
   - [If relevant] How has the sector changed during this time?
4. What in your opinion are the main challenges facing the youth sector at the moment?
5. How would you describe the philosophy of the organisation? What is it you are trying to do here?
6. How are the young people recruited into the program, what are the criteria?
   - What kind of young people participate in these programs?
7. What are the main steps or activities this program takes to help the young people?
   - What works/doesn’t work
8. What do you hope the young people get out of the program?
9. What helps the young people succeed in this program?
10. What are the main barriers for the participants?
11. Is there any activities or services you would like to be able to offer? If time and money wasn’t an obstacle.
12. I am looking at how, why and why not young people participate in their community and society. Have you got any thoughts on this – in particular how the young people in this program see themselves participating in society?
13. I know this might be very speculative, but do you have an idea about the future aspirations of some of these young people in this program?
14. Are there any key documents you think I should read or people you think it would be good for me to talk to?
15. That was all my questions. Is there anything else you would like to add?
Appendices

**APPENDIX D: PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT GROUP PARTICIPANTS**

**Social citizenship and avenues of recognition for disadvantaged young people**

**Dr Dan Woodman (supervisor)**
Department of Social and Political Sciences  
ph: +61 3 8344 9081

**Ms Maja Moensted (PhD student)**  
majal@student.unimelb.edu.au

**What is the study about?**
Young people are too rarely offered a voice in research on community participation and citizenship. This study is an effort to begin to offer a space for young people to express their ideas and concerns regarding how they see their role in the community. The key aim of the thesis is to investigate the relationship between how the policies of the government define young people’s citizenship and participation in society and how young people themselves experience this.

**Who is carrying out the study?**
The study is being carried out by Maja Moensted as part of a doctoral study at School of Political and Social Science, Melbourne University in partnership with the Brotherhood of St Laurence. This study is being overseen by Dr Dan Woodman and Prof Paul Smyth.

**What does the study involve?**
Stage 1: Interview with key informant within the youth sector  
Stage 2: Two case studies of groups of young people in youth programs

You are being asked to take part in Stage 2 of the research. The case study involves:

- Two workshops

**How much time will the study take?**
The whole case study process will take around four weeks to complete. However, the two meetings you are being asked to participate in should not take longer than 2 hours at a time.

**Can I withdraw from the study?**
Being in this study is completely voluntary — you are not under any obligation to participate. You may withdraw from the study at any time, without consequences. If you choose to withdraw your contribution to any workshops or interviews will be erased. However, once the workshops and focus groups have been analysed you can no longer withdraw your contribution.
Appendixes

Will the study benefit me?
The study intends to build knowledge and understanding of how, why and why not young people choose to participate in society and exercise their citizenship. Your contribution to this study will be for research purposes only. There is no personal benefit to the participants.

Are there any risks involved in this study?
This study poses minimal risk to the participants. The greatest risk is that some questions may raise uncomfortable issues or feelings that you might not have been aware of. When people are asked about their concerns and attitudes about personal and community affairs they can become upset. It is appropriate in this study to express those feelings, but it may raise uncomfortable emotions. This research will provide a space for those feelings and concerns to be heard. You can also choose not to answer a question or take part in a discussion.

How will my confidentiality be protected?
We intend to protect your anonymity and the confidentiality of your responses to the fullest possible extent, within the limits of the law. Your real names will be removed as soon as the data is collected and real names won't be used on the transcriptions or during the analysis. Your name and contact details will therefore be kept in a separate computer file from the transcribed interviews and will only be able to be linked to your responses by the researchers. In the final report, you will be referred to by a pseudonym. We will remove any references to personal information that might allow someone to guess your identity; however, you should note that as the number of people we seek to interview is very small, it is possible that someone may still be able to identify you. The data will be kept securely by the student researcher and will be destroyed after a minimum period of five years, as per University policy.

How will I receive feedback?
Once the thesis arising from this research has been completed, a brief summary of the findings will be available to you on request from the researcher. It is also possible that the results will be presented at academic conferences and in academic journals.

Where can I get further information?
Should you require any further information, or have any concerns, please do not hesitate to contact either of the researchers on the numbers given above. Should you have any concerns about the conduct of the project, you are welcome to contact the Executive Officer, Human Research Ethics, The University of Melbourne, on ph: 8344 2073, or fax: 9347 6739.

How do I agree to participate?
If you would like to participate, please indicate that you have read and understood this information by signing the accompanying consent form.

This information sheet is for you to keep

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APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

Consent form for persons participating in a research project

Project Title; Social citizenship and avenues of recognition for disadvantaged young people

Name of participant: ____________________________

Name of investigator(s): Maja Moensted, Dan Woodman

1. I consent to participate in this project, the details of which have been explained to me, and I have been provided with a written plain language statement to keep.

2. I understand that after I sign and return this consent form it will be retained by the researcher.

3. I understand that my participation will involve an interview and I agree that the researcher may use the results as described in the plain language statement.

4. I acknowledge that:
   (a) the possible effects of participating in the interview have been explained to my satisfaction;
   (b) I have been informed that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation or prejudice and to withdraw any unprocessed data I have provided;
   (c) the project is for the purpose of research;
   (d) I have been informed that the confidentiality of the information I provide will be safeguarded subject to any legal requirements;
   (e) I have been informed that with my consent the interview will be audio-taped and I understand that audio-tapes will be stored at University of Melbourne and will be destroyed after five years;
   (f) my name will be referred to by a pseudonym in any publications;
   (g) I have been informed that a copy of the research findings will be forwarded to me, should I request this.

I consent to this interview being audio-taped □ yes □ no

I wish to receive a copy of the summary project report on research findings □ yes □ no

Participant signature: ____________________________ Date: ____________________________
Author/s:
Moensted, Maja Lindegaard

Title:
The price of belonging: social citizenship and avenues of recognition for disadvantaged young people

Date:
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Persistent Link:
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