Emerging Adulthood and Reflexive Modernity:

Defining an Adult Identity in Early 21st Century Australia

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Abstract

Defining adulthood in contemporary Australian society has become an increasingly difficult task over the past few decades, particularly since the new millennium. This thesis argues that young people in contemporary Australia form their own definition of what it means to be an adult, using individualised measures of success which reflect the social, cultural and economic conditions of young people. The thesis uses the concept of emerging adulthood which posits the existence of an extended period of identity formation after the age of 18. The thesis argues that the characterizations of emerging adults are better able to frame the structural, social and cultural shifts in conceptions of adulthood that have occurred in the last 40 years, than the frameworks from the sociology of youth and the transitions theory. The thesis uses the ‘social generation’ framework to position young people within contemporary Australian society, and incorporates ‘emerging adulthood’ as a thick description of the conditions that shape the period of life during the late teens and early to mid twenties.

21 respondents were interviewed for this project, using a novel research method that mixed qualitative and social network techniques. The interviews focused on three aspects of emerging adulthood: the ways in which the respondents used their time, the managing of their personal communities, and their conceptions of adulthood, including their self-identification of adult status. The thesis found that the respondents’ work and study obligations constrained the ways in which they could spend their time, particularly when the activity would have required a substantial investment of time. Respondents
prioritised activities that could be engaged in easily, heavily favouring social activities that could be organised on short notice. The respondents’ relationships suffered similar constraints, work and study schedules made it difficult to organise regular interactions with those people who did not share the same spaces. The unpredictable nature of the respondents’ circumstances required an ongoing process of managing their relationships, in order to spend time with those people they considered important and to maintain contacts they did not want to lose. The respondents’ self-identification as an adult, or more frequently as in-between adolescence and adulthood, involved individualistic criteria in line with the emerging adulthood framework: independence, autonomy and taking responsibility for themselves. The respondents were aware of the ‘markers’ of adulthood frequently cited in sociological studies, but saw them as being irrelevant to the construction of an adult identity. This thesis concludes by arguing that the use of emerging adulthood as a thick description for the current social generation of young people in their late teens and early twenties offers a useful and accurate portrayal of this period of life.
Statement of Authorship

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signed __________________________________________

Dated:   /   /
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Introduction: Reflexive Modernity and Emerging Adulthood in Australia

This thesis argues that young people in contemporary Australia form their own definition of what it means to be an adult, using individualised measures of success which are reflective of their social, cultural and economic conditions, and the existence of an extended period of identity formation after the age of 18. Defining what an adult of contemporary Australian society looks like, how they behave, and what their responsibilities and obligations are, has become an increasingly difficult task over the past few decades, particularly since the new millennium. Social theorists point to a process of ‘individualization’ in Western society, where social and cultural norms that once stood to distinguish people of adult standing from children and adolescents, have been markedly altered through deinstitutionalisation, social reform, economic restructuring, and the reduction of the welfare state (Bauman 1991, 2007, Beck 1992a, 1992b, Giddens 1990, 1991). Young people move towards adulthood from adolescence largely without support from the State, and without clear definitions of their individual roles, responsibilities and obligations as an adult.

Instead, many young people experience a period after turning eighteen during which they are held personally responsible for their successful development as an adult. Moving from adolescence to adulthood used to be considered a relatively short period of transition, rather than a significant life stage in its own right. Assumptions that young people will move from adolescence to adulthood in a timely manner still underpins
much academic literature in psychology, the sociologies of youth and education, and the study of youth transitions. This thesis argues that the period between 18 and the mid to late twenties is best described through the framework of ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett 2000a, 2004, Arnett and Tanner 2006), during which the individuals must confront and deal with a significant array of issues, dilemmas and choices, many of which are specific to this period of life. Recognition of emerging adulthood means that from socio-demographic and socio-cultural perspectives we acknowledge emerging adults as a substantial portion of the population, with significant needs and patterns of behaviour arising from the particular conditions of this period of life. Emerging adults are a major segment of Australia’s population, making up an estimated 4,997,940 people Australia wide\(^1\) (ABS 2013), and they merit study.

The conditions of emerging adulthood are the product of structural changes over the course of decades. Post-war economic growth and urbanisation involved a relatively stable set of employment and career opportunities, where the majority of young people moved quickly from school to employment (Short 1970). Casual employment was rare; most jobs had security and could lead to further training and a career. In the 1970s and 80s the labour market was significantly restructured, full employment ended and the opportunities for careers, training and education changed (ABS 1998). By the early 1990s many young people were involved in the casual labour force from their mid teens,

\(^1\) From Table 59, calculating the number of 18 to 32 year olds (having been born in or after 1980). This makes emerging adults approximately 21.6% of the population. There are an estimated 10,230,523 people in Australia born after 1980, all of whom are or will have to deal with the changing conditions of Australian society.
often while still in school, in jobs that offered little security or opportunities for 
advancement and career. Property prices increased rapidly, impacting on the ability for 
young people to buy a home and start a family (ABS 2009c, 2010a). In the same era 
social policy frameworks shifted significantly to neo-liberal principles that emphasised 
These social and structural changes have led to an increased privileging of the place of 
Giddens 1990, 1991). The extent to which individuals have greater agency in modern 
society is debatable, however it is clear that the notion that individuals are responsible 
for their own welfare and success has entered the culture of late modern societies.

These changes in Western society constitute ‘youth’ and the transition to adulthood in 
whole new ways. Analysts and commentators have talked of these changes in terms of 
a ‘new adulthood’, extended adolescence, delayed adulthood, and similar terms. These 
changed conditions occurred in different ways throughout the Western world and have 
been well documented by social theorists, although the changes in Australia happened 
later and faster than in other countries. This thesis uses the framework of ‘reflexive 
these general social conditions, describes the ways they became dominant in Australia 
and their role in creating and sustaining the circumstances of emerging adults.
This thesis investigates the lived experiences of 21 emerging adults living in Brisbane, using in-depth interviews conducted in 2007 and 2010 with participants aged between 18 and 25. Though the respondents came from a variety of backgrounds all had experienced emerging adulthood under similar social conditions. The interviews primarily explored how the respondents conceived of adulthood and viewed their own development towards adult status. The interviews explored how the respondents used their time, and how they managed their personal communities, in order to provide a context for the respondents’ understanding of their self-identification as adults (or otherwise), grounded in their social worlds. The exploration of these two areas also provided new avenues of inquiry into the respondents’ conception of adulthood that were not otherwise available.

Chapter 1 reviews the converging bodies of literature on emerging adulthood, the sociology of youth, and transition studies. Australian studies of youth draw attention to the macro-level structural changes impacting on young people through the 1980s and into the 1990s, consolidating these in descriptions of ‘new adulthood’ and ‘extended adolescence’. This chapter shows how the new realities of advanced modernity made themselves evident across the Western world, discussing the concepts of ‘reflexive modernity’, ‘choice biographies’ and other sociological theory that help conceptualize the individualized nature of modern life. The socio-demographic patterns of change in Australia are considered, as they highlight the generational differences between those who became adults prior to the changes, and the succeeding cohorts of Generation’s X
and Y, who were the first to deal with the demands and issues of Australia’s new adulthood. The literatures on the sociology of youth and transition studies have considerable biases and inadequacies when it comes to studying the general experiences of young people. Framing the successive cohorts of young people as ‘social generations’ allows sociological research to address the considerable structural and social changes that affect each generation’s pathway(s) to adulthood (Wyn et al. 2008, Wyn and Woodman 2006). Emerging adulthood provides a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of this period of life for the current generation; this chapter finishes by describing the concept of emerging adulthood, the research behind it, and its value for the study of young people in Australia in the early 21st century.

Chapter 2 presents the interview method created for this research, which allowed a qualitative exploration of their understanding of adulthood. The interview method ‘maps’ the participants’ day-to-day lives by adapting a technique from social network research, a method partly modelled on time-use and leisure studies but with significant differences. The qualitative data on the participants’ day-to-day lives was analysed using an open coding process from grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1968, Strauss 1987, Strauss and Corbin 1990), which allowed the construction and refinement of broad phenomenological categories describing the meanings attached to various endeavours. Respondents’ personal communities were mapped using a social network research technique and this mapping of the relationships allowed for considerable in-depth exploration. The qualitative data on the participants’ understanding of adulthood

This chapter gives details on the data collection process, the theoretical sampling strategy used to define and recruit respondents, and the analysis used for the later chapters.

The substantive chapters are organised around three research questions that guided the research protocol. The first research question asks: how do emerging adults use their time? This research question explores the choices that emerging adults make about how to use their time, with regards to work, study, leisure and the more everyday activities related to maintaining their lifestyle or planning for their future. Chapter 3 presents seven phenomenological categories which reflect the respondents’ engagement in everyday activities relating to work, study, and socialising, as well as the other activities that are crucial to maintaining well being. The categories are social, play, cultural, functional, aspirational, creative, and liminal.

The second research question asks: how do emerging adults create and maintain relationships with others? This research question explores the evolving nature of emerging adults’ personal communities, how they maintain long term relationships (particularly when circumstances change, such as after graduating or when leaving a job), and the roles these relationships play in the day-to-day life of the emerging adult. Chapter 4 presents the different aspects of the respondents’ personal communities, as
they move from their family of origin and relationships defined by the spaces in which they frequent, to a family of choice and relationships that are defined by shared history.

The third research question asks: **what defines an adult?** This question explores the emerging adults’ understanding of the notion of adulthood, what they perceive to be their parents understanding of an adult, and their impressions of the general understanding of adulthood portrayed through the media and expressed by their peers.

**Chapter 5** presents those criteria that the respondents consider important for adulthood, their understanding of the importance of the ‘markers’ used in sociology to measure the transition to adulthood, and the formative experiences that guide their choices in the past and for the future.

From these chapters a story emerges about what it is like to be an emerging adult in Australia. Chapter 3 shows that work, study and socialising dominated how the respondents use their time, though there is a wide array of other activities which are important to them. Chapter 4 shows that the respondents placed a great deal of importance on their families and their long established friendships, even though they were able to spend less and less time with them. It also shows that many of the respondents were attempting to create the kinds of stable relationships that are associated with adulthood, though there were many barriers to success. Chapter 5 shows that the respondents’ measured adulthood in individualistic terms, and they defined their own success through their particular experiences and abilities. The
‘markers of adulthood’ still have relevance to the respondents in varying degrees, but they were increasingly less relevant to their understanding of what it means to be an adult in modern society.

Chapter 6 considers the general themes of the thesis, arguing that there is considerable evidence that emerging adults live in a world similar to that described by theorists of reflexive modernity. The experiences of the respondents correspond to the concerns and profiles of emerging adults elsewhere, as explored by researchers in other Western developed countries. The uncertainty and lack of external guidance that Giddens uses to characterize reflexive modernity is a feature of the respondents’ experiences, as is the expectation that nearly all possibilities are available to them, a characteristic of Arnett’s emerging adulthood. Similarly the criteria that the respondents identify as being important for adulthood (taking responsibility for one’s actions, financial independence and autonomy) are in line with the findings of research into emerging adulthood, and indicative of a society which values individual achievements over the more traditional, social markers (getting married, becoming a parent, owning a home).

There are clear distinctions that can be made about the experiences of this generation becoming adult to those of previous generations, however there are few stories of conflict arising between the respondents and their elders due to the particular set of conditions for emerging adults. Those few exceptions of inter-generational conflict are reported by the children of first generation migrants, for the most part parents and the
extended family were sympathetic towards the many difficulties facing emerging adults. The respondents were aware of the popular depictions of Generation Y, but few could identify any personal experiences related to such negative portrayals. Instead the social conditions which lead to the development of a period of emerging adulthood in Australia have become incorporated into the expectations that parents had for their children and how they move from adolescence to adulthood.

Finally, the goals and aspirations of the respondents are closely related to the social and cultural norms of early 21st century Australia. Financial stability and careers were important to all of the emerging adults in this study, though the path to such achievements was vague and uncertain. Many of the respondents placed little value on marriage as a social institution – though the possibility of a long term committed relationship, married or otherwise, was something they welcomed, as was the idea of having children. Home ownership was important to some of the respondents, and an unlikely future for others, but independent living was valued by all. Perhaps the most important aspect of this research is the fact that despite the uncertainty involved all of the respondents are thinking about and working towards long term goals.

The research presented in this thesis has several unusual aspects that make a valuable contribution to sociology and the study of young people in particular. The use of the emerging adulthood framework as a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of the current social generation in Australia is a novel application of the developmental model from
psychology and one of the first instances of its use in sociology, which has been reluctant to adopt the concept (Arnett et al. 2011b, Bynner 2005, Côté and Bynner 2008). The exploration of ‘emerging adults’ is unusual as it shifts focus from those young people deemed ‘at risk’ or from disadvantaged backgrounds. This research did not seek out young people who were heavily invested in subcultural pursuits, but rather focused on the median experience of young people in their late teens and early twenties. The interview method is a novel mix of qualitative and social network research techniques created specifically for this research project (Appendix A). The typology presented in chapter 3 is an original contribution organised around the meanings associated with the respondents’ activities, interests and pursuits, and differs from the categories of activities, such as those used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2000), based on external observation. The discussion of personal communities in chapter 4 adds to the body of literature on young people’s relationships with their parents, their friends and their partners, but takes account current conditions of considerable change and instability, under conditions quite different from previous generations and particular to Australia. And finally, chapter 5 presents the inductive exploration of the respondents’ understanding of adulthood, attempting to privilege neither the sociological or psychological models, in order to demonstrate the relationship between the structural, social, cultural and individual factors that impact on the respondents’ self-identification as an adult.
Chapter 1 – Reflexive Modernity and Emerging Adulthood

The idea that a young person leaving high school will quickly mature and fulfil the role of adult is widely questioned in both the sociological and psychological literatures on young people, and the movement from adolescence to adulthood is seen as increasingly difficult in modern Western society. The conditions of life from around the age of 18 are perceived to be highly unstructured, characterised by openness of opportunity and possibility, and by considerable uncertainty about the future. Australian society has seen significant structural and social changes over the past four decades which have resulted in young people experiencing longer gaps between leaving school and starting careers and families. These conditions are partly seen as a result of a process of individualization, where services once offered by the State have been relegated to individuals, described as "reflexive modernity" by Anthony Giddens (1990, 1991) and Ulrich Beck (1992b, Beck et al. 2003). Sociologists have attempted to understand these changes in terms of 'transitions' between adolescence and adulthood, measurable by the achievement of certain markers, such as marriage, which are arguably dwindling in importance for many people. "Emerging adulthood" is a term used by psychologist Jeffrey Arnett (Arnett 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, Arnett et al. 2011a, 2011b, Arnett and Schwab 2012, Arnett and Tanner 2006) to describe this time of life as a separate and distinct stage of development, particularly for those of middle class origins. While this framework is focused on the individual experience between 18 and the mid twenties, when integrated into reflexive modernity
it provides a useful overview of life as an Australian emerging adult in the early 21st century.

Chapter one explores the structural and societal conditions that have created the distinctive life-chances and circumstances of emerging adulthood in advanced reflexive modernity. While these conditions are characteristic of most Western societies, in Australia they only fully coalesced in the 1980s. After reviewing the general literature on advanced and reflexive modernity this chapter considers the relevant economic and social changes that occurred in Australia. Many of these changes have been encapsulated in discourses around Generation X and Generation Y, which lay much of the blame for “failing” to become adults at the feet of young people, often without acknowledging worsening structural conditions. The discourse on emerging adulthood positions the experiences of middle class young people in a more positive light, arguing that the period after adolescence is a distinct stage of development, adapted to the cultural, social and structural changes of reflexive modernity. With this understanding of the realities emerging adults face in contemporary Australia I ask: how do emerging adults define themselves in early 21st century Brisbane?

**Reflexive modernity and individualization**

The roles of social institutions in modern Western society have changed considerably.

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2 Though often the subject of political polemics in Australia there is no evidence for a decline in the middle class, though this may not be the case in every Western country. See http://www.melbourneinstitute.com/downloads/hilda/Bibliography/Working+Discussion+Research_Papers/2007/Hamilton_etal_State_of_Australian_Middle_Class.pdf for more.
since the end of the Second World War, with traditional social norms, values and institutions being aggressively remodelled. Beck, Giddens and Lash argue that society has entered a phase of ‘reflexive modernity’ (Beck et al. 1994), in which the institutions of modernity are radicalizing themselves in a “conscious response to the myriad risks and unanticipated side effects generated by the processes of modernization” (Lee 2008, p. 56). A large number of traditional institutions are undergoing this process of reflexive change, including “[the formerly] reliable welfare state; mass parties anchored in class culture; and a stable nuclear family consisting of a single breadwinner, his housewife and their children” (Beck et al. 2003, p. 1). Bauman argues that society is in a stage of ‘liquid modernity’, in which social forms undergo such rapid alterations that people have little chance to adapt and become settled, causing a continual sense of uncertainty and anxiety about their role in society (1991, 2007). At the core of these changes is a process of “individualization”, in which people are no longer guided by clearly defined roles that guide people’s choices and actions, but must instead make their own choices about who they are. These conceptualizations have been criticized on a number of fronts (Argyrou 2003, Atkinson 2007, 2008, Elliott 2002, Lee 2006, 2008, 2011, Rasborg 2012) but they do reflect the broad structural and social changes occurring in Western society over the past decades, many of which affect young people disproportionately. The traditional understanding of “adulthood” is an institution undergoing reflexive change, as the various aspects associated with being an adult (such as marriage and careers) evolve into different forms; this has significant consequences for young people as they become adults.
Giddens argues that reflexive modernity is a consequence of a transformation of time and space, the use of disembedding mechanisms and institutional reflexivity (Beck et al. 1994, Giddens 1984, 1990, 1991, 1992). The ‘compression’ of time and space through global communication networks means that there is an overwhelming amount of information about the world that is readily accessible, often in ‘real time’. The consequence of this is that temporal principles such as “cause and effect, linearity, spatiality, invariability, stability, clarity and precision” are joined in concert with competing principles such as “instantaneity, simultaneity, networked connections, ephemerality, volatility, uncertainty as well as temporal multiplicity and complexity” (Adam 2003, p. 74). Disembedding mechanisms cause individuals to become disconnected from modern society, instead of fulfilling clearly defined roles (breadwinner, housewife, employee, etc.) the individual is required to define themselves.

As with social institutions Giddens sees the creation of a sense of self as being a “reflexive project” in which the individual creates and maintains a ‘trajectory’ of narratives that are continuously revised and updated depending on events or circumstances:

The existential question of self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual ‘supplies’ about herself. A person’s identity is not to be found in behaviour, nor – important though this is – the reactions of others,
but in the *capacity to keep a particular narrative going*. The individual’s biography, if she is to maintain regular interaction with others in the day-to-day world, cannot be wholly fictive. It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world and sort them into the ongoing ‘story’ about the self (Giddens 1991, p. 54, emphasis in original).

The narrative that the individual creates then takes the place of the identity formerly defined by traditional roles, such as employee, or member of a household. The continuous creation of the narrative of the self is influenced by macro level social institutions such as the media, which inform the individual how they should think, how they should behave, how they should dress etc. In turn social institutions are in a process of continual structural revision based on the understanding of trends in individual behaviour, gathered through mechanisms such as market research and polling. This complicated relationship between the macro and the micro, in which both arenas are self aware, inform each other and revise themselves based on information from their counterpart, is the crucial dynamic of Giddens’ reflexive modernity.

Beck (1992a, 1992b, 1996, Beck et al. 2003, Beck et al. 1994) argues that modern societies have shifted responsibility for ‘risk’ onto the individual, who is now held accountable for managing their health, employment, standard of living, etc. These risks rarely respect class boundaries, affecting the poor and wealthy alike, although the wealthy are usually in a far better position to weather and respond to any difficulties that arise from environmental or economic upheavals. The management of individual
risk is linked to the increase in uncertainty, the changes in social institutions and economic structures over the past six decades have resulted in the crumbling of the pillars upon which identity was formerly constructed:

In advanced modernity individualization takes place under the general conditions of a societalizing process that makes individual autonomizations increasingly impossible... The place of *traditional* ties and social forms (social class, nuclear family) is taken by *secondary* agencies and institutions, which stamp the biography of the individual and make that person dependent upon fashions, social policy, economic cycles and markets, contrary to the image of individual control which establishes itself in consciousness (Beck 1992b, p. 131, emphasis in original).

For Beck the process of individualization is due to erosion of traditional institutions that allowed people to understand their function within society, leaving the individual to navigate the vagaries of trends, cycles and fashions beyond their control. Under this set of conditions the individual is able to choose from the various options presented to them, but must accept personal responsibility should they fail.

Bauman (1991, 2007) argues that the driving force of earlier modernity was the urge to conquer uncertainty. The rapid development of technologies that regulated day-to-day life, the creation of large cities with controlled environments, the formalisation and institutionalisation of social relations, all attempted to control the vagaries of human existence and provide a sense of order and structure. Labour conditions were stabilized
with the construction of careers or ‘jobs for life’, reducing individual uncertainty and providing a key source of identity. The nuclear family was entrenched as the social norm, defining the structure of the family and providing clear roles for each of its members. This ‘solid’ modernity was built on a firm belief in traditional values, the authority of governmental organisations and the knowledge that their safety and wellbeing was insured by the state.

Since the 1970s the institutions and norms that provided certainty for individuals have been gradually dismantled, and are now in a constant state of flux:

The passage from the ‘solid’ to a ‘liquid’ phase of modernity: that is, into a condition in which social forms (structures that limit individual choices, institutions that guard repetitions of routines, patterns of acceptable behaviour) can no longer (and are not expected) to keep their shape for long, because they decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them, and once they are cast for them to set (Bauman 2007, p. 1).

In this ‘liquid modernity’ social forms change too quickly for people to adapt effectively, to make long term plans or to draw upon established role models to form a suitable sense of identity. Family structures have fragmented into myriad forms, and gender roles are no longer clearly defined. Economic instability has seen the end of traditional career paths for many individuals, and belief and trust in government and state institutions has declined. However the opportunity to pursue individual pursuits is unparalleled, as is the opportunity to construct a sense of self that is not defined by
roles or institutions. “Liquidity reduces our sense of durability to suggest new levels of freedom and at the same time dissolves the bonds that reify our sense of security” (Lee 2005, p. 67).

The dilemma for people in liquid modernity then is to regain the certainty that existed in prior generations (Bauman 1991, 2007). The paths to doing so are diverse, but they are overwhelmingly individual. Each person must find their own certainties in liquid times, as well as their own sense of self. Bauman argues that the path most commonly taken is through consumption, whether it be fashions, culture, technology etc. However these paths are all marked by impermanence (fashions change every season, new technologies emerge every year etc.) and can have the unintended effect of increasing uncertainty in an individual’s life.

The dominant themes within these works are the notions of individualization, ‘risk’ and ‘uncertainty’, themes which reflect many of the changes in the structures of Western society, but which have drawn criticism on a number of grounds. The extent to which ‘risk’ is in fact omnipresent in everyday life is questionable, given the difficulties in defining exactly what is considered to be ‘risk’ (Elliott 2002, Rasborg 2012). The argument that modern social institutions are in an irreversible state of liquidity, ‘the era of disembedding without re-embedding’ (Bauman and Tester 2001, p. 89), lacks a discussion of the ‘resolidification’ suggested by empirical studies into race, religion and class (Lee 2011). The role of class in the work of all three theorists is considerably
diminished, particularly with regards to its role in the formation of self-identity (Atkinson 2007, 2008), and Argyrou (2003) argues that the Eurocentric arguments of Beck and Giddens are built upon a mythical understanding of modernity that radically differs from history. At a more critical level is the notion of ‘reflexivity’, which is widely used in numerous settings and disciplines, each of which has its own criticisms and shortcomings (Lynch 2000). The ‘systemic’ reflexivity used by Giddens and Beck arguably promotes ‘a vision of subjectivities produced free of social constraint’ (Farrugia 2013, p. 284), it is unclear to what extent individuals or institutions are able to effect reflexive change in the face of broader social, structural, economic and political processes.

The critiques of reflexive modernity are not without merit, but this does not invalidate the theory as a useful tool for studying a Western society such as contemporary Australia, particularly in light of the changes in the workforce and the family over the past six decades. It was not unusual for young people to leave school before completing year 12, as men could earn a living wage without significant academic qualifications, and reasonably expect a job for life. The economic affluence of the post war period continued until the mid 1970s, at which point there was the first of two significant recessions, which resulted in a large percentage of manufacturing being moved offshore. Until that point white males enjoyed nearly full employment in thriving manufacturing, agricultural and mining industries.
The movement of manufacturing offshore resulted in the disappearance of secure, high paying jobs for unskilled labour. What was left was low paid casual or part time work in the service sector (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Griffin 2001, White and Wyn 2013). These changes also saw a significant rise in young people entering the workforce while still in school, a process noted in many countries by various researchers, including the Netherlands (Du Bois-Reymond et al. 1994), Norway (Fauske 1996, Hammer 1996), central and Eastern Europe (Haase et al. 2008, Kovacheva 2001), and the European Union (Walther 2006) to name a few. The necessity for young workers to pursue post secondary education increased dramatically, and by 2010 in the OECD countries 80% of 18 to 22 year olds were in some form of tertiary education (Bokor et al. 2011, p. 7). Entry level white collar jobs became harder to get, as there was an increase in ‘credentialism’: the demands from employers for tertiary qualifications that are not necessarily related to the requirements of the position (Brown 2001, Robinson and Manacorda 1997). Casual and part time jobs in the service sector are characterised by their lack of stability, in terms of both job security and the resources they provide for building a stable home.

The post war era had seen the popularisation of idealised depictions of family life, promoting family and reproduction as the primary focus of Western society. The women that had been a major part of the workforce during World War II were returned to the home, those that continued to work were considerably worse off than their male counterparts (Learmonth 1973, pp. 106-7, Sargent 1983, p. 113). Women were
prevented from many occupations, and those jobs they were able to hold often had many restrictions upon them. Men were breadwinners, strong, stoic, responsible heads of the household. Women were nurturing, caring, feminine, mothers, wives and homemakers. Divorce was unusual in most Western countries, difficult to obtain and carried a stigma that reflected cultural values heavily influenced by Christianity (Phillips 1988). These roles were clearly defined and understood as the social norms for men, women and families.

The 1970s was a time of profound social upheaval that disrupted the early post war social order. Strong civil rights movements in many Western countries pushed for racial and gender equality. At the same time the median age for women having their first child began to rise, and the number of children born to mothers aged over thirty started to increase (ABS 2011b, Carmichael 1987, Laws et al. 2010). In the same way that employment stopped being a constant for many people, the family unit was no longer solid and immutable; rather the roles within the family could become blurred and indistinct, and the family unit could break apart, to be reconstituted in a number of different forms. Non-nuclear family structures became more prevalent, with a rise in blended families and single parent families, more couples chose to live together before getting married, and by age twenty-nine Generation X were “three times as likely to still be unmarried as first-wave Boomers had been” (Holtz 1995, p. 181). There was a shift in living circumstances, for example in the United States in 2002, “57% of men and 43% of women aged 22 to 31 lived with their parents” (Twenge 2006, p. 98).
The works of Giddens, Bauman and Beck are largely a response to the broad structural and social changes across the Western world in the 1970s:

Modernity’s reflexivity refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge (Giddens 1991, p. 20).

The ‘traditional’ understanding of social institutions was undermined by the events of the 1970s, many of which were inspired by the monolithic and oppressive nature of these traditions, such as the civil rights movements that pushed for racial and gender equality. The role of ‘employment’ as a definer of social identity had to be revised due to the blurring of schooling and working as distinct periods from each other, the increasing casualisation of the workforce that had less stability for the employee, and the decreased demarcation between men and women in the workforce. The notion of the ‘nuclear family’ as the central unit of society had to be revised due to the increased access to divorce, the concomitant combinations of family structures that followed (single parent families, blended families, etc.), as well as the diminishing numbers of people choosing to marry and/or have children at any stage.

In the face of these changes, how are we to understand what it is to become an adult in the 21st century? The traditional model is built upon the fulfilment of particular roles within society, marked by such events as coming of age, leaving home, the completion
of schooling, the entering of the workforce, marriage and parenthood, many of which were seen as coinciding events that clearly delineated a person’s position as an adult. However the timing of these events have changed considerably, working overlaps with schooling, schooling extends beyond the coming of age, people are staying at home with their parents well into their twenties, marriage and parenthood are being entered into at later and later stages, if at all (ABS 2009c, ABS 2011b, Castles 1993, Maas 1990). Most of these events are now reversible and lack permanence, people return to live with their parents and to tertiary studies, marriages end, and career paths shift or are abandoned entirely for new pursuits. The reflexive modernity described by Giddens, Beck and Bauman does not specifically address the problems of young people entering adulthood, but this group is certainly amongst the most vulnerable to the problems caused by individualization. Oddly they are also best placed to recover from some of these problems, having the time to rewrite their ‘trajectories of the self’ or ‘choice biographies’.

The focus of this thesis is on exploring the consequences of reflexive modernity and the radical revision of the traditional institutions that constitute ‘adulthood’ for individuals coming of age in contemporary Australia. How do these young people define adulthood? How does this definition relate to the traditional understanding of adulthood? How does this affect the choices that young people make in their day-to-day life and in their plans for the future? Does this understanding of adulthood affect their relationships? These questions are related to a considerable body of sociological and psychological
The study of youth in sociology is often identified as starting in the 1950s, with antecedents in the work of various theorists such as Freud (1962) and Erikson (1951, 1959, 1968). The study of youth and youth culture positions young people as ‘other’, a problem to be monitored and solved until they reach adulthood and merge with society, or as a separate entity to be studied for their distinctiveness from mainstream culture. The study of the “transitions” between adolescence and adulthood began in the 1970s, but uses the models of the 1950s and their “markers of adulthood” to explore the changes in how young people are moving between school and work, and family of origin to family of choice. The study of the 'life course' has its origins in the work of Elder (1974, 1989), whose analysis of longitudinal data on the lives of people born during the Great Depression demonstrated the long term effects that massively disruptive structural issues have over the paths taken during a lifetime. The quantitative studies of the life course literature use 'life events' to chart the social trajectories of people across the various stages of a life time, including those leading up to adulthood, in increasingly
complex sequences. These studies recognise the structural and social changes of the period as being instrumental in altering the ‘transition’ to adulthood, and some reference the institutional reflexivity of Giddens and Beck as a cause for these changes, but very few consider the notion that the meaning of adulthood is undergoing reflexive revision. “Emerging adulthood” (Arnett 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2004, 2007b, 2007d, Arnett and Tanner 2006) from the field of developmental psychology recognises the individualized nature of becoming an adult, and argues that the period between 18 and the mid twenties is a distinct stage of development in the life cycle. Arnett argues that much of the process of identity formation that occurred during adolescence has shifted to the period of emerging adulthood, including the formation of an understanding of adulthood that complements their individual sense of self.

**Youth**

The sociology of youth is closely related to the developmental framework of Freud (1962) and Erikson (1951, 1959, 1968), "youth" is seen as a phase of the life course between dependent childhood and independent adulthood. Within this framework is a clearly defined process and a clearly defined end point to the phase: the adolescent moves from a period of rebellion and identity formation to become the stable and responsible adult that has internalised external forms of control (Henderson et al. 2007). Youth is a linear process, consisting primarily of "transition through the developmental stages of psychological immaturity to maturity... narrowly defined as (vocational) maturity and (nuclear) family formation" (Wyn and Woodman 2006, pp. 497-8). The
discourse on youth encompasses a diverse range of literature that examines an age group varying anywhere between 12 and 25, though there is no clear definition of what exactly a ‘youth’ is nor at what age the term applies (Bourdieu 1993, pp. 94-6, Definition of Youth 2014, Frith 1984, Hartinger-Saunders 2008, UNESCO 1969). In Eastern and Central Europe the age limits varied between 7 and 35 depending upon the country (Kovacheva 2001, p. 44).

The point of origin for the study of youth and youth culture can be attributed at least partly to the issues surrounding post war 1950s England, a period of considerable alienation and marginalisation for many working class young people. The working class youth dealt with issues of marginalisation and unemployment through defining themselves as distinct from society in various ways, in the subcultures of the Teddy Boys, the mods and the rockers (Brake 1980, 1985, Corrigan and Frith 1976, Frith 1981, 1984, Hebdige 1979, 1982), among many others. As a collective they could be safely ignored, or problematized through overblown media accounts of internecine violence (Cohen 1972, Frith 1984). However the structural changes to the workforce in the late 1960s and 1970s extended the problems of unemployment and marginalisation to the young people of the middle classes. The scale of these changes was such that the Baby Boomers were described as the "discrete generation" (Short 1970, p. 301) as a way of highlighting how distinctly different the Baby Boomers were from the previous generations, and the term "generation gap" was popularized.
The “problem” of youth unemployment and its consequences has been the concern of Western governments since the end of the Second World War:

This prolonged waiting tends to isolate the young within the society [by] keeping them in a situation in which their very exemption from the essential duties of adult life causes them to be largely refused the rights and responsibilities which go with those duties (UNESCO 1969, p. 9).

Young people have historically had a higher rate of unemployment than older cohorts, and the perceived relationship between work and adulthood has made it the focus of considerable research (ABS 1998, Boreham and Hall 2000, Brown 2002, Cockburn 2001, Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Hammer 1996, Jones 2009, Julkunen 2009, Learmonth 1973, Short 1970, UNESCO 1969, White and Wyn 2013). Youth unemployment is considered an issue of structures beyond the control of individuals, but youth are seen as particularly vulnerable due to their age and lack of resources (education, income, experience, etc.). Singling out youth for special attention in order to rectify these inequities has the effect of normalising their status as dependents, requiring the assistance and supervision of the State:

Academic research into youth contributes to the ‘othering’ of youth, by positioning young people as a problem to be solved, or by situating youth culture in opposition to the rest of society. The question of youth, of what to do with them, of how to school them, or police them, or regulate them, or employ them, or prevent them from becoming involved in any number of risky (sexual, eating, drug (ab)using or peer cultural) practices are questions which have a substantial
historical aspect. In the liberal democracies at the start of the millennium, the crisis of youth-at-risk is a key marker in debates about youth among intellectuals, social commentators, politicians, bureaucrats and experts in various domains of expertise (Kelly 2000, p. 463).

The “youth-at-risk” understanding of young people dictates the approaches of policy makers and academics, whose focus becomes the issue of ensuring that youth grow up to become socially ‘well-adjusted’ young adults. As a consequence the issues that affect many people of all ages are compartmentalized so that youth are treated as a special case. Alcohol and drug abuse are seen to be significant issues facing youth, as young people are considered to be more likely to suffer physical or emotional damage (Davey et al. 2002, Lindsay 2009, Pilkington 2007, Shinew and Parry 2005, Wegner et al. 2006). Homelessness among young people is treated as a special case as youth are thought more likely to become homeless through circumstances beyond their control (Dekel et al. 2003, Gwadz et al. 2009, Hathazi et al. 2009, Hyde 2005). Crime and deviance, especially vandalism (Allen and Greenberger 1978, Dickinson 2008, Dukes and Stein 2003, Ferrell 1995, Halsey and Young 2006) and violent crime (Dukes et al. 1997, White 2007, White et al. 1999), are likewise seen to be issues particularly affecting young people. These examples are a fraction of the bodies of research into issues affecting the population as a whole in which youth are singled out due to a parochial perception that as a group they are incapable of responsible, independent autonomy.

The other stream of youth studies is ‘youth culture’, which is conceived of as separate
from mainstream culture, a collective space in which alternate and often oppositional meanings are created by youth to distinguish themselves from their older peers.

Research into youth culture in the post war period between 1945 and 1970 focused on ‘subcultures’ such as the mods and the rockers, and counter cultures such as the Beat movement, which were treated with great suspicion, and often fear, by the general public and by political leaders, as indeed were the researchers who attempted to counter this perception (Griffin 2001, pp. 150-2). The series of moral panics that arose in the 1950s and 1960s initially focused on the violence and delinquency associated with working class youth, but later swelled to include the middle class counter culture and their ‘permissiveness’ (Clarke et al. 1975, pp. 71-5).

Music styles and their associated customs, language and dress such as Goth (Gunn 1999, Hodkinson 2002, Wilkins 2004), punk (Bennett 2006, Moore 2007), and heavy metal (Deyhle 1998, Selfhout et al. 2008, Singer et al. 1993), are often studied for the significant ways in which youth distinguish themselves from ‘mainstream’ culture, with a particular focus on the selection of styles that will provoke a reaction. Activities such as raves (Gourley 2004, Kavanaugh and Anderson 2008), skateboarding (Chiu 2009, Howell 2008, Vivoni 2009), and the use of public spaces (Mason and Korpela 2009, Winchester et al. 1999) are explored for the deviant ways in which youth engage with these spaces. Even such phenomena as changes in language and the adoption of technology (Ellis 1984, Goodman et al. 2006, Wolak et al. 2003, Ybarra and Mitchell 2004) are examined as special cases in which youth distinguish themselves from the rest of society. Youth
culture is often seen as the site or instigator of many youth issues, the argument that “rock music” corrupts youth has been made for more than forty years (Denisoff and Levine 1972, p. 245), leading to calls for industry standards and censorship. Though this research stream focuses on more positive aspects of being a youth in modern society than the “youth-at-risk” stream, it has the same effect of positioning young people as ‘other’ than the mainstream.

**Transitions and the life course**

The development of the transitions framework in the 1970s and 80s arose from the recognition of the significant economic, cultural and social changes that were ‘extending’ the youth phase. The delays in young people finishing schooling, entering a stable career and starting families was seen as deviating from the normative experiences of young people. The transitions model measures the attainment of a number of markers of adulthood, which are considered to signify that the individual has reached a level of independence, autonomy and responsibility. These markers vary, but those most frequently cited are leaving school, entering the workforce, leaving the parental home/buying their own home, getting married and becoming a parent (Chisolm and Hurrelmann 1995, Clark 2007, Hammer 1996). In focusing on measurable markers of adulthood the transitions framework is able to chart the structural and social changes within a society (Côté and Bynner 2008, Shildrick and MacDonald 2007). For example, an increase in the age young people leave home reflects the rising costs of living and their diminished economic capabilities, in large part due to poorer opportunities for
stable and well paid employment (ABS 2009c, Maas 1990, White and Wyn 2013).

Similarly the increase in the age at which young people are getting married and having children reflects a social change away from the nuclear family as the ideal archetype for family formation in the early to mid twenties (Du Bois-Reymond et al. 1994, Molgat and Vézina 2008, Skrbis et al. 2012). The transitions framework is able to highlight the difficulties that many young people face that can lead to social exclusion.

The life course perspective explores social trajectories, the paths that people take over the course of their lifetimes as measured through life events. The key theorist in the field, Elder (1974, 1998), identifies four principles that determine the course of an individuals' trajectory; the historical time and place in which a person is born and lives can have significant impacts on choice (particularly events such as the Great Depression or World War II); the timing of life events which impact subsequent choices (e.g. getting married early in life is negatively linked to education outcomes); the interdependence of lives can mean that events affecting households, communities or personal communities impact individuals' social trajectories; and the individual construction of life courses through choices and actions made within the constraints of the other three principles (Elder 1998, pp. 3-4). Life course theorists track individuals longitudinally to measure the impact of the different sequences on social trajectories, uncovering patterns linking human agency to problems of social inequality.

There is a considerable body of research that has examined the shift in when and how
the markers of adulthood (or relevant life events) are reached, across Europe and the English speaking world, with the focus being on the ‘delays’ between adolescence and adulthood and their various causes (Côté 2000, Côté and Allahar 1994, Elder 1998, Hutchison 2011, Hyde 2005, Shanahan 2000, White and Wyn 2013). More recently researchers have questioned the simple linear model for transitions, establishing alternative frameworks better able to handle the complex ways in which young people enter adulthood. Pluralistic, non-linear, ‘yo-yo’ and destandardized transitions models argue that there are numerous flexible pathways along which young people progress to adulthood, and that the markers are no longer attained in any particular order (Chisolm and Hurrelmann 1995, Devadason 2007, te Riele 2004, Walther 2006). Indeed, much of the focus on young people in the life course is devoted to the charting of the increasingly complex sequences of events that young people follow as they lead up to the adulthood stage (Hewitt, Baxter and Western 2005, Hutchison 2011, Mitchell and Gray 2007, Rose, Hewitt and Baxter 2013, Shanahan 2000, Skrbis et al. 2012). Within these frameworks it is not considered unusual for young people to leave home and return many times, for couples to cohabit for years rather than marry, for children to be born out of wedlock, or for multiple jobs to be had in a short time rather than a single stable career path.

There is a significant body of research into the life course focusing on the Australian context, most notably the Negotiating the Life Course study conducted by the Australian Demographic & Social Research Institute and ANU (http://www.lifecourse.anu.edu.au).
The overwhelming majority of these papers are focused on life events, such as marriage, parenthood, and retirement, as well as examining participation in the labour force as affected by gender, age, children's age, etc. Articles published on the life course in recent issues of the *Journal of Sociology* were similarly focused on issues of work and gender (Rose, Hewitt and Baxter 2013), the expectations around marriage and family of a large body of 12-13 year olds (Skrbis *et al.* 2012), declining fertility rates (Mitchell and Gray 2007), and the importance of family relationships to a body of 15-18 year olds (Wyn, Lantz and Harris 2012). There is also the *Our Lives Project* (http://artsonline.monash.edu.au/ourlives/), which is a major exploration of Australian young people and their pathways through life, though as yet there is no data from respondents older than 18.

The life course literature is overwhelmingly quantitative in nature requiring large samples and longitudinal data, making it difficult to emulate in a qualitative research study. There is a vast body of literature focused on the study of youth that makes no reference to the life course perspective, though there are frequent parallels. For example Shanahan's discussion of the 'pathways to adulthood in changing societies' (2000) mirrors the discussion of sociologists such as Furlong and Cartmel (1997), Furlong, Cartmel and Biggart (2006), Wyn and White (2000), and Wyn and Woodman (2006), and highlights the increasing variability in the lives of young people moving towards adulthood. Elder's discussion of social trajectories (1998) is mirrored in (or derives from) much of the work of Beck's discussion of risk society (1992a, 1992b) and/or Gidden's
reflexive project of the self (1991). These discussions have a long, rich history in sociological research into young people independent of the life courses.

The markers of the transitions framework and the life events of the life course framework mirror the social and cultural conditions of the Western world in the 1950s; their continued use in research assumes that contemporary society is normatively comparable to the situation sixty years ago. The markers and life events serve as benchmarks for the measurement of progress towards an understanding of adulthood that is rooted in the 1950s, and as such they anchor the framework to an outdated conception of what it means to become an adult (Hammer 1996, Molgat 2007).

“Adulthood in the traditional sense, being built on stability, serenity and settling down, cannot properly develop on the basis of flexibility and change” (Hoikkala 2009, p. 12). The markers no longer capture the significant events that constitute a contemporary understanding of adulthood, nor is the uniformity (and heterogeneity) of the markers or life events representative of the myriad possible ways that young people can be considered, or consider themselves as adults. This is not to suggest that events such as marriage, parenthood or the completion of schooling are not considered significant or desirable, but rather that they no longer have the same association or equivalence to notions of adulthood as they once had.

Much of the contemporary research on youth identifies the indistinct and reversible nature of these transitions, reaching many of the markers is no longer seen as an
indicator that the individual is progressing towards adulthood (Henderson et al. 2007, Pollock 1997, Wyn 2004). There is clear recognition that the traditional institutions embodying the transitions to adulthood have undergone a process of reflexive change (Skrbis et al. 2012), yet there is little discussion of “adulthood” itself as a traditional institution, nor is there a critical examination of what it means to be an adult. Within the life course discourse Shanahan has argued that "more refined measures of self-perceived adult status would allow researchers to examine the connections between transition markers, life circumstances, and self-perceptions" (Shanahan 2000, p. 685). However the approach suggested by Shanahan involves adding complexity to the existing understandings of adulthood through greater focus on gender, class and ethnic inequalities, and through the increasingly complex sequencing of life events using large bodies of quantitative data (Shanahan 2000, p. 686, Hutchison 2011, p. 29). This is problematic, given that there is "considerable variation... associated with factors such as class, gender, ethnicity, subculture and religion" (Rojek 2005a, p. 130), and that position of an individual in the life course is relational, and not objective (Featherstone 1987, pp. 117-118). In the 1970s and 80s it is arguable that adulthood could be defined partly through associations with achieving the markers set out in the transitions framework, however over generations these meanings have become disembedded as less people achieved them, and took longer doing so. It is no longer reasonable to presume that adulthood can be defined by the markers used in the transitions or life course research.
Emerging Adulthood

Arnett has proposed “emerging adulthood” as an alternative framework for researching middle class young people aged between 18 and the mid-twenties (Arnett 2000a, 2000b, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2008, Arnett and Jensen 2001, Arnett et al. 2001, Arnett and Tanner 2006). Within this framework emerging adulthood is a distinct period of development between adolescence and adulthood, and has five central characteristics: self focus, instability, identity exploration, possibilities, and feeling "in between" (Arnett 2000a, 2004). These characteristics describe individual states of being common to most or all emerging adults, and are now the normative experience for middle class young people in their late teens and early twenties.

Arnett explored the criteria viewed as important for being considered an adult by using a 43 point questionnaire to survey adolescents, ‘emerging adults’ and adults. The questionnaire included explorations of individual criteria, the ability to support a family, norm compliance, biological, legal and chronological transitions, ‘role’ transitions and other criteria, such as having purchased a house or had sexual intercourse (Arnett 2001, 2003). The criteria repeatedly nominated as the most important for being considered an adult are based on individual development: financial independence, taking responsibility for one’s actions and autonomy (Arnett 2004, p. 209). These results reflect the trend towards individualization in Western society, and the variations in reporting these criteria as important lean towards privileged socio-economic groups.
Cultural comparisons between the Western world and developing nations, as well as within the Western world between various ethnicities, classes and minorities, have been repeated to explore how emerging adulthood plays out in different parts of the world. Arnett’s initial study examined white college students, and showed that older students were less likely to consider biological transitions as being important in becoming an adult, and more likely to view norm compliance (e.g. avoiding drunk driving) as important (Arnett 2001). In all age groups role transitions were considered lowest in importance. A subsequent study broadened the target groups to include African Americans, Latinos and Asian Americans (Arnett 2003). Across all groups, including white Americans, the criteria considered most important included financial independence, autonomy and accepting responsibility for one’s actions. However, Latino Americans were considerably more likely to value role transitions over African Americans and Asian Americans (Arnett 2003, p. 63). All of these other groups placed higher values on marriage, parenthood, careers and home ownership than whites. A similar approach has been used by other researchers in a number of countries, including Latin America (Arias and Hernández 2007, Facio et al. 2007, Galambos and Martínez 2007), Italy (Dhariwal et al. 2009), China (Badger et al. 2006, Nelson and Chen 2007, Nelson et al. 2004), Japan (Rosenberger 2007), Spain, Finland, Germany, the Czech Republic (Buhl and Lanz 2007) as well as amongst the Canadian aboriginal population (Cheah and Nelson 2004). These studies show that to varying degrees emerging adulthood is becoming the norm in many Western countries, and that it is linked to the rise of a wealthy middle class.
Arnett’s discussion of emerging adulthood as a time of self focus and identity exploration mirrors aspects of Giddens’ reflexive project of the self, though it is focused on a specific period of the life course. Arguably emerging adulthood is the most important period due to its highly individualised nature:

Emerging adulthood is exceptionally unstructured, the time of life when people are least likely to have their lives structured by social institutions. Children have their lives structured by their families and school, adults have their lives structured by family roles and work commitments. In contrast, emerging adults have mostly left their families of origin and not yet established new families, and they have not yet committed themselves to stable long-term work (Arnett 2007d, p. 25).

The unstructured nature of this period makes it a time of both “possibility” and “instability”, a reflection of the changing social and structural norms of Western society in the early 21st century. Without the responsibilities and obligations that come with families, mortgages and careers emerging adults are able to select from a wide array of options regarding lifestyle, travel, education, living arrangements and relationships. However, the insecure and temporary nature of casual and shift work, relationships and shared living arrangements also make this a period of instability, when sudden changes can have dramatic impacts on an emerging adults’ lifestyle.
The discourses of uncertainty, risk and reflexive modernity constructed by Bauman, Beck and Giddens relate to the characterization of emerging adulthood as a period of instability and possibility. The lack of direction from traditional institutions and gender roles and the ‘liquidity’ of social forms allows for a greater range of freedom and choices, as has the loosening of social mores that allowed for a broadening of relationships, all of which contribute to the opening of ‘possibilities’ for emerging adults. However the increasingly individualized nature of risk and the erosion of support once offered by the traditional institutions and structures, many of which are undergoing reflexive revision, increases instability in the lives of emerging adults, who are now far more susceptible to forces beyond their control. Emerging adulthood involves a significant trade off: an individual is able to choose from a far wider array of options and goals than were available to previous generations, but will have less support to realise those goals than their predecessors, and will be largely responsible for any misfortune that results from their choices.

The existing literature on emerging adulthood covers a substantial range of areas, many of which overlap or complement the sociological literature on youth. Substance abuse and mental health issues are important areas of research in both sociology and psychology, and within the emerging adulthood framework a substantial number of articles have been published. That emerging adulthood is a period of considerable instability demonstrably plays a role in the vulnerability of many young people, and arguably places emerging adults at greater risk (Eitle et al. 2010, Lloyd 2012).
Schulenberg and Zarrett note that substance abuse peaks in emerging adulthood, and that “the incidence of psychopathology increases. Major depressive disorders, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and borderline personality disorders” manifest in late adolescence and emerging adulthood (2006, pp. 135-7). Shulman et al. suggest that an inability to cope with the age related tasks of emerging adulthood puts the individual at higher risk of mental health issues later in life (2009a, 2009b), and Carbonell et al. explored the various coping methods employed by emerging adults to deal with the difficulties of the period (2005). Related areas, such as attitudes towards substance use are examined at length, amongst homeless emerging adults for example the use of narcotics is viewed as therapeutic (Thompson et al. 2010).

Relationships are a major focus of research within emerging adulthood, as relationships that result in marriage by the early twenties are no longer the norm. In anthropological terms marriage has long been the defining transition marking an individual as an adult, however this is no longer the case (Arnett 1998, 2007d). Chen et al. explore how dating histories during emerging adulthood affected later romantic relationships (2006), Van Dulmen et al. found that there is an inverse correlation between bad behaviour and romantic relationships, emerging adults in stable relationships are less likely to engage in deviant behaviour (2008). Demir’s study of happiness predictors showed that emerging adults were generally as happy or happier out of romantic relationships as in them (2009). Carroll et al. surveyed emerging adults to determine what they considered the ideal age for marriage was, arriving at the consensus of 25 years of age (2007). In a
subsequent study the authors argued that:

it appears a period of single life is not only becoming a permissible for young people today but is increasingly regarded by many as a necessary period before a young person is ready for adult roles related to marriage and family life. This finding implies that a new philosophy regarding marriage readiness may be arising among emerging adults as they increasingly endorse the idea that they will only be ready for marriage when they are done being single (Carroll et al. 2009b, p. 369).

Every aspect of emerging adults relationships are explored, including forming, maintaining and ending friendships (Card 2007), social difficulties such as shyness (Nelson et al. 2008), the likelihood and motivations for continuing family rituals, religious or not (Friedman and Weissbrod 2004), the role that siblings play in identity formation (Wong et al. 2010) and discussions about sex between best friends (Lefkowitz et al. 2004).

Sociologists of youth argue that youth is a social process, a social construction that has no innate meaning, but rather exists in relation to the concept(s) of adulthood, which is itself a relational concept that has no single, clear definition (Blatterer 2007, Côté 2000, Jones and Schneider 2009, White and Wyn 2013, Wyn and White 1997). The ill-defined nature of when and what youth is makes it a fluid concept that can adapt to the cultural and social contexts of the places and spaces it is applied. However, apart from the pejorative use of the term ‘youth’ in both academia and media, the conceptualization of
youth solely as a process fails to differentiate the experiences of adolescents from those with legal status as an adult. Emerging adulthood has a clear definition of emerging adults and adults, as defined by emerging adults in that stage of life. The use of “emerging adulthood” instead of youth allows a differentiated exploration of the lives of those of legal age from adolescents, in those situations where it is appropriate – and particularly in the study of middle class young people from Western countries.

Emerging adulthood has considerable advantages for sociological research, yet faces a number of challenges from sociologists arguing against adding a phase to the life course. The most prominent argument is that any psycho-social developmental “stages” (Erikson 1951, 1959, 1968, Hall 1904) underplay the importance of structural and institutional factors on the life course, particularly in adolescence and the early twenties (Bynner 2005, Côté 2009, Côté and Allahar 1994, Côté and Bynner 2008, Hendry and Kloep 2007, 2011, Kloep and Hendry 2011). Developmental frameworks cannot explain the differences in experience across cultural and class divides:

Childhood does not exist – nor does adolescence or emerging adulthood: children join the work force as soon as they are able. We still find this economic system in rural areas in Africa, Latin America, and Asia, and, for example, in indigenous rural and poor urban communities in the Peruvian Andes, Guatemala, and Panama (Hendry and Kloep 2011, p. 80).

The thrust of this critique is that the psycho-social developmental framework, and the concept of stages, are privileged experiences of wealthy societies, and as such are
dependent on cultural context. Arnett acknowledges this critical perspective in the first chapter of *Emerging Adulthood*:

Emerging adulthood is not a universal period of human development but a period that exists under certain conditions that have occurred only quite recently and only in some cultures... Emerging adulthood exists today mainly in the industrialized or “postindustrial” countries of the West, along with Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea (Arnett 2004, p. 21).

Even within industrialized or post-industrial societies emerging adulthood is not a universal experience, but is a largely middle class experience, and strongly affected by ethnic and religious backgrounds. Critics such as Bynner (2005) have examined the conditions in many post industrial societies in order to demonstrate the variability of emerging adulthood. Although theories of emerging adulthood bear traces of their origins in developmental frameworks, its later formulations allow it to be a useful concept for sociological research. Emerging adulthood is not conceptually fixed as a stage in the psycho-social developmental framework in the traditional sense. It does not need to be treated as an inevitable or normative part of the life cycle, but rather is the outcome of a mixture of social, structural, and cultural conditions that have created an opportunity for individualised development. Not everyone that might be classified as an “emerging adult” will engage with this period by exploring career options, relationships or their sense of self, nor is this considered to be a problem for those individuals who marry young, find entry level full time work out of high school or feel that they have a secure sense of their own identity. However, such a path will be
considered unusual by cultural standards of countries where “emerging adulthood” has become the norm (rather than normative). The challenge for this research is in identifying the impact this life stage has on the ability of young people to successfully navigate the social and structural processes of contemporary Australian society.

**Structural and social changes in late 20th century Australia**

The emerging adulthood literature is largely based in psychology and almost nothing has been published in an Australian context. However the changes in Australian society over the past three decades have produced the conditions for “emerging adulthood” to be a common experience for middle class young people in this country. These conditions mirror other Western countries but with variations specific to Australia, such as a high median age at which people first marry, and the high levels of home ownership amongst Australians. Many of these conditions and their changes have been studied in the transitions framework. A perspective based on the concepts of emerging adulthood put them in a different light, and highlights how these changes have become an expected part of the experiences of young people.

**Work and education**

For a long time the separation of work and education served as a useful indicator of adult status, once a person left school they entered the workforce, and there was rarely an overlap. In the period following the Second World War few young people finished year 12 at high school and fewer went to university. In Australia the demand for
secondary education and higher education boomed, after a substantial increase in funding to universities that saw nearly two dozen institutions founded within the space of three decades, the abolition of university fees, and significant structural changes which saw the loss of well paid unskilled jobs. Between 1946 and 1956 student enrolments increased by 38.6% for men, and decreased by 18.1% for women, but "the following decade the increases were 147% for males and 390% for females" (Short 1970, p. 292). Access to education heavily favoured those who could afford private education, with the retention rate to year 12 being anywhere up to 36% higher for non-government students in 1974, depending upon the state (Edgar 1980, p. 79).

After the decline of manufacturing in the 1970s and 80s tertiary education became much more of a necessity, in 1966 almost half (46%) of all Australians worked in production industries, in 2011 this was 23%, with almost all employment growth in the service sector (ABS 2011a, p. 5). This arguably has increased the vulnerability of many young people, particularly those from rural (Alston and Kent 2009, Edgar 1980) and socially disadvantaged backgrounds (Macdonald and Marsh 2004). Between 1983 and 1992 the apparent retention rate to year 12 increased from 40.6% to 77.1%, and the percentage of 15 to 24 year olds in any form of education increased from 36.5% to 49.1% (Castles 1994, p. 78, Easthope 2000, p. 337). In 2007 this rate had increased to 74.3%, and includes university degrees, diplomas, and apprenticeships (Pink 2008a, p. 86). Between 1986 and 1997 the number of students enrolling in universities doubled, with more women enrolled than men (Carpenter and Hayden 2000, pp. 365-8). In the past
decade concerns over the loss of trade skills due to the upcoming retirement of the Baby Boomers and the lure of the mining industry, has seen a push towards getting young people to take up apprenticeships, and 49% of students were studying at the certificate or diploma level in 2010 (ABS 2010c).

The unfortunate downside to this enormous growth in education is the rise in credentialism; a job that previously required a year 12 certificate soon required a Bachelor’s degree at entry level, whether the position required it or not (White and Wyn 2013, p. 149). Between 1984 and 1993 the number of people between 15 and 69 years with a post secondary qualification increased from 35.5% to 43.2% (Castles 1994, p. 78). Between 1997 and 2007 the percentage of 25 to 64 year olds with post secondary qualifications increased from 45.5% to 59.4% (Pink 2008a, p. 86). This includes an increase in the people with Bachelor’s degrees or greater from 10% in 1990 to 24% in 2006 (Pink 2008a, p. 93). In 2010-2011 79% of all employees were in employment that was the same or relevant to their highest qualification (Pink 2012a, p. 13). However young people often have to endure five to ten years of entry level type employment before finding a stable job that matched their level and type of education (White and Wyn 2013, p. 149). Further complicating matters young people with postgraduate degrees are often considered too overqualified for entry level jobs, but without experience they cannot get jobs commensurate with their education (Michael Oct 16, 2012).
Australia enjoyed a time of considerable affluence in the decades following the Second World War, for almost thirty years following 1945 there was little to no unemployment for white males in Australia (Bessant and Watts 2002, p. 284). The same could not be said for women, who were encouraged to ‘make room’ for the returning soldiers and leave the jobs that they had taken up during the war and return to households and ‘traditional’ family roles. This inequality was institutionalised, for instance until 1966 the Australian Public Service could force any female employee that married to resign (Australian Government 2008, p. 1, Baxter 2000, p. 101). In 1967 only 40.8% of women were working full time (compared to 83.1% for men) and 28.2% of women were working part time (Boreham and Hall 2000, p. 176).

1972 saw the introduction of equal pay for equal work legislation, the Sex Discrimination Act was introduced in 1984 and the Affirmative Action Act in 1986, all seeking to address gender inequality. In some areas this was successful, with more women entering the workforce than in the decades before, though 73.8 percent of all part time jobs were occupied by women in 1998 (ABS 1998). In other areas much was left to be desired, access to maternity leave, paid and unpaid, was limited, and women still contributed more to household tasks and child care than their male counterparts (Baxter 2000, pp. 101, 102-4). Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and despite the equal pay for equal work legislation, women continued to earn substantially less than men in similar occupations (Baxter 2000, p. 107, Western 2000, p. 81).
The late 70s and 80s were a period of significant economic upheaval and labour market restructuring in Australia and elsewhere. Australia experienced a serious economic recession in 1982-83, causing a spike in unemployment, slowing of growth and increasing budget deficits, followed by a further spike in unemployment in 1992 (ABS 2011a). Many of the well-paid jobs in the manufacturing industry moved overseas, and young people’s opportunities, for both men and women, became more centred on the low paying jobs in the service industry (Wooden 1996). Between 1975 and 1995 unemployment for 15 to 24 year olds jumped from 9 percent to 15.4 percent, and full time employment dropped from 81 percent to just 55 percent (Easthope 2000, p. 332). Between 1997 and 2007 unemployment for 15 to 24 year olds dropped from 15.2% to 8.4%, a rate which has stayed steady at almost twice the national unemployment rate (Pink 2008a, p. 113). The disparity in the levels of income between young people and adults increased, for example in 1995, 15-19 year olds working full time earned just 44.6% of those aged 25 or older, and 20-24 year olds earned 72.5% of those aged 25 or older (ABS 1997a).

These changes in employment were not localised to young people, between 1971 and 1996 the overall participation rate for men declined from 83.1 percent to 73.4 percent despite an increase in the number of part time jobs employing men (Boreham and Hall 2000, p. 176). In 2009 only 31% of 15 to 24 year olds were in full time employment (ABS 2010b). For those not engaged in any form of study 5% were unemployed, 6% were not in the labour force and 8% of people worked part time (ABS 2010b). In 1993 30% of full
time students were also working, 90% in part time employment. 86% of part time
students were also working, 84% of those in full time work (Castles 1994, p. 88). The
use of temporary workers has evolved to become part of the long-term staffing
strategies for many employers, who prefer the flexibility that contracts offer over
permanent staffing (Michael Nov 28, 2012). This affects young people and women
disproportionately, 56% of all casuals were women in 2007, and “two-fifths of casuals
were aged 15-24 years compared with 14% of other employees” (ABS 2009a, p. 18).

The effects of these changes are mixed for young people in contemporary Australia. For
women there are considerably more protections in place than for those of previous
generations, but they are highly likely to be employed in low paid jobs with low security.
Men are much less likely to be employed full time, and those who do are unlikely to be
earning a wage that allows them to fulfil the ‘traditional’ gender role of breadwinner for
a family. Many of the young people who finished degrees and travelled overseas to
work have recently found living in places such as the UK too difficult and returned home,
only to find that there are few opportunities for professionals (Dart 2008, Tadros 2009).
The sustained push to entice school leavers in to apprenticeships has the problem that
the downturn in the economy means there is less construction work, and businesses are
unable to support young trainees (Karmel and Misko 2009). While young people might
have better opportunities for well paid employment in their late twenties and early
thirties than their parent’s generation, their experiences in the workplace until their mid
twenties are likely to be low paid and lacking in security, and dominated by a need for
post-secondary education. Within the emerging adulthood framework these conditions are characterised as ‘possibility’ and ‘instability’; the options that young people have to choose from are far greater than were available to previous generations, but they are far less likely to have long term stability.

**Marriage and parenthood**

Historically marriage has been the event that distinguishes an adult in society, associated with the establishment of a new home and the responsibility of caring for another person, and eventually children. Many young people delayed marriage due to the Second World War, in 1940s Australia the median age for men at the age they first married was 26.5 years, and for women it was 23.7 (ABS 1997a, p. 27). The post war period saw a push towards traditional family formation causing a ‘marriage boom’ (Carmichael 1987, p. 245), and the median age of Australians as they first married dropped until reaching its nadir in 1974, when it reached 23.3 years for men and 20.9 years for women (ABS 1997a, p. 27). The mid 70s was a time of profound social change, the sexual revolution altered attitudes towards marriage and relationships. The age at which Australians steadily increased from this point, in 1994 the median age had risen to 29.0 for men and 26.6 for women (McLennan 1994, p. 2), and in 2005 was 30.0 for men and 28.0 for women (Linacre 2007, pp. 1-2).

The idea that marriage is a lifelong commitment with specific gender roles has changed since The Family Law Act 1975 (C’wlth) introduced no fault divorce to Australia, which
made it simpler for women to leave unsuccessful marriages (Sargent 1983, p. 74), but also increased the importance of equitable working conditions for the many women who might be required to support themselves and their dependents in paid employment. Divorce rates spiked briefly in 1976 with 63 230 divorces granted before dropping sharply, followed by steady increases in the decades that followed. There was a 12 percent increase in the number of divorces granted between 1984 and 1994 (McLennan 1994, p. 3), and an 8% increase between 1994 and 2005 (Linacre 2007, p. 1).

The period before marriage has changed substantially as well, with the percentage of de-facto relationships and cohabitation before marriage increasing dramatically since the 1960s, when the rate was just 5%. By 1975 the rate of cohabitation preceding marriage was 16%, in 1992 this had risen to 52%, and by 2001 the rate was 72% (Carmichael 1991, Dempsey and de Vaus 2004, p. 161). These changes signal a shift in the understanding of marriage as being both the only appropriate form for committed relationships, and a commitment made for life.

The number of marriages reached its height during the early years of the Second World War, with marriage being considered ‘universal’ for most of the early twentieth century (Carmichael 1987). However following the marriage boom of the 1950s and early 1960s more men and women chose not to marry at all. By 1986 the percentage of the population over 15 years of age who were never married was 29%, increasing to 32% by 2001 (Linacre 2007). Marriage is no longer the primary goal of relationships for young people (Du Bois-Reymond et al. 1994), nor is it any longer the norm for young adults.
leaving the parental home (Molgat and Vézina 2008). The importance of marriage to young people as an institution in Australian society has shifted dramatically since the Second World War, particularly the importance of marriage to adulthood, as evidenced by the clear shifts in when, or if, people enter into formal marriages.

Being a parent is endowed with a much stronger sense of obligation and responsibility, as the relationship with a child endures long past the breakdown of a relationship with a spouse. The marriage boom following the Second World War was accompanied by a ‘baby boom’ (Carmichael 1987, p. 245), an enormous growth in the Australian population which reached a peak of 3.55 children per woman in 1961 (ABS 2010d, p. 1). Fertility declined rapidly after the baby boom, and by 1976 the birth rate in Australia had fallen below 2.1 children per woman, the level required to replace the population (ABS 1997a, p. 8, Mitchell and Gray 2007). The “Total Fertility Rate”\(^3\) (TFR) dropped to its lowest point in 2001, reaching just 1.73 babies per woman, though the introduction of the “baby bonus” by the Howard government helped that rate climb to 1.96 in 2008 (ABS 2010d).

There has been a long standing trend towards delaying first having children that mirrors the delays in marriage. In 1966 the median age for first time mothers in Australia was 23.0 years, increasing to 26.5 in 1986 (Castles 1993, p. 17), and 28.9 in 2011 (ABS 2011b). In 2008 42.2% of first time mothers were over the age of 30 (Laws et al. 2010, p. 17).

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\(^3\) The Total Fertility Rate is the total number of children a woman is expected to bear over her lifetime given current trends in fertility.
During the recent period when the TFR increased the peak fertility group were women aged 30 to 34 years, with the majority of births attributed to women aged 30 to 39 (ABS 2005, Harper 2005). However there have also been incremental increases in the number of women remaining childless, with 9% of women aged 45-49 childless in 1986, 11% a decade later, and 14% in 2006 (ABS 2006). In 2006 the most common type of household was couples with children, followed closely by childless couples. However this is projected to reverse in the next two decades, spurred by an ageing population of ‘empty nesters’ and couples choosing not to procreate (ABS 2010a). The relationship between marriage and parenthood has also changed, there is less importance placed on the need for children to be born within wedlock. In 1983 15% of births were ‘ex-nuptial’, by 1993 this had increased to 25% of all births in Australia (Castles 1993, p. 1, Harper 2005). In 2011 33% of all births were to parents who were not in a registered marriage (ABS 2011b). These trends show a marked change in the importance of parenthood in Australian society, as well as a shift in the importance of the “traditional” path to parenthood.

Marriage and parenthood have traditionally had very strong ties with the understanding of adulthood in Australian society, responsibility and commitment to others is a clear signal that an individual has matured beyond the self involvement of adolescence. However, as has been demonstrated here, the difference between the age where an Australian is legally an adult and the median point at which they are likely to marry or have children is a decade for women, and more for men. Coupled with the decreasing
likelihood that a man or woman will ever marry or have children, it is reasonable to argue that marriage and parenthood are not critical in understanding adulthood in contemporary Australian society. This is one of the important features of emerging adulthood, relationships do not have a central role in decision making during this period of life, and identities are not necessarily defined around position in a partnership.

**Leaving home and buying a home**

Leaving the parental home to establish an independent household, or simply to establish independence, has long been associated with adulthood, and was often related with marriage. For many young people who have delayed serious coupling, particularly those who are studying, it is simply too expensive to live away from home. Across Australia 23% of people aged 20-34 were living with their parents in 2006, up from 19% in 1986 (ABS 2009c, Masanauskas Aug 14, 2012). Young men are slightly more likely than young women to live with their parents, and leave home slightly later (median age for first leaving home is 20.9 years for men, and 19.8 for women). 94% of young people have left home by the age of 28 (ABS 2009c). The reasons for this are numerous, however “almost half (45%) of people aged 20-24 years who had never left home said that the main reason was financial” (ABS 2009c, p. 27), though 36% of respondents indicated that they remained because they enjoyed living with their parents (White and Wyn 2013, p. 131). The 1980s and 1990s saw an increase in the dependence of young people on their parents and the state (Maas 1990). The increased casualisation of the workforce, the rise in youth unemployment, and the subsequent
necessity for remaining in school to year 12 and beyond decreased the opportunities for young people to establish independent households. These problems were exacerbated by the policies of successive Australian governments, for instance when the Howard government changed the Austudy regulations to make full time students dependent on their parents until the age of 25 (Easthope 2000, p. 331), they increased the difficulty young people faced in becoming independent.

The costs of living independently have increased substantially over the past decades, with young people often the most vulnerable, forcing many of them to return to live with their parents at some point (Jones 2004). The Consumer Price Index rose 35.85% between 31 December 1999 and 30 September 2009 (ABS 2009b, Pink 2009) and another 9.8% between September 2009 and September 2012 (Pink 2012b), with significant rises in the costs of electricity, rent, food and petrol ('Food price rises mean more pain at the checkout' Feb 5 2009, Wages can't keep up with prices' Aug 16 2011, Christiansen Oct 22 2008). Recent data from the ABS reports that one in seven Australian households is “spending more than it earns” (Bita 2012). The considerable increases in median rent prices have long been a cause for concern in Australia (Anderson and Hughes 2009, McCarthy and Stolz 2009), with weekly rent prices rising by 50 percent just between 2006 and 2011 (Farr Jun 21, 2012). As a consequence young people are more likely to return to the family home after leaving than in previous

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4 The base for this index is the financial year 1989-90, which set the CPI at 100. A long-term linked series set the CPI index at 100 in 1945, and shows an increase in the CPI between 1945 and 2008 of 2840% (Pink, 2009). The index was reset for the financial year 2011-12 (Pink, 2012).
generations, with 31% of people aged 20-34 having moved out and returned at some point, and “the probability that someone would return home at least once before turning 35 was almost one in two (46%)” (ABS 2009c). This phenomenon has lead to such experiences being labelled “yo-yo transitions” (Biggart and Walther 2006, Du Bois-Reymond and Blasco 2003, Jones 2004) or “boomerang kids” (Côté and Allahar 1994, p. 53, Mitchell and Gee 1996, Okimoto and Stegall 1987), and rather more offensively “kidults” or “KIPPERS: Kids In Parents’ Pockets Eroding Retirement Savings” (Paine Jul 6 2012). The reasons given for returning home are usually financial, young people not in relationships are increasingly facing high burdens in the cost of living that they simply cannot meet. Despite these trends approximately three out of four Australians will have moved out of their parents’ home by their early twenties, even if it’s temporary, leaving home is arguably a useful component in understanding adulthood in contemporary Australia.

Australians have long prized owning their home, and Australia has one of the highest rates of home ownership in the world. For the forty years leading up to 2006 the rate of home ownership in Australia was steady at almost 70% (Pink 2011, p. 14). While it is difficult to make clear historical comparisons in the relative affordability of housing (HIA 2010), it is clear that in the 1960s the cost of buying homes was reasonable, within the reach of the majority of Australians (Shaver 2000, p. 349). The cost of housing in
Australia has largely been “affordable”\(^5\), but in the last decade there has been a well documented rise in housing prices. In Brisbane the median house price rose from $144 500 in 2000 to $433 900 in 2012, an increase of 200% (Keane 2012b, Liebke 2000, Pink 2012c, Robinson and Riethoff 2009). According to the Reserve Bank the largest contingent of home owners are those over 70, followed closely by the Baby Boomers. The Baby Boomers “led the real estate investment boom last decade, which... pushed prices out of reach for many” (Keane 2012a).

For young people trying to get into the housing market this poses several problems. Nationally the affordability index is at 5.6, and for Brisbane it is 6.0\(^6\) (Cox and Pavletich 2012). The increasingly high cost of housing means that it is necessary to have two incomes to repay a mortgage on a house in many parts of the US and in metropolitan Australia (Twenge 2006, p. 199). In the 2011/12 financial year a 20 percent deposit for a home based on the median national house price was $77 600, requiring an average of three years and nine months to save (Scott 2012), an average was based on income date for couples aged 25 to 34 year olds. Young people have always had to borrow more to purchase a home, and because they often have higher job mobility they have considerably more difficulty in securing loans ('Home ownership difficult for Gen Y' Dec 21 2009). Home ownership with a mortgage is something that younger cohorts are more likely to do, with 81% of first home buyers in 2009-10 aged between 25 and 44

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\(^5\) Housing is considered “affordable” when the ratio of median house prices to median annual income is between 2.0 and 3.0 (Cox and Pavletich, 2012: 1).

\(^6\) The two largest metropolitan Australian markets are much less affordable; Sydney is at 9.2 and Melbourne is at 8.4.
years (Pink 2011, p. 16). However 66.7% of first home buyers with a mortgage in 2009-10 were couples, or couples with dependent children (Pink 2011, p. 24), a proportion that has remained reasonably stable since 1995-96.

It is clear that owning a home is a strong and persistent Australian value, which has survived the massive increases in housing prices and the turmoil caused by the recent global financial crisis. The chances are good that most young people will own their own home at some stage, however it is highly unlikely that they will do so before the age of 25, or before they have formed a committed relationship. Given the difficulties in simply saving for a deposit before this point, it is reasonable to argue that owning a home may be a sign of adulthood, but being an adult does not require owning a home. However the inability for many young people to purchase a home, or even to move out of their parent’s home, may contribute to the sense of emerging adulthood as being a period of “in-between” adulthood and adolescence, as both of these acts are linked to notions of independence and autonomy.

**Emerging adulthood as a ‘social generation’: Generational differences in Australia**

The scope of the structural and social changes in the Western world has profound effects that cross generations, and affect the ways in which generations interact. These inter-generational affects impact on emerging adults and contribute to the understanding of emerging adulthood as a life stage. In Australia the concept of ‘social
generations’ signals the different experiences of various cohorts, known generally as the ‘Baby Boomers’, ‘Generation X’ and ‘Generation Y’ in the popular media. The concepts of social generations focus on specific historical experiences rather than universal experiences implied by the concepts of ‘youth’ and ‘transitions’ in sociological studies. Emerging adulthood presents a thick description of the current ‘social generation’, providing a context for the process of becoming an adult in contemporary Australia in terms that are recognisable in the discourses around individuals at that stage of life.

Social generations

The use of “social generation” to describe a cohort of people born under similar social and structural conditions (as distinct from generations within families) has been common practice for decades, perhaps not academically but certainly in popular media (Mannheim 1952, Pilcher 1994). The utility of generations as a framing concept is that it allows the locating and contrasting of views, experiences and values according to the social conditions during the time that young people are born and have grown up (Rojek 2005a, pp. 131-2). The idea of a “generation gap” was created to describe the significant differences between the ‘Baby Boomers’, born after the Second World War, and their elders (Mackay 1997, Short 1970), but has continued to be used to describe the perceived antagonism between each successive generation, their parents and their older peers. The number of terms used to describe the successive generations is considerable and include, in no particular order, the lucky generation, the greatest generation, Baby Boomers, the ‘me’ generation, and generation ‘me’ (Twenge 2006),
though oddly this refers to a different cohort, Generation X (Coupland 1991),
Generation Y, generation z, the ‘lost’ generation, Millennials, the Nintendo generation,
the options generation, the 9/11 generation, Generation Jones, and the baby busters

These generation labels have the same difficulty that the term ‘youth’ has; there is no
clear definition of which cohort they refer to, when the generations begin and end, or
whether they exist at all. For example the term ‘baby busters’ is only sometimes used to
refer to a cohort immediately following the ‘Baby Boomers’ and preceding ‘Generation X’
(Mackay 1997). Additionally the popular descriptions provided of the various cohorts
are inconsistent and often directly contradictory, such as the questioning of the abilities
of Generation Y to manage their economic affairs in times of economic adversity ('Gen Y
spending on as times get tougher' Aug 17 2008, Gen Y urged to be realistic on job
options' July 27 2009, Bela Aug 27 2011), which are followed by articles praising
Generation Y for being thrifty and avoiding credit traps ('Gen Y play their cards right by
avoiding credit' Sep 10 2012, Elsworth Dec 24 2012). Such turnarounds are not without
a certain measure of incredulity:

Is it possible? Could it be? Does that lazy, indecisive bunch from Generation Y
actually have the whole work-life balance sorted? Further, should we oldies
actually (gasp) be following their lead? (Fynes-Clinton Mar 15 2012)

The common trend in the different portrayals of generational cohorts is the parochial
disdain with which the young are treated, in much the same way as the discourses around youth treat the young as separate from the mainstream or perpetually at risk. The general descriptions of the different generations have some similar themes, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y have all been accused of being selfish, self-centred, and apathetic, while also being considered to be better educated and more in tune with technological advances than their elders.

The major Australian research into young people and generational change is the Life-Patterns research project (Dwyer et al. 2003, Dwyer et al. 2001, Dwyer and Wyn 2001, Smith et al. 2007, Wyn et al. 2008, Wyn and Woodman 2006). The first wave of research followed 2000 young Australians who left high school in 1991, and the second wave of research followed 4500 people that left high school in 2005. The researchers argue, as does this thesis, for the defining of a ‘new adulthood’ that takes into account the fundamental changes in Australian society:

Rather than seeing young people’s transition processes as problematic or faulty, the evidence from the Life-Patterns Study provides evidence that a new process for becoming adult is emerging... Such an approach should recognise that social change has affected the meanings of both youth and adulthood in the 2000s. It should shift from a narrow, economistic approach that focuses only on young people’s academic and employment outcomes. It should incorporate a focus on health and wellbeing outcomes for young people, and develop frameworks for understanding the uses that young people make of education, work and leisure in shaping their lives (Wyn 2004, p. 12).
As has been discussed the cohorts that became adults from the 1970s have delayed starting a family, extended their education and changed how they entered the workforce. The conditions of late modernity have shifted the focus from these ‘narrow, economistic’ transitions towards individualized criteria for judging adulthood. What form does such an approach take? Wyn and Woodman (2006) frame their approach in terms of a “post-1970” social generation, arguing that those born after this point have experienced significantly different experiences of adulthood than that experienced by the Baby Boomers (Furlong, Woodman and Wyn 2011, Wyn and Woodman 2006).

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 1.1 Positions of social generations at the time of reaching adulthood**

Conceptualising the experiences of young Australians within a “post-1970” social generation is not entirely satisfactory, as there is at least one significant difference between the cohorts labelled “Generation X” and “Generation Y” worth discussing. Figure 1.1 illustrates the relationship between the social generations and the familial
generations, locating them at the time when they experienced adulthood\textsuperscript{7}. The Baby Boomers, born after the Second World War, were becoming adults at the end of the 1960s and throughout the 1970s. Their experiences of nascent adulthood involved considerable social change, which they played a considerable part in spurring on (McDonald and Evans 2003). Education had increased in importance, and there were structural changes in the workforce that affected the Baby Boomers, though most would have been well established by the recession of 82-83. Importantly the values of the Baby Boomers cohort were considered to diverge so significantly from their parents and the post-war Generation that the term “generation gap” was coined. The social and economic trends established in the 1970s expanded in the 1980s, as “Generation X” moved into adulthood the gap between the young and their parents’ experience of becoming adult widened. Where the post-war generation had clearly defined gender roles, Generation X had feminism and equality; where the post-war generation had full employment, Generation X had massive unemployment; where the post-war generation prioritised family, Generation X prized individuality and exploration of self-identity.

The current generation of 18 to 30 year olds, commonly referred to as “Generation Y”, are seeing a reversal of this ‘generation gap’. Generation Y’s parents, the Baby Boomers, share many of the values that underpin this period of life, such as a focus on self

\textsuperscript{7}Two of the frequently repeated criticisms of any generational framework are that the assignation of any one generation starting and ending on any particular date is arbitrary (as evidenced by the many different time periods assigned to Baby Boomers, Generation X and Gen Y), and that they do not constitute clearly defined, uniform cohorts (Arnett and Schwab 2012, Mannheim 1952). Figure 1.1 aims to capture the broad social and structural cross-generational distinctions, without becoming bogged down with insupportable details.
development, individuality and gender equality (Mackay 1997, 2007, McCrindle and Wolfinger 2009). The two generations also share some of the same social and structural conditions that inform and define their development as adults, such as the diminishing importance placed on traditional marriage, the increasing availability of tertiary education and the broadening of scope of acceptable personal relationships. However they differ considerably in their experiences of the workforce and independent living, the Baby Boomers had to contend with less casualisation of the workforce, lower unemployment and had far more affordable housing than is currently available. The nature of generational conflict has shifted, while the Baby Boomers may not be able to draw on their own experiences to understand the structural difficulties that Generation Y face, they can certainly sympathise with the desire to explore the self and the world as part of the process of becoming an adult.

Emerging adulthood as thick description for a social generation

The emerging adulthood literature offers a “thick description” for the process of becoming an adult for the current cohort of young Australians, in that it provides a clear context for the experiences of young people as they become an adult in terms that have meaning for the emerging adults themselves (Geertz 1973). The characterizations of emerging adults has the potential to add considerable detail to sociological studies of young Australians as they become adults. The term “emerging adult” implies several

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8 A second shift in the nature of generational conflict may occur as the “Generation Z” or “Millennials” cohort approach adulthood, as their parents, Generation X, will be able to draw upon their own experiences in sympathising with the difficulties their children face in the workforce and in establishing an independent household. It would be nice to think that this will lighten the burden for young people somewhat, but it seems unlikely.
crucial aspects of the experience of becoming an adult; namely the process of the adult ‘emerging’ from the individual, the individualised nature of adulthood, as well as the distinction that is made between emerging adults and adults in Australian society without the negative connotations associated with other terms, such as ‘youth’ or ‘kidult’. The characteristics of emerging adulthood as outlined by Arnett (Arnett 2004, Arnett and Tanner 2006) are visible in the social, structural and cultural conditions of young people in Australian society, as well as describing the individual experiences of becoming an adult. The criteria identified by theorists of emerging adulthood as important for self-identification as an adult (Arnett 2003) closely correspond to those life goals from the Life-Patterns research program (Dwyer et al. 2003, Dwyer et al. 2001, Wyn et al. 2008), indicating agreement around cultural values appropriate to study.\footnote{The Our Lives project is a longitudinal study into the attitudes and experiences of young people in Brisbane, sharing many similarities with the Life Patterns research program and the focus of this thesis (http://www.artsonline.monash.edu.au/ourlives/). However the first wave of participants were 12 years of age, and it is only in the fifth wave (scheduled to begin in mid 2013) that the participants would be over the age of 18.}

Emerging adulthood is a social construction, as are adulthood, adolescence, youth and childhood; a product of late modern industrial society. Within Australia the large majority of young people go through a period of emerging adulthood, as evidenced by the shift in the values of young people and their understanding of adulthood. The three criteria consistently nominated in studies of emerging adults as the most important for defining adulthood are taking responsibility for one’s actions, autonomy and financial independence (Arias and Hernández 2007, Arnett 2001, 2003, Badger et al. 2006, Facio et al. 2007, Nelson and Chen 2007). In the Life-Patterns research program the life goals...
ranked highest (by a first cohort of 27 year olds in 2000 and a second cohort of 17 year olds in 2005) were “to have financial security”, “to develop my abilities to the fullest”, and “to care and provide for a family” (Wyn et al. 2008, p. 25). The similarities here are close, the need for financial security/independence, taking responsibility for one’s actions can lead to being able to provide for a family, and the ability to make one’s own decisions is certainly related to the development of one’s abilities to the fullest.

These values and criteria for adulthood reflect the characterisation of emerging adulthood as a time of self-focus and identity exploration (Arnett 2004). What in the 1960s and 70s was seen as “rebellion” and in the 1980s and 90s was seen as “selfish slacking” (Arnett 2007d), is now seen with a peculiar mixture of positive and negative attributes. The consequences of spending years on personal development without attendant responsibilities is often characterised as producing ‘spoilt’ and ‘self-indulgent’ young people with unrealistic expectations of what is possible (‘Gen Y can't afford to be 'job snobs'' July 26 2009, Ranke Sep 27 2012, Stokes Dec 26 2012), characterisations which are equally often challenged as being inaccurate (‘Stereotype broken on Generation Y' Feb 13 2011, Elsworth and Tin Mar 13 2012, Kemp Jul 30 2010). As discussed earlier this characterisation of emerging adulthood as a time of self-focus and of identity exploration is closely linked to the individualization thesis; the ‘choice biographies’ (Du Bois-Reymond 1998) and ‘reflexive project of the self’ (Giddens 1991) are life-long endeavours, and constrained by gender, class and cultural considerations (Skrbis et al. 2012, White and Wyn 2013). However, as emerging adulthood is a time
largely free of responsibilities, obligations or age related restrictions individuals have considerably more latitude to make choices than when they were adolescents, or when they have careers, families and mortgages.

The characterisation of the period of emerging adulthood as a time of ‘instability’ and of ‘possibilities’ reflects the social and structural changes in Australian society. In the emerging adulthood literature ‘possibilities’ usually refers to the range of personal relationships that are socially acceptable (Arnett 2004, Carroll et al. 2007, Lanz and Tagliabue 2007), and instability often refers to the changing living circumstances of the young, who are much more likely to move houses on a regular basis. The idea of emerging adulthood being a period of ‘possibilities’ is certainly congruent with the individualization thesis, the necessity for individuals to make their own choices rather than relying upon the state and traditional norms for guidance, as well as the opportunities afforded for and by education and travel can convey the impression that anything is possible. The working conditions for many young people involve employment that is low paid and lack security, making emerging adulthood a period of instability, particularly in times of hardship. This is compounded by young people often having very little in the way of savings or assets, and the dismantling of the social welfare state has meant emerging adults are especially vulnerable to significant downturns in the economy, even when they come from backgrounds of privilege.

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10 Globalization is an important consideration in making emerging adulthood a time of possibilities, the opportunities afforded by international travel in particular. However the issues of globalization are beyond the scope of this thesis.
The expectations of what it means to be an adult have changed, from the perspective of emerging adults, their parents and society as a whole. Society still defines adulthood in part through the transition markers of marriage, parenthood, career and leaving home, however these are no longer considered necessary achievements in order to reach adulthood. The individualistic criteria that emerging adults identify as necessary for adulthood are achievable without reaching any of the markers, as is recognition as an adult (one can live at home and be unmarried yet still financially independent, responsible and autonomous). This makes the period of emerging adulthood a time of ‘feeling in-between’, where they recognise that they are distinct from adolescents, but do not feel that they are fulfilling the ill-defined role of adult (Arnett 2004).

The place that emerging adults awkwardly occupy in society sees them simultaneously lambasted for their inability to ‘achieve’ a stable and productive position in society (through such mechanisms as full time employment and home ownership) while being valorised for the supposed freedoms that are associated with being young. The policies of the State identify the vulnerabilities of young people in order to guide them into adopting mainstream values and an appropriate lifestyle (Wyn 2009). The language of the moral panics of the 50s and 60s and the negative aspects of the discourses on youth and Generation X, and the popular characterisation of “Generation Y” as selfish, apathetic slackers are widespread, affecting how young people are treated by their peers, their parents, the media, their employers and the state, as well as informing their
own sense of self during this period. The positive aspects of emerging adulthood, the freedom from responsibility, the carefree attitude, the ‘boundless’ opportunities and the sense of being ‘other’ from society, are used to market to the cohort of young people. This is the contradiction that each emerging adult must deal with, they are rebuked for failing to meet standards of adulthood that are ill-defined and towards which they receive little to no support, yet they are envied for the lifestyle they are able to live because they are young and have no responsibilities.

This thesis has adopted the emerging adulthood framework to address the research questions, as it provides a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of young people’s lives in contemporary Australia, presenting an explanation of both the behaviour of emerging adults and context of emerging adulthood in a way that is meaningful to outsiders. The term ‘emerging adulthood’ is preferable to the other terms heavily laden with negative connotations, as its relative newness means it has little in the way of negative associations. Its relationship to psychological literatures encourages focus on the individual’s perspective, allowing for an exploration of the subjective experiences of being an emerging adult. This is of particular concern given the individualised nature of late modernity, and the specific focus in this research on young people from middle class backgrounds, as opposed to those from situations putting them at high risk of marginalization. However, in conjunction with the application of a sociological framework, this subjectivist methodology allows for an interrogation of the relationship that individual trajectories and experiences have to various patterned social and
structural conditions, and the interplay between both that impacts on participants’ understanding and self-identification of adulthood. The following chapter outlines the methods used in this research, which focused on the subjective experiences of the respondents, reflecting their individual choices and understandings of emerging adulthood, and the context in which they exist.
Chapter 2 – Research Design and Data Collection

The data collection for this project was shaped around a comprehensive exploration of respondents' social worlds, using in-depth, semi-structured interview. The participants for this research were selected using a theoretical or purposive sampling frame (Glaser and Strauss 1968, Minichello et al. 1995, Patton 1990), with the aim of interviewing roughly the same number of men and women whose circumstances matched those of emerging adulthood. Twenty-one full-length interviews were conducted with 10 men and 11 women. The interviews addressed three broad questions: how did respondents use their time? How did respondents create and maintain relationships? And, in the social world of the participants, what constitutes an adult? These questions sought to inductively explore the characteristics particular to the period of life of the respondents, allowing for an analysis that addresses both the sociological and psychological experiences and portrayals of young people. The first two questions provide context for the exploration of how the respondents understand adulthood and their self-identification as adults. By including these questions the conception of adulthood is explored as an abstraction, as a lived experience, and as a social construction.

Each of the research questions required a different research methodology. Open-ended questions were used for the last question and a personal (egonet) inventory was used for the second question. For the first question respondents were given a set of ‘activity generator’ questions (Chamberlain 2006, Chamberlain and Alexander 2005), derived from ‘name generator’ questions used in social network research (Burt 1983, 1984, Burt
and Minor 1983). These questions elicited the range of activities the respondents engaged in and then explored the meaning of these activities for them. The respondents were asked to link the activities they engaged in with the members of their personal communities, information which was used to create detailed network maps that were subsequently used for further qualitative inquiry.

Each methodology has its own form of data analysis. The activity questions required grounded theory coding of interviewee’s statements about the meaning of their activities to create a phenomenological categorisation of activities. The personal network inventory and subsequent discussion was analysed qualitatively, rather than using social network analysis, while the questions about the constitution of adults were analysed using thematic analysis.

This chapter begins with the epistemological and theoretical foundations upon which this research was based, arguing that social constructionism and phenomenology are appropriate in approaching the highly subjective and individualised experiences of emerging adults. The sampling parameters on age, relationship and economic status are specified, and an overview of the 21 respondents is presented. The methods and analytical techniques for each of the research questions is discussed in turn, from least complex to most.
The epistemological framework

This research adopts a social constructionist perspective. Social constructionism argues that the social world is constructed by the social interaction among people, and the meanings embedded in their everyday activities (Berger and Luckmann 1966, Burr 1995). There is recognition of an objective world independent of the participant, but any understanding of this world is dependent upon the meanings that are created by people; the world is ‘constructed’ by its individuals and groups.

Social constructionism offers a great deal of flexibility in researching the lives and experiences of emerging adults. The understanding or conceptualising of adulthood is less dependent upon the broad, measurable markers such as marriage or beginning a career, and more upon their own experiences with their parents, with leaving school, leaving home, in the workforce, etc. The individual’s activities, interests or pursuits may be defined or limited by their class position, gender or other structural factor; they may be a result of conscious choice or personal preference. The different activities and pursuits are embedded with meaning particular to the individual participant, which can change depending upon social context. Similarly, relationships between people can be affected by the circumstances of the individual, places of work, study and residence are all in part determined by socio-economic status, and the tendency to form homophilous relationships (Kalmijn and Vermunt 2007, Kandel 1978, Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954, McPherson et al. 2001) limits the people a respondent is most likely to be associated with. However the nature of those relationships will be constructed on an individual
basis, with meanings created as time goes on. Social constructionism does not mean
infinite individualism, the research methods are designed to find real ‘objective’
domains of inter-subjective agreement and consensus.

Other methods such as positivism offer a structured approached, using the scientific
method to explore a concrete reality. Positivist approaches are quantitative, measuring
social processes, the multitude of characteristics that can describe people and statistical
analysis of trends. These approaches benefit from a “scientific rigour” that allows them
to be tested and repeated, making the results comparable, and underpins many of the
larger research projects used in sociological research into young people, particularly life
course research (Hutchison 2011, Shanahan 2000, Skrbis et al. 2013). The difficulties
with positivism lie in the assumption that everything can be measured, quantified, and
produce the same results when research is replicated. While many of the characteristics
of emerging adults will be quantifiable, it does not follow that the experiences of
emerging adults will be defined by them. Social constructionism allows for the
exploration of structural factors while remaining flexible in exploring the individual’s
experiences of emerging adulthood, making it a more responsive epistemology for this
research.

**The theoretical perspective of the research**

Phenomenology (Schutz 1972 [1932]) argues that the world can only be understood
through exploring the social meanings that are created and shared by people.
Phenomenology shares many of the assumptions of social constructionism. Social reality is created by interactions between individuals, who will share some understanding of the meanings of social processes, and can create new meanings that they will share. Context can alter the content and meanings of social interaction; something as simple as a conversation between two people will change depending upon location (the workplace, university club, a lecture theatre, a wake, the beach etc) or relationship (siblings, colleagues, strangers, parent and child, friends, lovers, teacher and student, boss and employee etc).

Phenomenology’s strength for this research lies in the exploration of how emerging adults construct their social world through shared meanings at macro, micro and meso levels. At the macro level meanings are shared across very large communities, such as cities and nations, which enable people to interact in social situations. At the micro level meanings are created specific to the individual, as their experiences shape their relationships with activities, objects and social contexts. At the meso level phenomenology examines small groups, as interactions between two or more people create new meanings based on shared activities or social relationships. This thesis was concerned with the ways in which the respondents create micro and meso level meanings around notions of adulthood and personal communities, as well as the choices and limitations that structure their everyday activities.
Phenomenology is able to explore these different levels of meaning in ways that other approaches cannot. Phenomenology does not impose grand narratives upon its research subjects, the subject’s experiences are explored in their own terms. The meanings that emerging adults create to make sense of their lives can be analysed without reference to prior research or existing frameworks (Gubrium and Holstein 1997, Holstein and Gubrium 1994). While it is more difficult to employ in a research project, phenomenology offers a flexibility that is far more effective than quantitative or observational approaches at reflecting the experiences of emerging adults in their own terms.

Ethnography is often considered to be a more developed form of phenomenological research, and is widely used within the study of youth and transitions (Bennett 2000, 2001, 2004, 2006, Cohen and Ainley 2000, Cohen 1972, Hodkinson 2005, White 1993). An ethnographic researcher immerses themselves within their research area, concerning themselves with all aspects of the lives of the participants as it happens (Garfinkel 1967, Gubrium and Holstein 1997, Sarantakos 1993, Whyte 1943). However, there are two barriers to engaging in this ethnographic research that make it unsuitable for this project: there would need to be an identifiable, bounded group and the researcher needs to be able to devote considerable time and effort to immerse themselves within the group. Emerging adults are a large amorphous, unconnected group, with little in the way of identifiable boundaries outside of age; immersion within a group would have been impractical for this research.
The most significant advantages of social constructionism and phenomenology are the focus on the details of participant’s responses. Phenomenological research demands particular attention to the details of each individual’s experiences and recollections, as it comes from the perspective that each individual is unique. By contrast, observational or quantitative research does not take the individual’s perspective into account. Such quantitative research is limited by the survey methods that predetermine the possible responses, rather than allowing individuals to speak for themselves. Observational research imposes the researchers understanding of social interaction onto their subjects. By using phenomenological methods the participants are able to give their own accounts of their lives in their own words.

**Theoretical/purposive sampling**

Theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss 1968, Minichello *et al.* 1995, Patton 1990) targets individuals that fit predetermined selection criteria, and is used in instances where collecting a representative sample is impractical or unnecessary, making it the predominant form of sampling used in qualitative research. The use of theoretical sampling, also known as criterion based preferential sampling, allows for a focus on specific segments of a population in instances where sampling of the whole population is not practical, necessary or desirable. In this instance individuals were selected when their circumstances were best characterised by emerging adulthood (Arnett 2000a, 2004, Arnett and Tanner 2006), with a specific focus on young people engaged in work and/or
study, as the initial research focus involved examining young people who were likely to be excluded from sociological research on the basis that they were unlikely to be considered unusually disadvantaged. Participants were considered if:

- they were aged between 18 and 30. Anyone under 18 is still considered an adolescent and subject to the legal restrictions of a minor, limiting their ability to exercise independence and autonomy. Those people 30 and over are less likely to still feel “in between” adolescence and adulthood, and less likely to be treated as other than an adult;

- they were unmarried and had no dependants in their care, either invalid parents, siblings or children. Individuals with these responsibilities may still be considered emerging adults, but they do not fit into the research aim of studying the modal or characteristic members of theoretically defined categories (Shildrick and MacDonald 2007, p. 600);

- they were engaged in either full time study (possibly working casually or part time) or full time work. The distinction between an individual working full time and an individual on a career path lies in their intent; the latter intends to stay in the position and works towards promotion and greater responsibility, the former feels able to leave their job should other opportunities arise.
This criterion based preferential sampling produced a respondent pool typical of emerging adults who are significantly engaged in education and/or work. While these are by no means the only choices available to emerging adults, they do provide a useful position to begin an exploration of their lived experiences. Those individuals who work will have a considerable disposable income, but have to deal with the structured conditions of full time employment. Full time students have much more flexibility with their time, even when they work they are often able to rearrange their shifts; however they usually have significantly less disposable income.

There were certain limits placed upon the size and scope of the research program, dictated by necessity and the limitations of conducting individual research at a PhD level. A respondent pool of 21 individuals was judged to be an appropriate size for this research, given the length and depth of the interviews (total length of time just over 49 hours), although it is by no means a representative sample of the Australian population in this age group. Though it was not a primary consideration respondents were all Australian born, with very limited ethnic backgrounds that preclude a discussion of issues around ethnicity.

The selection of respondents that were predominantly middle class was due to the original research aim focusing on the typical experience of young people in Australia that were unlikely to be the focus of sociological research. This excludes discussions of class inequality based on the collected data, a factor which was considered desirable.
given the complexity of the issues involved and the small sample size. In addition, issues around disability, sexuality and living in a rural or disadvantaged area were either not pursued or actively controlled for when selecting participants.

The demographics of the respondents

In total 21 emerging adults participated in this research, interviewed in two waves (2008 and 2011). Appendix B presents a table with the demographic information of the respondents. The 10 males and 11 females were aged between 20 and 26, with a mean age of 22.29 (σ = 1.74). At the time of interviewing only one person was unemployed (Ryan), the rest were employed in a variety of positions, including as a nanny, in the dairy and fruit sections of a supermarket, in call centres for a pizza chain, disability services, and insurance claims, working as a car salesman, a chef, and an independent salesman for a telecommunication firm based overseas. Of the 20 respondents working at the time, 6 were working full time (Tiffany, Cyril, Alan, Melissa, Kevin, and Dean), the rest were employed part time or casually.

19 of the respondents had some form of tertiary qualification, only Melissa and Kevin had no significant qualifications to speak of, though they had participated in apprenticeships or completed various minor certifications. 5 of the respondents were not currently involved in formal study (Dean, Kevin, Melissa, Alan and Cyril), the rest were enrolled in university degrees and TAFE courses. The subjects of study (completed and ongoing) included theatre, physics and computer science, political science, business,
psychology, economics, medical science, graduate law, history, microbiology, accounting, education, speech pathology and an apprenticeship as a Chef. There are several ways in which to divide the groups based upon employment and education status, the significant difference lay in the amount of time and flexibility that each respondent had. However, only four of those working full time had heavily structured schedules that did not allow for much freedom to do what they wished. Melissa worked full time doing shift work in a call centre, which often meant working up to 7 days a week. Although the shifts could be as short as four hours, they might be at any time of day but were usually easily rearranged to accommodate other arrangements. Cyril worked from home doing sales; as long as he met his quotas he was able to dictate his own schedule. The sample size is too low for a comparison of the two groups, and as a whole their experiences are not unlike that of other emerging adults.

9 of the 21 respondents were single at the time of the interview (Georgia, Nathan, Phoebe, Lisa, Sharon, Alan, Melissa, Kevin and Dean), 3 were in new relationships (Ryan, Olivia and Jackie), 7 were in long term relationships (Eric, Bianca, Fiona, Tiffany, Henry, Victor and Cyril), one had multiple casual relationships (Zane) and one was uncertain about the state of her relationship (Wendy). 7 of the respondents were living at home with their parents (Jackie, Sharon, Georgia, Eric, Bianca, Phoebe and Wendy) and one respondent was living with his parents and his partner (Cyril). Sharon, Georgia and Cyril had previously lived out of home and had returned to live with their parents due to different circumstances. The 13 other respondents were living independently in share
accommodation of one form or another and had been for anywhere between several weeks and five years.

Creating and conducting the mixed methods interview

This research adopted a multiple methods approach combining qualitative and social network research methodologies to flexibly explore the lives of emerging adults while being structured enough to collection information efficiently and in a focused manner (Chamberlain 2006, Spencer and Pahl 2006). The in-depth qualitative interview, allowed the participants to respond to questions in any way they deem appropriate (Gubrium and Holstein 1997, Neuman 1994, Vidich and Lyman 1994). A semi-structured interview schedule was developed to direct the dialogue along the focal areas, while allowing the freedom and flexibility to pursue interesting discussions. The development of each set of questions is discussed below, along with their relation to the research question. The complete semi-structured interview schedule can be found in Appendix A, along with a description of how to quickly convert the information in the database into a network data file. For the purposes of this interview template files for both the MS Access database and the MS Excel spreadsheets had been created, requiring only the input of the respondent to complete.

The analysis was carried out concurrently with the interviews; each block of interviews was transcribed, coded and evaluated, and as the themes started to develop the literature was reviewed to find relevant material, which in turn informed the conduct of
subsequent interviews. After the first ten interviews a major review of the collected material was performed and several changes were made. A set of questions on the social capital resources (Van Der Gaag and Snijders 2005) in the respondents’ networks was considered abstruse and dropped, and a greater emphasis was placed on exploring the meaning of adulthood to the respondents. Once the themes had been well developed a process of recontextualisation was conducted in which the interview data from the first wave was analysed and gaps in the existing literature review were identified, particularly those exploring how the specific living circumstances of the respondents impacted upon their social relations and their understanding of adulthood.

The 21 participants in this research were interviewed in a face to face setting for a total of 46 hours, 26 minutes, and 9 seconds of interview recordings (mean = 2 hours, 12 minutes, 40 seconds; σ = 51 minutes, 7 seconds). The interviews were recorded using a USB microphone and Audacity, an open source freeware recording program. Each interview began with the discussion of an informed consent package and the signing of a release. During the course of the interview much of the participants’ responses were entered into a Microsoft Access database as part of the open coding process and later as a part of the social network data compilation. Data entry was visible at all time, and respondents were asked to engage with the process in front of them. Once the database had been completed towards the end of the interview some of the information was copied into two Microsoft Excel spreadsheets, and some of the

11 Available for download at http://audacity.sourceforge.net
information was first processed using a query in Access and later a macro in Excel\textsuperscript{12}, then included in the spreadsheets. The two spreadsheets were saved as text files and opened using Netdraw (Borgatti 2002). The presentation of the networks described by the respondents was then used as the final stage of discussion.

The research methods and interviews were constructed and conducted in accordance with the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007 - updated May 2013). Griffith University’s Human Research Ethics Committee approved the application for ethics clearance, assigning it protocol number AMC/09/06/HREC. Final reporting was completed on the 30\textsuperscript{th} of September, 2011.

**Qualitative materials and the thematic analysis**

The first research question covered in the interview (presented in chapter five) asked: in the social world of the participants, what does it mean to be an adult? The purpose of this question was to examine the competing views on adulthood in contemporary Australian society from the perspective of the respondents, an area of considerable concern to emerging adults. The scope of the question allowed for exploration of the respondents’ definition of adulthood, the relationship of that definition to the emerging adulthood and transitions literatures, the respondents’ self-identification as being an

\textsuperscript{12} The macro used to process the data was written by venkat1926, who answered my request posted on the 10\textsuperscript{th} of April, 2011 at http://www.excelforum.com/excel-programming/771783-macro-to-create-dyadic-pairs-from-a-single-table-of-data.html.
adult or in-between adulthood and adolescence, and their experiences as an emerging adult.

The research method approached the notion of adulthood in an open-ended fashion, initially asking questions such as “do you feel like you are an adult?” As in any semi-structured interview the scripted questions were there to initiate avenues of conversation which can then be pursued. The areas to focus on were suggested by the literature review, which highlighted structural, social, cultural and individual issues that might have impacted upon the respondents understanding of adulthood. The questions about adulthood were inspired by a number of studies into emerging adulthood and youth, in particular those that utilise Arnett’s 43 point questionnaire (Arias and Hernández 2007, Arnett 2003, Badger et al. 2006, Nelson et al. 2004, Sirsch et al. 2009), and sociological studies that focus upon the markers of adulthood (Abel and Fitzgerald 2008, Andres and Adamuti-Trache 2008, Berger 2008, Chisolm and Du Bois-Reymond 1993, Clark 2007, Devadason 2007, Fauske 1996, Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Molgat and Vézina 2008, Pollock 1997, te Riele 2004, Vickerstaff 2003), though they are not directly drawn from any particular source. Arnett’s questionnaire covered a broad range of areas which have been associated with adulthood, such as biological changes brought on by puberty, sexual awareness, financial security and stability, and the distancing from family of origin towards creating a family of choice. The literature on transitions studies focusing on the markers of adulthood is included in the scope of Arnett’s questionnaire;
it was included here as it reflects the cultural expectations of contemporary Australian society as well as the current trend in sociological studies of young people.

The thematic analysis (Aronson 1994, Boyatzis 1998, Braun and Clarke 2006, Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2006, Tuckett 2005) from the first part of the interview was suggested by the semi-structured approach used in the interview method, and the major themes of the research project: uncertainty and possibility. The interview transcripts were coded around the various facets of adulthood, such as how it was defined or occasions when the respondents felt that they had achieved adulthood, and the dominant themes were drawn from this coding. The results are structured around three areas: the respondents’ significant criteria for self-identifying as an adult, their views on the importance of the markers of adulthood personally and as criteria for being considered adult, and their experiences of uncertainty and possibilities as an emerging adult.

The name generator and analysis of personal communities

The research question addressed in the third part of the interview (presented in chapter four) asked: how do emerging adults create and maintain relationships? The purpose of this question is to understand how emerging adults approach social relationships during a period with few permanent structures to help focus and maintain them. The scope of the research question allows for an exploration of how the respondents define a significant relationship, the importance they place on family of origin and family of
choice during a period of independence and exploration, and how the respondents maintain these relationships. Being an adult is a socially constructed process, the exploration of the respondents’ personal communities provides insight into the relationships that shape and impact their self-identification as an adult.

This section of the interview employed social network methods, specifically name generators, to collect a list of significant relations and their details (Bott 1971, Burt 1983, Carrington et al. 2005, Chamberlain 2006, Marsden 1987, 2005, Marsden 1990, Marsden and Lin 1982, Scott 2000, Wasserman and Faust 1994, Wellman et al. 1997). The use of a name generator is standard practice for egonet or personal network research. Respondents provide nicknames or identifiers for the actual people in their social circle. Personal network researchers also collect demographic information on each of the “alters” (people nominated by the respondent as part of their social network) (Brewer 1997, 2000, Brewer and Webster 1999, Burt 1983, 1984, Chamberlain 2006, Liebow et al. 1995, Marin 2007, Wellman and Berkowitz 1988, Wellman and Gulia 1999, Wellman and Potter 1999). Name interpreters are highly structured sets of questions designed to elicit short responses about the individuals in their network, such as name, gender, relationship etc. Name interpreter questions explore the specific relationship between the respondent and each of their significant others (Marsden 2005, p. 17). This data is usually treated as quantitative, with the focus on network structures and metrics; however the names can also serve as a starting point for qualitative inquiry (Pahl and Spencer 2004a, 2004b, Spencer and Pahl 2006). In this research both quantitative and
qualitative information was collected on the respondents’ relationships, with the list of alters providing a useful structure for in-depth questioning.

Social network methods\textsuperscript{13} facilitated the initial data collection. With this starting point the qualitative exploration of the social networks meant there was little difficulty in conducting a thematic analysis of respondents’ descriptions of their social relations. Many of the initial broad codes were suggested by the categories of relations nominated by the respondents (e.g. family, work colleagues, university friends, etc). Using these codes as a guide to the transcribed interview data, patterns of responses and discussions were analysed and broad themes drawn out. The most significant precedent for this particular section of the method comes from open-ended research into friendship (Pahl and Spencer 2004a, 2004b, Spencer and Pahl 2006), involving an exploration of people that were important to the respondent, followed by an extended discussion of why that relationship was important, and how it fit in with the rest of the respondent’s network. This research project had a similar concern with the in-depth exploration of the significance of relationships, but the analysis is situated around the specific concerns of emerging adulthood. The results are presented in four sections that mirror the development of social relationships across the life cycle: relationships with the family of origin, relationships that are spatially defined by a shared presence in a

\textsuperscript{13} A considerable amount of social network data has been collected in the course of this research. However, during the course of writing the thesis the decision was made not to present this data, as it would require substantial discussion of both the literature and methods involved in order to properly embed the data. The qualitative data was deemed to be more accessible to a broader audience and able to stand alone on its own merits, thus it was given priority for this thesis, but the social network data will form the basis of future publications.
space, relationships defined by a shared history that transcend barriers of time and space distantiation, and the nascent relationships that may constitute a family of choice.

Though a considerable amount of multiplex social network data was collected during the course of the interviews, it has not been presented in this thesis. Multiplex data is generated when more than one piece of information is collected about the relationship between two people, that data is ‘multiplex’ (Fischer and Shavitt 1995, Mitchell 1965). A great deal of information was collected on each relationship between the respondent and the members of their significant social circle, which was multiplex network data. This information and such analysis as has been completed is not included in this thesis for several reasons. First there exists no analogue of the research method in the social network literature, and therefore no template that can be followed for analysing the data. The study of personal networks is well established and has a long history, but the study of multiplex relationships is rare, and only one example of a study of multiplex group relationships has been found to date (Cardon and Granjon 2005). As the research method used here is not comparable with their method we could not replicate their analysis; different methods of analysis would have had to be developed. Second, the nature of social network data is considerably different to that of qualitative network data. The discussion of network densities and degree would not easily fit with the qualitative analysis of the respondents’ social networks, nor does it have the advantage of being accessible and relevant to the respondents themselves. Third the volume of qualitative data is more than sufficient for the scope of a doctoral thesis without the
addition of the social network data. The discussion of the social network aspects of this research is included to highlight the innovative methods with which the interviews were conducted, and the utility of the structured approaches in prompting qualitative inquiry. But the content and analysis of the network data has been reserved for future work.

The activity generator: Open coding and phenomenological categories

The research question covered in the second part of the interview (presented in chapter three) asked: what do emerging adults do with their time? The purpose of the research question is to understand the significant day-to-day activities that the respondents engage in, during a period that is characterised (and idealised) as being free from structure or responsibility. The scope of the research question allows for an exploration of all aspects of the respondents’ lives, encompassing the spectacular and mundane activities, casual and serious leisure, social and solitary endeavours, and permanent and transient goals. These details provide context for the respondents’ lived experiences as an emerging adult, and gives insight into the relationship between individual choice and social and structural conditions during this stage of life.

The research method approached the subject by developing an ‘activity generator’ in order to capture as broad an array of activities as possible. The activity generator is an innovative, novel technique drawing inspiration directly from the name generators used in social network research, but to my knowledge has never been used (or proposed) by any other researcher. The choice of questions drew inspiration from Burt’s guide to
developing name generator questions through a focus on relational content (1983), Bien, *et al.* who developed a network tool to explore the family without a preconceived definition (1991), and the work of McCallister and Fischer (1978) who developed a name generator to get at the ‘core’ members of their respondents’ social networks which included questions on their hobbies and social activities. The activity generator’s utility is the same as that of the name generator, the highly structured approach allows for a speedy yet comprehensive collection of data on the respondents’ day-to-day activities. The list of activities generated provides a useful starting point for qualitative discussions about the many varied and individual practices of the respondent and can be used to collect information on the multiplex relationships between the respondent and their alter (Fischer and Shavitt 1995, Mitchell 1965).

The analysis of data collected from the activity generator used grounded theory, beginning with a process of open coding (Glaser and Strauss 1968, Strauss 1987, Strauss and Corbin 1990). As the participant responded to each question in the activity generator they were asked to provide a short description using between one and three words. These descriptions served as useful markers for open coding the considerable amount of discussion on the various activities.

The process of axial coding (Glaser and Strauss 1968, Strauss and Corbin 1990, 1994) involved sorting these activities into categories, in this instance centred upon the experience involved in the practice. Three categories were immediately apparent:
social activities encompasses those practices whose central purpose is in connecting with other people; cultural activities centre upon an engagement with a cultural object or form; and play, including the vast range of activities that are recreational or leisurely. A clear distinction emerged between the cultural activities that involved a passive engagement and those that were more active, the category of creative activities was added to distinguish them. The remaining activities were incorporated into three small categories: functional activities that are regularly engaged in but whose significance might be overlooked; aspirational activities that are more often discussed and planned for than actually conducted; and liminal activities, practices that are often considered unhealthy or risky, and occasionally are illegal.

The final stage, selective coding, involved analysing the complex stories about the participants’ recreational and leisure activities, as well as the relationships between the activities and their social interactions. These stories reflect the differing experiences of the participants, the various ways that they engage in the activities and the different social contexts in which they are performed. Each participant’s experiences were unique: though the individual activities shared similarities (there are only so many ways somebody can listen to music, for example) the combining and overlapping of these activities was different for each person.

The crucial outcome of this stage of coding was the realisation that many of the activities described by the respondents fit into more than one category, and were
interrelated to other activities. For example, engagement with a cultural form such as music often served other purposes as well, including being an integral part of social interactions, or as an accompaniment to functional activities such as exercise. The engagement with each activity was fluid, music might be an accompaniment to social interaction on occasion, but it wasn’t necessary, and the absence of one did not preclude the other. In the same way that the experience of each activity was highly subjective, the engagement with the activity by each respondent could be dependent on the context.

The results of this analysis are presented in seven sections, describing the purpose and meaning that the respondent held for each activity, ordered from most frequently nominated to least. The social category describes those activities engaged in out of a desire to spend time with others (Simmel 1950, Simmel and Hughes 1949), though socialising was often conducted concurrently with activities that had other purposes. The play category includes activities centred on relaxation and fun, and incorporated activities and meanings closely associated with (but not limited to) the field of leisure studies (Rojek 2000, 2005a, 2006). The cultural activities involve a passive engagement with various forms of culture, primarily for the purposes of entertainment (Hughes 2000, Lynch and Veal 2006, Stevenson 2006). The aspirational activities contribute to medium or long term goals, and often required the negotiation of significant structural and social barriers (McDonald et al. 2011). The functional activities relate to the maintenance of day-to-day life, contributing to the respondents’ development as independent and
responsible for their own well-being (Arnett 2004, Arnett and Tanner 2006, Soupourmas 2005, Trainor et al. 2010). The creative activities involve the creation of cultural objects and forms, as both entertainment and forms of personal expression (Bucholtz 2002, Hodkinson 2005, Jenks 2006, Osborne 2003). Lastly the liminal activities are those the respondents consider to be unhealthy, socially transgressive or illegal, though their interpretation of liminal were not necessarily defined by what was socially normative (Lyng 1990, Turner 1969, Van Gennep 1960).

The following chapters present the findings of this research project, addressing the social worlds of the respondents in ways that are meaningful to them. The results demonstrate the respondents’ everyday lives and their personal communities were shaped by a mixture of social and structural factors, centred largely on work and the future of work. The respondents view these factors in individualised terms; the respondents’ understanding is that these are a normal part of this stage of life, and that it is their responsibility to find ways to overcome these obstacles.
Chapter 3 – Everyday Activities of Emerging Adults

Freedom is relative, not absolute. We are all subject to the restrictions of nature, such as climate, physiology and gravity. Most people have social obligations to friends, family and colleagues. Economic limitations vary enormously from one individual to another. And for some, religious and political factors limit freedom of action (Lynch and Veal 2006, p. 24).

The first research question this thesis asks is: how do emerging adults use their time? This question provides context for the respondents’ lived experiences as an emerging adult, and gives insight into the relationship between individual choice and social and structural conditions during this stage of life. The respondents nominated a vast array of activities including socialising, working, studying, leisure, play, the everyday activities that are important for maintaining their lives, and planning for their future. This question addresses the cultural stereotypes of young people as free to spend their time without thought of responsibilities or concern for the future, as well as the social and structural conditions that influence their decisions. The aim of this chapter is to capture the subjective experiences of being an emerging adult in contemporary Australia, as “it is necessary to go beyond the description of patterns of education, work and family life, to grasp the significance of shifting subjectivities that mark one generation from another – and that distinguish different groups of young people from each other” (Wyn and Woodman 2006, p. 512).
This chapter presents seven phenomenological categories in order of the importance placed upon them by the respondents, determined both by the number of activities nominated in each category and the significance the activities held. These categories include all 318 activities nominated by the 21 respondents; however, their placement into the broader categories was determined by the meanings individual respondents placed upon them. This means that the same activity can appear in multiple categories according to differences in meaning between respondents, or even the complexity of one person’s engagement with an activity. Studying, for example, usually relates to both the respondents’ future career aspirations, and is a functional activity, requiring continuous engagement on a routine and mundane level. The seven phenomenological categories are social, play, cultural, aspirational, functional, creative, and liminal:

- Social: includes the activities or interests that have a significant social component to them, either as their central purpose, such as socialising (in any form), or indirectly through the collective engagement in an activity, such as playing board games;

- Play: includes activities and interests that are for the purpose of recreation in one form or another, such as playing games or yoga;

- Cultural: includes activities or interests involving a passive engagement with cultural objects or forms, including reading or listening to music;
• Aspirational: includes activities that are for the purpose of preparing for a future endeavour or working towards a future goal, such as studying for a career or planning to travel;

• Functional: includes activities or interests that are practical, often for the purpose of maintaining day-to-day existence, such as working or cleaning, but can also include those activities related to future endeavours, such as those aspects of studying which are utilitarian (writing, research, etc.);

• Creative: mirroring the cultural category, this includes an active engagement in activities that involve the creation of cultural objects or forms, such as writing or playing music;

• Liminal: includes interests or activities that the respondents consider to be risky, dangerous for their health, illegal or socially transgressive, and are engaged in despite that, such as smoking or gambling.

The nominated activities are presented in tables at the beginning of each section for easy reference, with the number of respondents that nominated the activity in the adjacent column. Each category makes a contribution to various sociological fields, and a brief discussion of the relevant literature is presented in order to properly
contextualise the analysis. The analysis in each section begins with a typical case that highlights the dominant theme of the category, followed by a discussion of other significant themes.

**Social activities – Finding ways to interact with others**

The category of social activities includes those practices that connect people together, directly and indirectly. Friendships, relationships and family relationships can change significantly due to the “structural opportunities and constraints posed by different stages of the life cycle” (Fischer *et al.* 1977, p. 97). A considerable portion of the literature critical of Putnam’s argument has highlighted the importance of informal recreational activities in building and maintaining the social relations that are essential to building and maintaining the different forms of social capital (Adam and Rončević 2003, Glover and Hemingway 2005, Herreros 2004, Lin *et al.* 2001, Putnam 2000, Warde and Tampubolon 2002, Warde *et al.* 2005). The period of emerging adulthood allows many opportunities for these informal activities, and they often exist within the structured activities (work and tertiary study) as well. However despite the apparently generous amount of time that emerging adults have to engage in leisure activities (Larson 1990) their opportunities to engage in social activities can be limited by their non-standard work schedules and varying workloads across semesters. The activities nominated in the social category include those focused on people in general (e.g. socialising or using Facebook), those focused on specific people (e.g. visiting partners or family), those activities that are shared with others (e.g. work) and those activities
where being able to interact with others is a primary goal (e.g. drinking or playing board games).

| Hanging out/socialising | 19 | Drinking, studying, playing board games | 6 |
| Work | 14 | Coffee, Facebook | 4 |
| Eating out, visiting family | 9 | Calling friends, cooking, going to festivals and concerts | 3 |
| Going out (nightclubs, etc.) | 8 | Dating, gatherings, Netball, road trips, sport, Tennis, travel, video games | 2 |
| Spending time with partners | 7 | Acting, art galleries, the beach, bowling, brunches, buying Boost, camping parties, card magic, chatting, checking phone*, dancing, drinking tea, emailing, gambling, Games Workshop, hiking, Jugger, going to Melbourne, pool, QUEST, recreational substance use, Roar games, running, shopping, smoking, studying Korean and Japanese, trivia nights, walking | 1 |

Table 3.1 Tally of ‘social’ activities nominated by the respondents

The respondents nominated activities as social when contact with other people was a significant aspect of the activity. All but two respondents nominated ‘hanging out’, ‘seeing friends’ or ‘socialising’ as an activity in its own right, and rated it at the top of their priorities, though they often complained about having inadequate time to do it. Social activities were generally unstructured, often conducted concurrently with other activities and could be picked up in almost any location at any time; these activities are simply about sociability, or “association for its own sake” (Simmel and Hughes 1949).

* For missed calls or text messages.
“Sociability has no objective purpose, no content, no extrinsic results” (Duncan 1985, p. 23, Simmel 1950, p. 45, Wearing 1998, p. 116). However, the lack of structure is what makes socialising a valuable pursuit, and the respondents frequently discussed socialising in conjunction with other activities, as well as a significant activity in its own right.

Olivia and Tiffany stand out as the only respondents not to mention ‘hanging out’ or ‘socialising’ as an activity. Olivia is a highly organised person, who feels better when the world around her is organised. Olivia spends a great deal of time studying in order to ensure that she meets the academic standards she sets for herself; after study and working enough hours to support herself Olivia likes to ensure that the time she has left is well spent. To that end Olivia divides her time between the daily and weekly activities that are important for her well being, such as cleaning and calling her mother. For Olivia the unfocused activity of simply ‘hanging out’ is not something that she had time for:

I think usually if I am hanging out and not doing anything specific it would usually be in my own home with people that live there or people that have just come over for the sake of it, it’s never really a planned thing it just sort of either happens or it doesn’t. To be honest the majority of people that I catch up with I generally only catch up with them if it’s like, oh let’s go out for dinner or let’s do this... I never hang out. Except for when it just happens coincidentally, like at work or with housemates. It generally doesn’t happen other times. I am a very busy person. [Olivia]
Olivia’s description of ‘hanging out’ as something that was usually unplanned and spontaneous, and occurring often in the home or in the workplace is typical of how most respondents described it. The respondents nominated a number of activities that were made tolerable or even enjoyable because of the opportunities they provide for socialising. In particular universities and many of the workplaces that employ casual and shift workers were considered well suited to providing social environments. Universities and low paid casual and shift work offered respondents plenty of opportunity to form homophilous relationships, the tendency for friendships to form between those who are alike in some designated respect (Ibarra 1992, Kalmijn and Vermunt 2007, Kandel 1978, Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954, Marsden 1988, McPherson et al. 2001, Yamaguchi 1990). These relationships are not necessarily determined by age and gender, but are often about sharing circumstance:

At uni I am very social, our course is quite social because it’s quite small and everyone knows each other so there’s always someone around to talk to, normally when I’m at uni I don’t really do a lot of uni work at uni, I do it more when I get home and stuff like that, just because it’s nice, it’s really social, you have a couple of hours between classes, there’s always someone that you can hang out. [Georgia]

[Work is] good for socialising though, I don’t have a lot of time to socialise, so thankfully I have a lot of friends there, so I actually count work as part of socialising because I think if it wasn’t for that, thankfully because I want to save money and things like that it’s hard not to go out and to see people and do
things, but it’s easy when you have a job where you have a lot of friends.

[Nathan]

For the respondents in this survey the difficulties and unpleasantries of these situations were far more bearable because they had someone to share it with. These activities also gained a measure of significance because of the opportunity to socialise; Bianca for example had very little attachment to her job as a nanny because of the isolating nature of looking after young children, whereas Nathan enjoyed his job because he could socialise.

The social activities that don’t specify others such as family or partners often had increased significance because of the opportunity to draw people together. Informal leisure activities play a significant role in the generation of social capital, helping to create strong bonds between individuals, and potentially bridging social groups (Bellah et al. 1996, Bourdieu 2001, Burt 2001, Warde and Tampubolon 2002, Warde et al. 2005, Wellman and Gulia 1999, Wellman and Potter 1999). As with the workplace and universities the social aspects of these activities can have equal or greater significance than the practice nominated by the individual:

I suppose also as well as the cooking side the eating with people, for example having a meal, sitting down, talking, having wine with someone, the preamble, maybe sitting down with people before a meal to talk and then you eat the meal and you have something after the meal, so that whole process. [Cyril]
I like how it can bring people, like if you can cook well and you say come over and I will cook you this good meal and everyone comes for it, I like it that it can bring people together in a way that it doesn’t feel like it was an effort to them, I like that, I like being able to cook for people, I like it as the cornerstone for everyone getting together.  [Ryan]

I’m a big fan of spending money, although my bank balance doesn’t always find that so fun [laughs]. Yeah shopping, but that’s also an excuse as well to just hang out with friends, it gives you a place to be there and a reason to be there rather than just going ‘hey, let’s just do something’.  [Fiona]

The expense and time involved in some of these activities, particularly those involving food or alcohol, can make it difficult for the respondents to engage in them regularly. The respondents coped with these problems by shifting the focus away from the aspects requiring money, allowing them to make choices that accommodated their situations. Eating out at restaurants was nominated by nine respondents, all of whom felt limited in their opportunity to go out as often as they wished:

I don’t get paid enough to go out to restaurants as much as I would like, but I do try and set aside some time and some money for going out whenever I can... My criteria are that, because usually I do these as social events and things like that, the other people have to enjoy it... and usually when I go out it’s got to be somewhere I haven’t been before. [Zane]

Zane focused on those aspects of going out to eat that he felt were important, trying something new and ensuring that his friends enjoyed themselves. Zane’s desire and the
significance he placed on eating out at restaurants were not diminished by the limitations of his budget, instead they gained a measure of importance because of the difficulties that had to be overcome in order to engage in the activity.

Time and money were the two greatest impediments to the respondents’ ability to socialise with their peers, and family. Alan was working a full time job and had been working a part time job as well in order to save money. Working full time limited Alan’s opportunities to socialise, especially as many of his friends worked part time in shift jobs that regularly required them to work weekends. Though ‘hanging out’ was one of the most important activities for Alan, he had to balance this with his medium term plans of working in the United Kingdom and the financial burdens this imposed. In addition his parents lived several hours away in New South Wales, the costs of getting down there and the difficulty in arranging adequate time off from his full time job made it impractical for Alan to see his parents more than once every few months. While he was able to find an acceptable balance between saving and socialising, Alan concluded that most of his time ‘hanging out’ was at home with his flatmate James:

I do like going out on the weekends casually, I am not completely boycotting it even though I am saving like nothing else, um so yes I have still been going out. I do enjoy socialising, just sort of being around people, have a few drinks, you get to relax, you get to chat about all different stuff, people bitching about whatever they want to bitch about, all that kind of stuff, but other than I would say that at the moment my social life is fairly restricted in that, self restricted, I’m keeping it
fairly simple because of the goal of going overseas and trying to make everything as cheap and minimalistic [sic] as possible. [Alan]

Alan’s experience is more severe than that of other respondents; however they all have similar stories about the difficulties involved in finding enough time with the people that are important in their lives. When the respondent lived at home they reported spending a more than adequate amount of time with their parents, but when they lived independently it became more of an issue, requiring particular effort in order to see them. Respondents with highly structured degrees (such as Jackie and Olivia) had friends in their classes that they saw more than once a week, but other respondents reported seeing their friends less frequently during the breaks between classes. Incompatible work schedules meant that several respondents (Georgia, Melissa, Lisa and Victor) complained that despite their social workplaces they rarely saw their friends at work. Housemates were the only people that respondents were likely to see on a frequent basis, even the extra lengths respondents (such as Henry, Olivia and Ryan) would go to in order to see their partners could suffer under the need to work or complete studies.

Technology is playing an increasing role in bridging the gaps that occur because of distances in time and space. Being able to meet face to face with people that are significant to the respondents can be difficult, because the respondents have moved away from home (Alan, Olivia, Nathan, Zane and Ryan), because they live (and lived) overseas (Cyril and Sharon) or because they work odd hours that make it nearly
impossible to catch up with friends (Kevin, Melissa, Lisa, and Dean). The respondents employed a number of technologies to keep in contact with their social circle(s), including email, texting and Facebook. These technologies present the peculiar situation where the respondent is being social, yet doing so alone, and often with little expectation of immediate social contact. In the case of using Facebook there may be no expectation of any social contact, and yet the respondents still considered it to be a social activity:

I just see what other people are doing I guess, the witty status updates that I enjoy, and people generally will post a news story up so you can get some information on Facebook through what your friends post that you didn’t know before, and also the more kind of stuff that everybody uses it for, just seeing who’s single, who’s not, just you know going through other people’s profile, just seeing what’s happening with your friends. [Victor]

Keeping in contact with people, I know a lot of people from a lot of different places because I went to two different high schools and then all the people that I went to college with, and yeah, it just sort of makes me feel that I am still keeping those people in my life even though they are several hours or sometimes across the world away. I have family in Japan, and my cousin always puts up videos of his kids so we can see how they are growing and pictures of important dates and stuff so I find that good to still feel like I am a part of their life, that I know what’s going on rather than you know when they move back for school having these five year old kids that I’ve never seen before. [Olivia]
Facebook allowed the respondents to feel as if they were in social contact with people that were not present, and that they may not have seen in person in years. The sense that the respondents were still a part of their friends’ or families lives was important, particularly when they lived overseas. Both Lisa and Sharon had initially created their Facebook accounts in order to keep in contact with family while overseas. Facebook, and other technological solutions, allowed the respondents to circumvent the limitations placed upon them by the distances between them and their social circle.

The activities nominated in the social category are often considered the most important to the respondents, who value the opportunities to spend time with others extremely highly, in whatever forms they might take. The social activities also make up the larger portion of how the respondents spend their time, not necessarily because the respondents are selecting activities that are specifically social, but because they find ways to make activities about spending time with people. The situations of most of the respondents were conducive to this lifestyle, with little to no family commitments and flexible study and work schedules, the respondents were able to prioritise socialising wherever possible. However the respondents were still limited by factors beyond their immediate control, work and study commitments are only so flexible, and money is often a consideration.

Many of the activities nominated by the interviewees have social aspects to them, as they can form the basis of discussion (e.g. watching television or listening to music), but
unless socialising is considered one of the reasons to engage in the activity by the respondent they are not included in this category. It can be difficult to delineate those practices that are social from those that are not, as almost every activity nominated by the respondents is discussed with friends or family on occasion. However, the activities included in this category are significant to the respondents for their social aspects.

**Play activities – Fun, games, relaxation and leisure**

The play category of activities, interests and pursuits, centre on the practices that are engaged in for reasons of entertainment and recreation. The field of leisure studies is wide encompassing, covering most aspects of day-to-day life. “Conceptually, leisure practice is the expression of individual choice made from patterns of behaviour and options of conduct laid down by factors of location and context” (Rojek 2005a, p. 32). Popular portrayals of young people tend to emphasise the opportunities for leisure and the expression of individual choice without due consideration of the context; while young people have fewer responsibilities to constrain their choices, they are limited by their access to resources and their commitments to study and work.

Leisure in modern society has an important role in day-to-day life, serving as an outlet and for the enhancement of “cultural, political, ethical and spiritual existence ... and for the betterment of life in general” (Rojek et al. 2006, p. 18). Historically, leisure has been a highly stratified endeavour in Western societies, a privilege of the wealthy allowing for civic participation (Shores and Scott 2007, p. 32), before the industrial revolution the
majority of people having little non-obligated time they were considered ‘idle’ if they were not working (Cunningham 1980, p. 12). In modern industrial societies the rhythms of industrialised working lives, urbanisation and the commercialisation of mass leisure have made free time much more important for the majority of people, including Australians (Lynch and Veal 2006, Marrus 1974).

Defining ‘leisure’ is difficult (Wilson 1980), as the breadth of activities and time the field seeks to encompass often begins as anything that is ‘non-work’, which would include almost everything presented in the seven categories of this chapter. In order to avoid confusion this category is instead named “play”, and the definition adopted reflects the subjective nature of the nominated activities: the play category consists of activities that are largely undertaken for their own sake (Iso-Ahola 1989, Lynch and Veal 2006). The activities nominated can include other people (e.g. board games or sport), exclude other people (e.g. spending time alone), or are about nothing more than relaxing, and making themselves happy (e.g. reading).
The play category covers a vast array of activities that the respondents use to relax or for entertainment. Many of the activities in this category are nominated because they are easy to engage in, they require little effort, cost or commitment, and are available during the periods when the respondent might have time and space for them. The ubiquity of television has long made this an easy and accessible form of entertainment (Bennett et al. 1999, Ip 2000, Lynch and Veal 2006), and with the advent of streaming (or torrenting/downloading) programs the respondents are no longer constrained by television scheduling. Other activities such as drinking coffee or ‘buying Boost’ can require a small amount of money (and are only available during trading hours), but are easily accessed and provide high opportunity for socialisation in public spaces.

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14 Boost is a frozen juice franchise found in numerous locations around Brisbane.
Computer games and the internet are considerable sources of entertainment for many of the respondents in this study, a number of studies argue that ‘electronic leisure’ dominates free time particularly among those in their late teens and early twenties (Hendel and Harrold 2004, Odell et al. 2000, Padilla-Walker et al. 2010). While it has many important functions the ability to randomly ‘surf’ the internet is one that is highly prized, as is the seemingly limitless amount of information that is readily available (Rowe 2006, pp. 323-5). Alan uses the internet for a number of reasons, including keeping in contact with friends and planning his move overseas. However, as he was working two jobs and trying to save money, surfing the internet had become one of his main recreational activities:

I do use surfing the internet certainly as a recreational thing, it’s kind of a hobby in that it lets me find out all kinds of quirky information that I know I’m not going to find anywhere else, so I do like to find new weird cool interesting things out, probably not as in depth about finding out how it works as [other people] might be, but I do like to sort of get a handle on a lot of different things. I am known for knowing a lot of useless stuff, and that’s the source of it, spending a lot of time on the internet and just going off on wild tangents. [Alan]

Surfing the internet requires very little in the way of effort, once the initial costs of purchasing a computer and setting up a connection have been met going online is as simple as the click of a few buttons. This makes the internet, and similar activities such as computer games, a ready source of relaxation, undemanding in their requirements, and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, whenever the respondents are available:
It’s probably stupid spending all day on a computer, but generally I would come home and go on a computer, I generally just go on random, random tangents when I am on a computer, just looking up anything really, anything that interests me at the time. Just general surfing, like there’s so much knowledge out there on the internet, it’s really great, I feel sorry for previous generations, you know we’ve got a question and we’ll go on the internet and it will be answered in ten seconds. But a lot of people don’t use it for that purpose though. [Victor]

The necessities of working and/or studying can make it difficult for the respondents to engage in all the activities that they may wish, and their choice of play activities was often dictated by how easy they were to engage in. Time use studies have shown that Australians, like most of the Western world, have increased their leisure or free time over the past few decades (ABS 1997b, Soupourmas 2005, Trainor et al. 2010, Whitson 2006). The respondents often seemed to have the advantage of flexible work and study schedules that allowed them to prioritise the activities in their lives; however their lack of money often offset the respondents’ flexibility with their time use.

Those nominated play activities that require considerable amounts of time to engage in are also difficult for the respondents. For Olivia, who is extremely time poor, she feels that there must be a reason to take time away from other things to enjoy herself by baking:

I love baking, but I never get the time to do it... it’s great when someone has a birthday and I have a reason to do it; when the floods were on at 3am I made
cupcakes for everybody, they were all very drunk except for me and I just felt like I wanted to do something so they were very much appreciated. [Olivia]

The necessity of juggling work and study meant that many of the respondents had to be selective about their time use, making choices based on their expected benefits (Shores and Scott 2007). Wendy was training to be a triathlete before a heart defect forced her to stop competing. This didn’t diminish the importance of fitness for Wendy, it was too much a part of who she was and how she felt about herself. Fitness was one of the areas extremely important to Wendy, and because she was a student both time and money were issues that impeded how often she could get to the gym:

I only train with my PT once a week because it’s expensive and I am at uni, but I go everyday or I go for a run from home or something... I used to do it so much that my body is used to it so it’s not really that big of an effort. And it helps with uni to focus, like if I go to the gym and then go to uni I have a much better day than if I just go straight to uni... It keeps me happy mentally, but also physically, I feel better when I am fit, if I am chubby I don’t feel as good I guess. [Wendy]

Wendy was able to substitute running for the more expensive activity of training with a personal trainer. Wendy was unable to go to yoga classes as often as she liked due to her study schedule, though she tried to make time for it on the weekends:

Before I started uni I was trying to do it a few times a week but then with uni I wasn’t going at all because I was at uni the same time the classes were on, but I try to go on weekends. [Wendy]
Being able to keep fit and healthy were very high priorities for Wendy, and as such she engaged with as many affordable fitness related activities as she was able to fit in around her schedule. Respondents that worked full time such as Lisa and Melissa had to manage their leisure activities around their work schedules, which limited their opportunities to engage in organised activities, such as yoga classes and team sports.

Kevin was an athlete in high school, playing rugby league and competing in weight lifting. Pursuing a career in sports was not something he was able to do, but it is still a part of his nature to compete with others, even if it’s just playing board games with friends. Kevin substitutes playing pool in pubs to fulfil in part his desire to play sports, as it coincides with other activities that he engages in and it requires no commitments:

> I play a lot of pool in pubs, if you call that sport. Um, yeah, I’m, I’ve got a few guys who are hassling me to go back and play a bit of footy, but it’s just hard with my work hours, like I work all day Saturday and they play on Saturdays, I might be able to play the odd game but I told them it wouldn’t be a full time thing for them. [Kevin]

Part of the rhetoric around the lifestyle of emerging adults includes the notion that young people are free to do as they wish. However the respondents repeatedly talked about the limitations that they had on their preferred choices in play activities, and the compromises that they had to make. There has been considerable research into the constraints on leisure activities (Arab-Moghaddam et al. 2007, Jackson 2005, Jackson and Scott 1999), for the respondents in this research the constraints were less likely to
be inter-personal or intra-personal, and more likely to be related to their lack of resources and their non standard working schedules.

Many of the play activities were discussed as being conducted in conjunction with the social activities, such as ‘socialising’. However the value of the activities in the play category is innate, they are nominated because the respondents enjoy that specific activity. For example, board games offer a useful way of engaging with people socially and which have value in themselves. Zane plays a wide variety of board and card games with several groups of friends. Zane talked about a number of different games that he enjoyed playing, but the common thread throughout all of them was their social nature. Whether with friends or strangers is immaterial, the games give Zane an opportunity to interact with people:

I’d say that takes up most of my time apart from work and a couple of other bits and pieces, I do enjoy social games.

**Are they always social games?**

Yes always. Because even with Warhammer\(^\text{15}\), which is probably the least social game, you are at least standing across the table from another person, you get to interact and talk and through the game itself you get to learn interesting things about people. [Zane]

\(^{15}\) A table top battle simulation in which two opponents fight each other using ‘armies’ they have collected and personalised, according to an extensive set of rules governing aspects such as movement, terrain, elevation, etc.
Zane regularly played games (board and card games, Jugger\textsuperscript{16}) with different groups of friends, and made regular visits to the Games Workshop\textsuperscript{17} in order to play against strangers or to develop his Warhammer collection. His choice of games was as important as the opportunity to spend time with people, even when the social interaction is at a minimum. The opportunity to spend time with friends motivates Ryan to play some games, and contributes to how he chooses to engage with them. Without his friends’ participation the play aspects of the game become less important than the story. Play activities such as these can be significant social activities in themselves.

“League of Legends” is an online strategy game, which Ryan plays with friends over the internet:

Camaraderie and story are my biggest draw to games, like if I am playing a game by myself I am mostly playing for the story, I have found that if I am playing a game and then I have to do something else, like I need to stop playing the game, then I will look up the ending on Wikipedia, if I am playing single player, and then I lose the urge to keep playing as much. And apart from the obvious things like victory and the social conditioning that goes in to games with like wanting to win and have fun and stuff like that I think the biggest thing that draws me to games is the camaraderie, the playing with friends and having that in common. I probably wouldn’t play League of Legends as much if I didn’t play it with four close friends. [Ryan]

\textsuperscript{16} A team sport involving mock combat based on an Australian post-apocalyptic horror movie from the 1980s. Instead of a ball, they use the ‘head’ of one of their defeated enemies.

\textsuperscript{17} The Games Workshops are a chain of specialty stores selling Warhammer related merchandise. They provide a place for game players to customise their armies and to play against opponents.
Despite not being in the same room (or suburb) as his friends, Ryan values the social interaction involved in playing League of Legends. The move from face-to-face interaction to an online environment does not diminish the activities importance (Lawrence 2003).

The play activities nominated by the respondents include a wide range of activities engaged in for reasons of entertainment and relaxation. The choice of play activities are largely dictated by the ease with which they can be engaged, despite the lack of family obligations and responsibilities the respondents had considerable constraints upon their leisure choice dictated by their study commitments and non-standard work schedules. Being able to pick up the majority of play activities quickly and easily, whatever the activity, is the aspect that is the most highly valued:

I think because I have a fairly busy schedule, that when I don’t have anything on it’s kind of nice to do nothing. [Sharon]

**Cultural activities – Engaging with the works of others**

The category of cultural activities, interests and pursuits includes those practices centred on an engagement with cultural objects and forms. Culture and entertainment are closely linked categories, which are difficult, if not impossible, to clearly separate and delineate from each other (Hughes 2000, p. 14, Lynch and Veal 2006, pp. 220-2, Stevenson 2006, p. 355). Much of the research on cultural activities and cultural tastes has focused on the replication and social reproduction of class (and gender) distinctions,
whether it is through access to privileged knowledge (Bourdieu 1984, Eder and Parker 1987, Williams 1981) or the displays of broad cultural repertoires (Emmison 2003, Peterson 1997, 2005, Peterson and Kern 1996). In an Australian context, a replication of Bourdieu’s seminal study found that there was little evidence to support the idea “that there is a single powerful and universally binding scale of cultural legitimacy which produces effects of social legitimation, and which endows those without cultural capital with a sense of their own inferiority” (Bennett et al. 1999, p. 269). The wide ranging set of activities in the cultural category and the vast differences in tastes among the respondents lends credence to this, as do the personal and introspective meanings that the respondents associate with the activities. The activities nominated involve objects (e.g. books or food), media (e.g. music or television), performances (e.g. concerts or festivals) and displays (e.g. art galleries).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Music, television</th>
<th>18</th>
<th>Internet</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Anime, cooking, sport, studying, theatre, video games</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Movies</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Acquiring media, art galleries, book stores, Cricket, eating, playing games, reading fan fiction, reading the newspaper, shopping</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.3 Tally of ‘cultural’ activities nominated by the respondents

The cultural activities nominated by the respondents were often low key, requiring little in the way of effort to engage in. One of the benefits of the modern age is the wide availability of music, books, movies and television shows, as well as other cultural objects and forms. Television has long been the dominant medium for leisure activity in
Western society (Rowe 2006, p. 319, Silverstone 1994), Australians are no different with 98.6% of households owning a television (Bennett et al. 1999, pp. 58-9). Being able to easily access such a vast array of material doesn’t necessarily make the activity significant:

Yeah if there’s a show that I want to watch on, there’s a lot of crap on TV so, there are certain shows that I will definitely, Survivor and the Amazing Race, those sorts of shows, they’re relaxing, but they have to be on at the right times. [Henry]

If everything is really full on with uni and work and just out of control then I like things that I don’t have to think about, like Grey’s Anatomy or Hellcats, just really fluffy chick flick sort of things, but then um, like especially in holidays and stuff I am willing to give things that require a bit more thought and interpretation a go. [Olivia]

I’m not sure how much TV... to be honest I don’t watch heaps of TV... I have specific shows that I will watch over and over like Friends and Scrubs and so anyone that has similar tastes in them I will talk about it with. [Jackie]

Television is one of the cultural activities nominated by most of the respondents in one form or another. However the value of television viewing as an activity is not necessarily in the content of the show but rather the ease with which it can be engaged. Being able to turn on the TV and ‘chill out’ at almost any time makes it a convenient way
to relax, and on a laptop with a DVD player or downloaded content it can also be any place.

Unlike television, music is a cultural activity nominated by the respondents where they reported having clear preferences for artists and genres. A substantial portion of the youth cultures and subcultures literature is focused on music (Bennett 2000, 2001, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2009, Bryson 1997, Denisoff and Levine 1972, Homan 2003, Lincoln 2005, Singer et al. 1993), in particular those elements that make them unusual or spectacular, such as the specific language and styles that can develop around them. However, none of the respondents had a sense of community associated with their musical tastes. Jackie nominated a number of music related activities as part of her significant activities, including going to music festivals, which had a strong social component for her. However ‘music’ as a general interest had little social value, despite its high importance to Jackie:

It’s the kind of thing that I won’t shut up about... but I’m not sure that it’s a big thing, like it’s a big thing with Clara and I, but not really with anyone else, do you know what I mean? I mean I will talk about it with Emma and I will talk about it with Anna but I’m not sure that it’s a group thing with anyone else much... I can see myself talking about anything at any group, but to actually have it discussed back with me and talked about it back with me is different. Like I could talk at Emma, Anna, Henrietta, Mike, I could talk about anyone with a festival or music in a group, I could do that, and I probably have, but it’s not like a topic that we would all bounce off each other on. [Jackie]
Clara shared similar tastes and interest in music, and Jackie was able to share her passion with Clara in a way that she could not with others in her social circle. The cultural activities nominated by the respondents potentially serve as the basis for discussions with friends and family, and certain activities could be shared (such as listening to music or watching a movie). However the majority of cultural activities are engaged in on a solitary basis or with a partner, and though they serve as a general topic of discussion between friends the respondents repeatedly mentioned that their specific tastes were not shared with others:

I talk about what I read with a select few group of people, not very often... Because I know people don’t value the same things that I do in books, most people don’t critically evaluate their books and I mostly just talk to people who do on occasion critically evaluate books and I value their opinion about books. [Zane]

I usually don’t talk about [heavy metal music] with people that aren’t interested, that’s why I talk about music a lot, but not necessarily my music tastes... Some people really just don’t get it, and don’t really think that it’s interesting or that it’s a good type of music or all sorts of different things. [Olivia]

The respondents did not describe equating engagement with cultural activities with the development of cultural capital or in a way that would be used to demonstrate social status (Critcher 2006, Peterson and Kern 1996, Zavisca 2005), nor is there a concern to be seen as culturally “omnivorous” (Peterson 2005, Van Eijck 2000). Tastes in books,
movies and television series were often described in selective terms, either centred on specific genres or authors/artists/directors. Music tastes were the ones most likely to be described as eclectic, with respondents usually singling out only a few genres as being disliked. However such judgements were arrived at individually, with the very occasional reference to the influence of family members in exposing them to particular cultural forms or objects.

The cultural activities nominated by the respondents were largely low key activities requiring little organisation in order to engage in them, however any substantial engagement could take considerable time, which was not always possible. Reading in particular was a cultural activity that suffered because of the amount of time it required. Henry was studying for his Honours in International Relations, which dominated the time he spent away from working and his partner. Reading was an activity of considerable significance for Henry, however:

I can’t remember the last time I read a fiction book... I don’t read my books during semester, I find it too distracting. If it’s a good book I will want to read it more than I will want to read a textbook, so I have a pile of books I want to get through before I get back to uni properly. [Henry]

Henry had to sacrifice his enjoyment of reading fiction for other priorities, but it did not diminish the importance of the activity for him. The same sentiment was repeated by a number of respondents about various cultural activities, and influenced their behaviour.
Both Cyril and Alan were passionate about music, and had gathered large collections. Alan had an eclectic mixture of genres stored electronically on a hard drive, Cyril had several thousand CDs of mostly pre 1980s rock and folk music:

I listen to music. I collect quite a bit of music and I just enjoy listening to music, a lot of people I think don’t listen to music but I will exclusively listen to something rather than just putting it on as background music. [Cyril]

If there’s an opportunity for me to be listening to music I probably will be... A lot of what I have is, I have it so I am not going to get rid of it as opposed to I don’t listen to it so I will get rid of it, I like to know it’s there if I ever want to listen to it and it doesn’t hurt to have it there basically. [Alan]

Alan worked part time on top of a full time job, and had little opportunity to listen to his extensive collection. Alan, like many other respondents took the opportunity to listen to music wherever he could, usually in conjunction with other activities such as surfing the internet, driving or talking with friends. Cyril was unusual in that he would exclude all other activities when listening to music, making it harder for him to engage in what he considered his most important activity. The limitations on their time did not diminish the importance of music to Cyril or Alan, or other respondents in similar circumstances, in fact it is possible that the difficulties in engaging with the activity may enhance its importance. For other respondents music, and cultural activities like it, has diminished in importance over time. Olivia was trained as a singer, and changed high schools in order to attend a school that would allow her to focus on her musical development:
Used to be a lot more important than it is now, especially with like year 12, it was one of the components of my HSC so it was very important, for a while I was doing two shows a week because I went to a performing arts school... so back in those days it was a lot more important, getting colds used to be probably the worst thing in the whole world to ever happen, but now it’s yeah not nearly as important. [Olivia]

Since leaving school music has played much less of a role in Olivia’s life, though the training as a singer has been useful in her training as a speech pathologist, with many of the exercises or knowledge being closely related. While it is not clear from the interviews why some cultural activities were considered important and others declined significantly in the last several years, the perception of limited free time appears to be a factor, and certain cultural activities need to be prioritised over others; however understanding the relationship between activity, free time and value is extremely difficult and can be related to a number of factors that can change rapidly (Zuzanek 2006). Reading for example was nominated by fourteen of the twenty one respondents, all of whom bemoaned the lack of time they had to read, yet most of whom considered it to be an important activity, more important than watching television or movies which they could engage in frequently and easily.

The cultural activities nominated by the respondents involve engaging with a broad range of objects and forms that are readily available and usually cheap, making them accessible for the low-income earners in emerging adulthood. The reluctance of the
Chapter 3 Everyday Activities of Emerging Adults

respondents to discuss specific cultural tastes would seem to agree with the findings of Accounting for Tastes (Bennett et al. 1999), specifically that they do not serve or are not used as signifiers of social status amongst peer groups. The cultural activities nominated here can be shared, but are far more likely to be engaged alone when a suitable occasion arises. The category is distinct from others, such as the play and creative activities, due to the largely passive engagement with the object or form – reading, watching, listening, looking, etc. The significance of these activities to the respondents can vary and is not necessarily related to how often they engage in them.

Aspirational activities – working towards medium and long term goals

The category of aspirational activities, interests and pursuits includes those practices that contribute, directly and indirectly, to medium or long term goals. There are numerous significant changes that have helped to shape the aspirations of young people in contemporary Australia, including the increasing ease of international travel and the opening of universities to more people. Aspirations and life goals are associated with the social positions of both the emerging adult and their parents; young people from working class backgrounds tend to have lower occupational aspirations (Anderson 2000, Carpenter and Hayden 2000, Jones and Schneider 2009, Sandefur et al. 2005). The process of individualisation in Western society and the concomitant opening up of ‘possibilities’ for young people also shape aspirations, which now must account for the uncertainty around the outcomes of long term goals such as education, and finding a balance between competing interests (McDonald et al. 2011). Having high aspirations is
important, as it can lead to better educational and occupational outcomes for many (Carroll et al. 2009a, Gutman and Akerman 2008), although gender differences and disadvantaged backgrounds may present numerous structural obstacles impeding their success (Alston and Kent 2009, Andres et al. 1999, Arthur et al. 2004, Marjoribanks 2005, Morgan and Idriss 2012).

The aspirational activities nominated by the respondents focus on education (e.g. studying), and include activities that are difficult to arrange and require preparation and planning (e.g. domestic and international travel), and any activity related to future or long term endeavours (e.g. writing). Many of these activities require substantial investment of time and effort, and usually money, and the outcome is uncertain. However the activities are seen to have value in themselves, whether the goals are achieved or not their pursuit is significant.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>13</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Travel</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Internet, write</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Road trips</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Acting*, going to the beach, being alone, camping parties, cinema, coding and programming, collecting journal articles*, dogs, drawing, job applications and resumes*, making lists, going to Melbourne*, creating a photo album, planning a Café*, running, studying Korean and Japanese*, theatre*, tutoring ESL, walking, window shopping, working out</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 Tally of ‘aspirational’ activities nominated by the respondents

Education and study are the most frequently nominated aspirational activities, partly reflecting the highly privileged social backgrounds of the respondents (and emerging adults as a cohort), and partly reflecting the recognition that post secondary education was important for financial independence and success in adulthood (Sandefur et al. 2005). The considerable rise in the availability of university places (Carpenter and Hayden 2000, Encel 1970), along with the decoupling of university degrees from occupational outcomes (Michael 2012a, White and Wyn 2013), has lead to a cultural change in how tertiary education is approached reflective of the possibilities and uncertainty of the period. The value in undertaking specific degrees is often unrelated to a particular job or occupation, especially in areas such as theatre (Cyril, Phoebe and Georgia), history or politics (Lisa, Nathan and Eric), where finding related work is

* These activities directly relate to planned future careers, which are often not directly related to the fields of study.
extremely unlikely. The reasons for studying are generally much more individual and personal:

I don’t know if I will end up graduating physics because I still have no idea what I am doing with my life, originally I was going to do law... I generally find physics and mathematics hard, I have to study, I have to work at it, but I feel gratified in doing it, where as with law I am doing a law subject this semester just for shits and giggles because I want to see if I am doing the right course ... I stopped thinking about what I wanted to do and started thinking about what I wanted to be able to do and I like physics and I like computer science for the intellectual skills that they teach me, but as far as that goes I still haven’t made up my mind. [Ryan]

Ryan’s studies in physics and computer science require a great deal more effort than law, as he felt that he was able to argue articulately far more naturally than the heavy mathematics and abstraction involved in physics. The value in this degree lies in the process of self development, which was initially more important than the potential outcomes of studying. Ryan was weighing up whether to change degrees at the time, something which other respondents (Sharon, Cyril, Tiffany, Nathan, and Melissa) had done in the past for various reasons; the extra time it would have taken to complete a law degree was not something that bothered him at all.

Nathan’s chosen course(s) of studies were selected because of a personal life goal to make a difference in the world, considering a number of options including becoming a doctor. Nathan had finally settled on economics, and had planned out a course of
action that included moving to Melbourne to complete his undergraduate degree, and then moving to Canberra for post graduate study:

The main reason why I wanted to do medicine was I wanted to have a job that keeps me quite busy and where I can feel like I am making a difference and helping people, and then I realised that I could do that just as easily going through international relations and things like that, just in a different way. Then I decided that because I enjoyed it so much, I thought I would stick that through and then over time just imagining where I would end up it’s kind of evolved to where it is now. [Nathan]

Nathan found economics held greater interest for him than medicine or international relations, and had constructed a career path for himself leading up to working for the World Bank, as that was a position that he felt would allow him to make the biggest difference. The ideal that study should be both meaningful and enjoyable was shared by many of the respondents, at least initially. Once the necessity of finding employment stemming from their studies became a looming concern the meaning shifted towards finding a line of study that would result in a stable job.

Work was rarely one of the activities specifically relating to future endeavours, as the respondents mostly worked casual or part time, in jobs with little or no relation to the careers that they desired. There were a few exceptions, Lisa and Olivia felt their jobs were complimentary to their intended future careers, and Kevin’s job offered the possibility of moving upwards to something better. In Lisa’s case working at a disability
service for the deaf, hearing and speech impaired is something that inspired her interest in a career as an Auslan interpreter:

It’s good for a little while I think, and it will really set me up to be an interpreter, I am hoping for that in a couple of years, but with the relay service, it’s not a career path for me, it’s just a fill in thing for me. [Lisa]

Lisa had a bachelor’s degree in history; however it was not an area of work that she had pursued. After graduating Lisa went through a period of introspective reflection, where she thought about what was important in her life. Contributing to the community was something Lisa considered worthwhile, and she felt interpreting for the deaf community could meet that criterion:

It’s just one of those things that I got interested in because of the work we do with deaf and hearing impaired at work, and I guess that my aim is to be an interpreter so I feel like I am actively helping a piece of the community. I guess I can go out and I get to travel and to see different places and meet people but at the same time really contributing. [Lisa]

Working as a relay officer held little intrinsic value as a career for Lisa, but the opportunities it afforded her to gain experience for an occupation she wanted to be in made it more palatable. Kevin worked as a salesman selling cars, a job requiring 50 hour work weeks and involving sporadic rostering that consumed his Saturdays and made it difficult to plan too far ahead. Kevin considered himself to be good at his job, was
earning a comfortable living, and could see the potential if he chose to make a career of it:

I’ve a bit of ambition so in five years if I am still in the industry I’d want to be management, probably sales manager. Ten, fifteen years I would want to be general manager of a dealership or something. [Kevin]

Kevin was uncertain about the future course of his life, expressing a wish to travel and/or study in the near future. Both of these were strong desires for Kevin, but they were incompatible with his current job, and would have to fit in with his primary concern:

I’m thinking of doing a marketing or business degree part time in a couple of years, starting within a couple of years. Or possibly maybe a human movement degree when I am in my thirties, just for something to do. Something I am interested in, but it’s only going to be a part time thing, because I have to have the full time job because I still need the money. [Kevin]

Kevin had been independent since before he turned 18, and stated ‘I haven’t actually been on holidays since I was fifteen’. Kevin placed great importance on financial independence and security as personal life goals, and though he planned on travelling to Europe or somewhere with a beach and nightlife, they took secondary priority behind a steady income.
Travelling was one of the frequently nominated medium term goals to which the respondents’ aspire, reflecting the growing trend for many young people to travel internationally, either while studying or before committing to long term responsibilities such as children and careers (Simpson 2005, Smith et al. 2007, p. 5). Travel is seen to play an important role in the development and exploration of self-identity, and many young people consider it important to do so while they have the opportunity (King 2011, Ravert 2009, p. 384, Shulman et al. 2006), reflecting a modern cultural value that “the well-travelled person, the person who has experienced the world, is very widely believed to be an improved version of the less travelled” (Franklin 2006, p. 399). While Jackie and Bianca were saving their travel for the end of their degrees, other students interviewed combined travelling with their studies:

On my holidays I try and go overseas as much as possible, but you know with studying and on the wage that we are on it’s not always viable. But there are still a lot of places I want to see that I haven’t. Like South America, I haven’t really. I have been to Europe but that was like ten years ago so I haven’t really experienced it, there’s still a lot of America I haven’t seen, I only went to New York and LA, I’d love to go to like French Canada, Montreal is meant to be great, just like quite a lot of places. Probably in ten years I would have done a lot of those things I hope. [Victor]

The strong desire to see the world, even if only in short blocks of weeks or months, was shared by Bianca, Cyril, Olivia, Alan, Kevin, and Sharon, but always tempered by the high
costs involved. Even the costs involved with a road trip can be prohibitive, given the costs of petrol, accommodation and the need for access to a car:

Last time we had holidays me and Robert went to the sunny coast which was fun, we are going to Thailand later in the year. Like I want to do travel, more travel overseas, I have already been to Indonesia, but yeah it’s sort of a money thing with that, like I do like getting away for the weekend to the coast if we can, that sort of thing.

**Money thing?**

Travelling overseas costs quite a lot of money and I don’t generally tend to have that much money lying around, it’s usually sort of a build up to it, save all your money until you can get there sort of thing. [Olivia]

The cost of travelling was the dominant concern for everyone who nominated it, whether they lived at home or independently, or worked part time or full time. The value of the activity was considered more important than the difficulties in preparing for it, and for Kevin and Cyril at least it was nominated despite their being uncertain of whether they would ever get the opportunity in future to travel at all.

The outcome of the aspirational activities is often uncertain, and in some cases extremely difficult to achieve, but the respondents are not shy of sacrificing their short term desires in order to try. Tiffany had been researching dog breeds and breeders for some time, finally settling on a puppy that will cost her $3000 for the initial purchase.

At the time Tiffany was working full time in a call centre, however most of her (mediocre)
income went towards rent, bills, the expenses involved in regularly travelling to Melbourne to see her boyfriend Ben, as well as paying for her imminent move to Melbourne for study. $3000 was a hefty sum to find, and Tiffany found every opportunity to save that she could:

I’ve been nagging my boyfriend about it, he’s like what do you want for your birthday? And I’m like put it to the puppy fund! He said what do you want for Christmas? Put it to the puppy fund! And then, because I wanted this handbag I was like if I get a job in Melbourne then I will buy this handbag, and then I kept on talking about it for three weeks, and he was like fine, I will pay for half of it, and I said no, and he said why not? You really want this handbag. And I’m like, yeah, but put it to the puppy fund! [Tiffany]

Tiffany’s willingness to sacrifice and work towards her medium term aspiration of getting a puppy is reflected in the stories and attitudes of other respondents who have set themselves long term goals. The café Melissa was planning required considerable research and effort, involving learning how to run a small business, apply for grants, gaining familiarity with all the relevant pieces of legislation, exploring possible designs for a space and checking out the competition for ideas – all without any prior training or education. Dean was learning Korean with the aim of moving to South Korea and teaching English, however for the time being he continues to work full time as a chef. Eric had completed a novel and was writing fiction while he was studying; however he had no idea whether anything he had written would ever be published. That these activities were difficult was not a deterrent, nor was the fact that nothing may come of
them, for the respondents much of the value of these aspirational activities was in the journey, rather than the destination.

The aspirational activities nominated by the respondents included a range of pursuits, interests and activities relating to medium and long term goals around education, careers, personal development and health. Many of the activities had a degree of uncertainty associated with them, particularly those where the respondents had little control over the outcome, such as studying. Other activities, particularly travel, required considerable effort and sacrifice; however the value attached to the outcomes was greater than the difficulties involved.

**Functional activities – Taking care of business**

The functional category of activities includes those practices and activities that contribute to the day-to-day upkeep of everyday life. The choice of the term “functional” is a deliberate allusion to the work of Durkheim, the nominated activities in this category are about the preservation of homeostasis in the respondents’ lives (Giddens 1984). The experiences of daily life can impact on psychosocial and physiological development, the development of social, creative and physical skills, interpersonal relationships, and the sense of self-worth, control and identity, particularly in adolescence (ABS 2001, Soupourmas 2005, Trainor et al. 2010). During emerging adulthood the necessity, or even the opportunity, to engage in functional activities can impact on the individuals sense of autonomy and responsibility (Arnett 2004, Arnett and
Tanner 2006). The activities nominated by the respondents in this category focus on the tasks necessary to responsibly maintain their lives on a daily basis, such as working, cleaning and running errands.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Cook, gym, gym, dog park, errand, grocery shopping, responsibilities, walking, yoga and pilates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clean</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Domestic duties, do nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sleep, study</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Do nothing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3.5 Tally of ‘functional’ activities nominated by the respondents**

Work is the dominant functional activity nominated by respondents, by necessity taking up much more of the respondents’ time than they would like (Veal 2006). The literature on the types of jobs young people are employed in is considerable, with the nature of part time and casual workplaces well established, as is the lack of opportunity for advancement or careers (ABS 2010c, Boreham and Hall 2000, Cockburn 2001, Côté and Bynner 2008, Fauske 1996, Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Hosking and Western 2008, Kovacheva 2001, Marks 2005, Messersmith et al. 2008, Michael October 16 2012, November 28 2012, Mortimer 2009, Sanefur et al. 2005, Shildrick and MacDonald 2007). The majority of the respondents gave similar descriptions of their jobs, as being something they disliked but which had a number of characteristics that made them bearable. Zane worked in an inbound call centre that allowed him time to study while he was completing his degree. The pay was low, and the work dull, but it was sufficient for his requirements:
It’s not a job I find enjoyable, it’s not a job where I learn anything new, or different or interesting. The people are nice, but other than that there is no real reason for me to stay in the job... Because it is a wonderful job to suit university around, because the longer you stay in places the more likeable you are for job interviews, because it looks like you stay in places a long time, those are primarily my reasons [for staying], and seeing as I’ve only just finished my university degree this is the first time in which I have been looking elsewhere. [Zane]

There was never any question about building a career in this job, or of staying in the position long term, Zane’s choice of work was entirely about convenience while he studied. Having completed his degree several days before Zane had already enrolled in classes to help tailor his curriculum vitae for prospective employers. This attitude towards current employment situations is repeated by many of the respondents working both full time and part time:

Mmm, it’s ok, like it’s a really easy job, the main downside is the boredom, you always have to take something to do with you, but it’s flexible and the pay is all right so it’s a good job for being at uni.

Is it something you can see yourself doing in five years time?

No, definitely not, absolutely not. I probably will stick with it until I finish this degree and then I will see what I want to do from there, unless I get this cadetship and then I will have to quit. [Wendy]

The attitude towards these jobs is that they serve a function that is important, but that the job itself often has little intrinsic value, as the opportunity for socialising, for training
or occasionally advancement are equally available at any number of identical positions –
one call centre (or supermarket, kitchen, etc.) is much like any other. While many of the
respondents had great hopes for future careers or for fulfilling work, the meanings
attached with their current work were uninspired – almost everyone could not wait to
be in a position where they could quit.

The functional activities can cover any number of practices within the domestic sphere
or related to a person’s continued health and well being. For the most part these
activities are engaged in when the respondent has free time, but they are not
considered to be leisure activities and are distinct from them (Dumazedier 1967,
Meyersohn 1972, Zuzanek 2006). A considerable portion of every day is devoted to
routine domestic things such as eating and personal grooming, but the respondents
rarely nominated these as being significant, at least for their functional aspects. Those
functional activities that are considered significant have aspects to them that make
them important to the individual. For Lisa and Zane, however, cleaning and domestic
chores were important activities that allowed them to bring a sense of order into their
existence:

It covers all things that I need to do like family events, and things like that, I do
find that’s a responsibility that you probably should go to. It also covers job
searches and work and rental searches, all the not fun but you need to do
activities. [Zane]
Errands, the post office, hairdresser’s appointment, whatever, those things that you have to leave the house for but are necessary things that you have to get done. Domestic stuff, keeping the house clean, I am really OCD about how I live I guess, if things are messy it just makes me feel all out of whack so I will do the washing and I will get everything put away and that kind of thing. [Lisa]

Being able to maintain order in their houses was seen as a reflection on how well they controlled their own lives, something which was not always possible when living in shared accommodation. Lisa found living in disarray put her “out of whack”, organising her belongings gave her a sense of control over her life, a feeling which was sometimes difficult to achieve. Similarly Melissa ‘can’t cook in a dirty kitchen, can’t shower in a dirty bathroom’, not having access to either in her previous home contributed significantly to her recent decision to move. These types of functional activities make it possible for emerging adults to exist from day-to-day without too much difficulty, and were not necessarily unpleasant; they can often be relaxing and engaging. These functional activities were engaged in because of necessity, but the feelings of order and achievement after having completed them could also be a powerful motivator. Olivia considered cleaning and ironing activities to be functional and allowed her the mental space to unwind from her hectic schedule of study and work:

I love cleaning. I always feel that my house or my room represents how the rest of my life is going so if everything is messy I generally tend to feel like everything is falling to pieces and it tends to have a really big psychological effect on me, just making my bed and having everything neat makes me so much happier. So I
am actually not that worried about doing it because it generally tends to end in me feeling better about other things, like I think that by doing an hours worth of cleaning in the morning before study I am actually more productive because I am not thinking about all the things that I have to do. [Olivia]

Olivia’s discussion of how she enjoyed cleaning and ironing was mirrored in Lisa’s discussion of cleaning and organising her belongings, Melissa’s discussion of shopping for groceries, and how Nathan used to feel about going to the dog park (until the repetitious nature of answering the same questions about his Tibetan mastiff became aggravating). The mundane, repetitive and uncomplicated nature of the activities allowed the respondents to unwind, serving as a form of meditative release from the difficulties of day-to-day life.

The functional activities nominated were largely of a domestic nature, and were more often named by emerging adults living independently, though not exclusively. For people living out of the family home these activities were likely to play a significant part in their day-to-day lives, whereas the respondents living with their parents may have shared the responsibilities with their family. The individuals engaging in the practices may enjoy the activity, feel an obligation to maintain their domestic arrangements or consider it important for their future well being. The functional activities are strongly related to the contemporary values of being an adult, they served as methods for the respondents to maintain independence and take responsibility for themselves.
Creative activities – Activities centring on the production of something new

The category of creative activities, interests and pursuits includes those practices involving the active engagement with cultural objects and forms. Creative activities are often considered a locus for personal expression and the development of self-identity, particularly around subculture (Bucholtz 2002, Hebdige 1979, 1982, Hodkinson 2005, Jenks 2006, Moore 2007), and there is considerable cachet associated with possessing ‘creativity’ as a personal attribute (Nixon 2006, Osborne 2003). The research on cultural industries is arguably narrowly focused on specific areas of mass media and entertainment, such as print and electronic publications, television, cinema, music, etc., to the exclusion of a number of areas which are potentially the location of culture and creativity, such as tourism, automobiles, toys and sports (Mato 2009, Miller 2009).

Additionally the commodification of the ‘creative industries’ is seen to have a destructive influence on the production of independently creative or individual works (Adorno 1991, Hesmondhalgh 1998, Lury 1996), and the role of government in funding and fostering these industries can lead to similar concerns (Stevenson 2006). The creative activities nominated by the respondents often mirror the cultural activities, involving objects (e.g. craft), media (e.g. writing or recording music), performance (e.g. playing an instrument) and displays (e.g. collections); they are ‘creative’ in that they allow the participant to actively choose the particulars of their activity as opposed to a passive engagement.
Table 3.6 Tally of ‘creative’ activities nominated by the respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Write</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting, baking, coding and programming, collecting journal articles,</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>film making, gardening, making lists, photography, compiling photo</td>
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<tr>
<td>albums, planning a café, singing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cook, craft, draw, guitar, paint, piano</td>
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<tr>
<td>The creative activities nominated were a mixture of long term projects</td>
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<td>requiring considerable time and effort, and short term pursuits which</td>
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<tr>
<td>could be picked up and left off without difficulty. The creative</td>
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<tr>
<td>activities had very personal meanings associated with them; the</td>
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<tr>
<td>activity did not have to involve the ‘creation’ of something original</td>
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<tr>
<td>(as in the composition of music), it could involve the replication of a</td>
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<tr>
<td>cultural form or object. The value of the activities lay in the</td>
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<tr>
<td>individual nature of the respondents’ engagement, whether the end</td>
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<tr>
<td>product was for them alone or for others. Craft for example is linked</td>
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<tr>
<td>to nostalgia for a pre-industrial lifestyle as well as the construction</td>
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<tr>
<td>of national identities (Creighton 2001), however on an individual level</td>
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<tr>
<td>craft can be focused on the process and the outcomes of making something</td>
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<tr>
<td>new. Lisa enjoyed making things for herself and her family, and was</td>
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<tr>
<td>able to take advantage of her flexible work environment in order to</td>
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<tr>
<td>produce gifts. Part of crafting involved the creation of something new,</td>
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<tr>
<td>but a lot of the significance Lisa placed on the activity was feeling</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>that the product was an expression of something personal:</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All the craft I do, I love giving craft to people... when my brother and   |       |
| sister in law got married I made them a cross stitch frame with their    |       |
| names and the date of their wedding, it’s just a gift that no one else  |       |
| would give them, would think of giving them I guess. Like this Christmas |       |
| I am making my family little book marks.
for everyone, we are all pretty big on reading, so um, and it’s a nice feeling to create something, even if you buy a kit and it shows you the picture of exactly what it’s going to look like when you have finished making it you are like, whoa, I made that, that’s my own skill that I’ve put into it and it’s just a great feeling giving a piece of craft to someone, and they just appreciate it so much more because you’ve put the effort in to do it for them. [Lisa]

The creative activities require much more engagement than the cultural activities they mirror. For example the amount of time that Eric invested in writing his novel is far greater than the time it would take to read it. The active and lengthy engagement with the cultural objects and forms added substantial weight to the creative activity, both to the process and the end result, and consequently the creative activities nominated were considered to have far more personal importance than an analogous cultural activity such as reading a book.

The creative activities are not nominated by everyone, the time, effort and skill required to undertake the activity can be prohibitive barriers to many people, or as Sharon put it they may simply feel that they ‘don’t have a creative bone in their body’. Some of the creative activities can be picked up quickly and easily, such as playing an instrument or working on a craft project, but many require a particular frame of mind, which may be difficult to get without a considerable amount of free time. While the respondents might not be planning on a career as an artist, they are approached with an unusual amount of dedication and investment in mastering the skills that surpasses most leisure activities (Stebbins 1992, 2006). The amount of time required for serious artistic
endeavours can be difficult to come by, and is underrepresented in time use surveys because of the infrequent occasions for engaging in the activities (Zuzanek 2006, p. 191). Melissa had devoted a lot of time to painting and art, and at one stage had her work exhibited in a gallery. However the time required to produce new paintings had to come at the expense of other activities:

I did my big exhibition a while ago, and then since then had a break from it... It’s hard, because I think it’s not the kind of thing I can just sit down to whenever I have the time, I have to be in the mood for it. And when there are so many other things to do, living in town especially, ... it’s a lot more tempting to just go out and do other things... I haven’t done it in so long that I am out of practice.

**Do you think that working so much is making it harder as well?**

Possibly. Yeah, working so much. Having partners, coincides with dating Derek and dating Bernie, my not painting. Boyfriends are time consuming. I need to find a boyfriend that likes to paint, then we can paint together. [Melissa]

Though Melissa placed significant importance on her painting, she had found it increasingly harder to make time for it in her day-to-day life, particularly when she was in a relationship. Having ended her latest relationship just days before Melissa was already reprioritising how she planned to spend her free time to allow her more opportunity to paint. Eric had similar difficulties finding time to write in between working, studying and seeing his girlfriend. For both respondents the costs involved in engaging in their respective creative activities too often outweighed the benefits, much to their disappointment.
The creative activities are often engaged in alone, becoming part of the private space(s) of the respondents, and contributing to their psychological well being (Abbott-Chapman and Robertson 2009, Robertson and Williams 2004). These activities are considered important by the respondents, but they do not wish to share them with others. Georgia and Jackie had creative activities they enjoyed doing, but they did not feel as if their performance would survive or require scrutiny. Jackie in particular had a love for music that she shared with many people, but her actual playing of music was something that she kept to herself:

I love to paint, I love doing it, but I don’t like involving other people, don’t like other people looking at it, don’t like other people critiquing it, it’s just something I do for myself. [Georgia]

Guitar and piano, I don’t really feel like I’m particularly good at it, so I don’t really like to go around talking about it all the time because then it just seems, it’s sort of something that’s more private I suppose. Like I will talk about it with Scott and stuff because that’s what he’s about, but I wouldn’t go around telling people that I played guitar because really I just sit there and muck around and I enjoy it, you know it’s like my own little personal enjoyment but I would very rarely get up and play for somebody else, just like I probably wouldn’t go around telling people that I play this and that, do you know what I mean? Like if I thought I was awesome I would probably talk about it a lot more because I’d be really proud but it’s really just a personal thing that I like to do that I like to do on my own, it’s sort of a comfort. [Jackie]
Keeping these activities and pursuits private is not done necessarily because the respondent feels that others would view their creative practices negatively, rather engaging in the creative activity may be something the individual feels no need to share with others, or it may be something they do for reasons that are entirely personal. The end result may be something they wish to share, as with Eric’s novel which he wished to publish, or the photo albums that Phoebe was trying to compile.

The creative activities were often more important to the respondents than the other activities they nominated, with considerable significance placed on their personal and individual nature. The activities were usually private and solitary pursuits, which they may or may not feel the need to share with others. A small portion of these activities were engaged in to produce something original, such as novels or artworks, but the amount of time and effort required was often prohibitive and impractical for them to be a regular part of their day-to-day lives.

**Liminal activities – On the edges of social acceptability**

The liminal category of activities, interests and pursuits includes those practices that are risky, illegal, or considered socially transgressive, and yet are still engaged in by individuals. Research into liminality has a long history originating in anthropology (Rojek 2000, Turner 1969, Van Gennep 1960) and the ritual practices embedded within society:
Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial (Turner 1969, p. 95).

These liminal entities can include spaces (Winchester et al. 1999), groups (Jenks 2006) and activities (Lyng 1990), and are often closely related to the study of deviance.

Certainly some of the activities that the respondents have nominated are well placed within these discussions, particularly those on drinking (Lindsay 2009, Patrick and Maggs 2010, Randolph et al. 2010, Tutenges and Rod 2009) and drug taking (Arbeau et al. 2007, Mason and Korpela 2009, Robinson 2009). However, there are a few nominated activities that are seemingly innocuous to the outside observer. These activities are considered liminal by the respondents because of experiences where they have had negative reactions from others, or because they consider these activities not to be ‘normative’ behaviour. The liminal activities nominated here are engaged in because they are enjoyable activities, yet there is awareness that the practice must be justified (e.g. smoking), kept secret (e.g. pornography) or monitored (e.g. drinking and using Facebook). The activities nominated in this category may have considerable significance to the individual, serving multiple purposes beyond simple enjoyment, or they can be fulfilling in of themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Drinking</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquiring media, smoking, Facebook</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camping parties, collecting anime, gambling, making lists, photography, porn, recreational substance use</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.7 Tally of ‘liminal’ activities nominated by the respondents
Not every respondent was engaged in a practice that they considered to be liminal, and not every instance of an activity was considered liminal by every respondent that engaged in it. Drinking alcohol is the most common activity included in the liminal category, serving as the starting point for many social activities with large groups of people, “drinking alcohol is ... central to Australian culture; it is inherently a social practice strongly associated with pleasure and celebration and not always harmful” (Lindsay 2009, p. 371). Excessive alcohol consumption amongst emerging adults and youth is a common theme in both the media and academia (Hayward and Hobbs 2007, Randolph et al. 2010, Shinew and Parry 2005, Winchester et al. 1999), with regular discussions of the reckless nature of youth and a culture of binge drinking featuring prominently. Respondents mentioned such occasions in their past (and future), and many of them also indicated an awareness of the associated health issues. Victor indicated he drank more regularly than any other respondent, especially during breaks between semesters it would be at ‘least every weekend’. Alcohol played a large part in social gatherings as well, at one stage joking “I guess a lot of times gatherings will just be drinking, an excuse to drink, maybe I do have a problem”. From the interview it is unclear whether the level of Victor’s alcohol consumption should be a subject for concern, but it is clear that it is not a level that Victor intends to maintain forever:

Yeah I probably do over drink a bit... Just on occasion I will go out and drink too much, but it’s nothing major, but probably you know as I get older I will just take it down a bit, be smarter about it... I know a lot of people that are worse, it’s not like a major thing. I will still readily admit that I should drink a little bit less. I
wouldn’t really say, it doesn’t worry me that much, but it’s something that is there and I am aware of. [Victor]

By their early twenties most of the respondents had found a level of appropriate drinking behaviour after excessive experiences in their teens. Melissa had had a number of issues with drugs and alcohol as a teen, but now consciously made an effort to limit her alcohol consumption:

Especially since I have started doing yoga I can notice the effect on my health, and it just doesn’t seem worth it. Really doesn’t seem worth it. So if I am going to get drunk it needs to be a really good night out, it needs to be worth it. I used to drink a lot in high school, and then I was a nanna for a while and then I didn’t drink at all, so now I’ve got a nice balance. [Melissa]

Fewer respondents nominated ‘drinking’ as an activity than nominated an activity in which drinking might be a feature, such as ‘gatherings’ or ‘going out’. Of those that did nominate ‘drinking’ all also nominated an activity such as ‘gatherings’ or ‘going out’ which provide a social context for alcohol consumption, the social rewards associated with drinking were more important than intoxication (Cooper 1994, Cox and Klinger 1988, Kuntsche et al. 2005, Maggs 1997). The only person that ever talked about drinking alcohol as a solitary endeavour was Kevin, mentioning that he might have a beer on the couch after work. However, for Kevin drinking was more likely to be an activity engaged in with mates at the pub, or after work with his colleagues. For the majority of the respondents who discussed alcohol consumption in one form or another
it did not fall into the liminal category at all, drinking is a normal and acceptable activity which they engaged in a manner they considered appropriate and reasonable. The respondents that did consider drinking to be a liminal activity did so because of their past experiences or because they had an awareness that their behaviour had the potential to be detrimental to their health.

Liminal activities often serve more than one purpose, almost all of the activities nominated in this category have some recreational aspect to them. Those liminal activities that have an element of risk to them, smoking, drinking, drug taking, and gambling, are often presented as being a part of social interactions. Their inclusion as liminal activities lies in the fact that they are not widely considered to be ‘normative’ behaviours, even though smoking, drinking and gambling are perfectly legal. Georgia was well aware of the health risks associated with smoking, and made several comments during the interview about her mother’s disapproval and her desire to quit. The influence of peers in people taking up smoking is well established (Delorme et al. 2003, Friedman et al. 1985), however sharing the activity with others allows for a short moment of socialising in much the same way as going for a cup of coffee with someone:

I couldn’t tell you how many friends I’ve made by being a smoker, it’s one of the most social things you can do, not so much nowadays that we are like second class citizens, we have to leave the building every time we want to have a cigarette, but just going out on the street, asking, borrowing a lighter off someone, sitting down having a chat with the smoker sitting next to you on their
smoke break, it’s bizarre. Adam and I wouldn’t be such good friends if he wasn’t trying to pretend to not be a smoker by only bumming cigarettes off me.
[Georgia]

Similar comments were made about gambling and drug taking, for example, Eric stated that “recreational substance use is something that I obsessively talk about, far more often than I do”, making it a topic of conversation amongst peers, an opportunity for socialisation, rather than an activity that he regularly engages in. For Kevin gambling was something he only ever did ‘with a mate’, and was something he rarely engaged in. Kevin lacked people around him that viewed gambling as an acceptable behaviour, and without this social influences his gambling practices were curtailed (Delfabbro and Thrupp 2003, Moore and Ohtsuka 1997).

The liminal activities are nominated by emerging adults because of the significance they have in their day-to-day lives. These activities cover a wide range of interests and pursuits; they share in common a status on the edges of what is considered socially acceptable. Accessing pornography is one such activity, ‘sex’ is reportedly the most frequently used search term on the internet (Cooper et al. 2000), and there have been several studies examining the viewing of sexually explicit material online (Buzzell 2005, Cooper et al. 2004, Cooper et al. 1999, Goodson et al. 2001), with one study finding that 72% of men and 24% of women reported using the Internet to access sexually explicit material (Boies 2002). Despite its wide spread prevalence it is not an activity that is considered socially acceptable by everyone. Carroll et al. reported that 66.5% of men
and 48.7% of women in their study agreed on some level that viewing pornography was acceptable, and that for adult men “approximately 1 in 5 reported that they used pornography but did not believe that it is an acceptable behaviour” (2008, pp. 16, 17).

Eric mentioned that downloading pornography was one of his important activities, though not one he shared openly with his friends or family, in particular singling out his girlfriend as someone whom he had to keep in the dark. Eric demonstrated awareness of both the ubiquity of and the sensitivity around this activity:

Just for realism’s sake, there is a lot of porn.

At uni?

Yep, they give me 120 megs of downloads a month and I have to use it somehow. That’s my excuse and I am sticking to it.

...You say [porn is] something important to you.

Yeah. Well I mean I think it would be, like most guys would feel a bit ridiculous even saying it, but I bet most men and a good proportion of women would have a pretty in depth knowledge of porn and feel it quite important to their life, whether or not they admit it is another thing.

Can you think of a reason why it would be important though?

Well sex is one of the key elements of existence, so it makes sense that it would be a big factor in most people’s lives, and considering you know, entertainment is another big factor in life, the two have quite enjoyable results. [Eric]

Eric’s discussion of downloading pornography mirrors that of respondents who have nominated other liminal activities such as downloading music and television illegally,
recreational substance use and collecting anime, to name a few. The respondents often feel the need to justify their interest, often by highlighting how common or widespread the activity is amongst the broader community. Whether such assertions are accurate or not, the respondents recognise the reluctance of many people to openly discuss such topics:

I don’t watch a lot of TV, um, I’m not sure if I can say that I illegally download TV, but I do. The TV itself isn’t something itself that I watch but I watch a lot of TV shows, just not when they are on the TV [laughs]. [Fiona]

The reluctance to discuss liminal activities is reflected in the behaviour of the respondents, who are unlikely to report discussing or sharing their liminal activities with the significant people in their social circle, even when the activity constitutes an important part of their daily life. In these cases the respondent may have a number of like minded friends with whom they share the activity in common, or it may be that it is something they rarely or never discuss with anyone.

The actual legality of the activity is not something that concerns the respondents. Downloading movies, television or music is a practice engaged in by many respondents, who are not concerned that what they were doing is illegal. For the respondents these are leisure activities rather than criminal, and there is recognition that these activities are widely tolerated, though not condoned in this time and place (Jenks 2006, Redmon 2003, Williams and Walker 2006). Victor’s housemate had obtained a copy of *Mortal*
Kombat, rated R for its depictions of graphic violence and therefore prohibited for sale in Australia\textsuperscript{18}. Victor disagreed with the controversy over the ban on R rated games, and that informed his willingness to engage in playing the game:

> I guess it’s a bit stupid, it’s so clearly cartoonish, and if you think about a MA rated movie they can be really far more sinister and far more real life, a lot of movies are trying to be like real life basically. I don’t think it really compares to be honest... we joked that the Federal Police will come knocking on the door and take it away, it doesn’t bother me that much but I do think that it’s a bit silly. I think an R rated game is akin to an M rated movie really, but I guess as the graphics get more realistic that might change a bit. [Victor]

Though playing Mortal Kombat with his friends was not intended as a political act of individual resistance that is the subtext of engaging in this particular activity (Shaw 2006). Victor recognises that this activity is illegal, even if he is joking about the Federal police intervening, to continue doing so makes a statement about his attitudes towards the current political position on adult rated video games. Music piracy has been highlighted as another site of resistance:

> Leisure, in the music ‘rip-off’ context, can be viewed as a form of resistance to structures that often challenge conventional boundaries and accepted codes of behaviour, particularly traditional and accepted distinctions between licit and illicit forms of leisure (Lynch and Veal 2006, p. 330).

\textsuperscript{18} The interview was conducted before Australia introduced an adult classification for computer and video games. This game has subsequently been released in Australia with a R18+ rating.
Wendy used to download music frequently, but had to stop in recent times because the service she was using was taken down, and as a result she has not listened to anything new in about six months. Purchasing music legitimately through the iTunes store is not something she can afford to do. Sharon is ambivalent about downloading music, feeling it is acceptable to download artists from overseas but that she has to show her support for Australian artists by purchasing their work. Like Victor and Fiona, they are aware that their actions are illegal, but see that fact as unimportant. In all of these instances the act of downloading the music or television programs, or playing the unauthorised video game, are not seen as being harmful (especially if no Australian musicians’ work is pirated), rather they are resisting the inequality of the authoritarian structures that determine pricing and availability (Rojek 2005b).

The activity does not have to be illegal for it to be considered liminal by the respondent; it just has to be an activity they feel sets them apart from others due to it not being considered ‘normative’ behaviour. Melissa spends a considerable amount of time making lists, organising everything including her short and long term goals, the things she needs to research, and what she needs to buy for that evening’s meal. One of the methods she employed to cope with the recent end of a relationship was to write a list of those things in her life she considered to be important. In her previous job her meticulous organisation was held up as an example to the other employees, yet Melissa discussed her friends in terms of who was “aware” of her list making.
It’s, when people are made aware, it’s not like they notice that I have lists, they notice that I have a pile of lists this long in my diary, and then they get a bit confused.

**It’s the volume of lists?**

There’s a lot. Even I can recognise that it’s a strange volume of lists, but, yep... I don’t go out of my way to hide it, it’s just whether they notice it or not. [Melissa]

In this instance it is not the activity that is a problem for Melissa; it is the level of engagement in the activity. However there are other innocuous activities that are placed in the liminal category because of the respondent’s social circle. Bianca recently took up photography as a hobby:

A lot of people just don’t get it; they don’t understand why you would want to do it. I don’t know, I guess in a way I am sort of embarrassed about telling people I do it because some of them kind of laughed at me, a couple people I told laughed at me so I haven’t really told that many people about it because I don’t really want it destroyed by other people’s views. [Bianca]

Bianca shares her interest in photography with her father and one friend; they interact on an online photo sharing board. Beyond that Bianca is reluctant to discuss her hobby with her friends or family because of her past negative experiences. A similar story is told by Dean and Zane, who keeps their interest in collecting anime and manga to themselves because of the association between anime and the more sexualised Japanese cartoons known as “hentai”. In these instances Melissa, Bianca, Zane and Dean do include these liminal activities in discussions with friends and family, but only
after a “feeling out” period in which they determine whether such discussions would be acceptable to the others, preferably without drawing attention to their own interests first.

Context is the most important aspect of understanding the liminal activities. What makes an activity acceptable or unacceptable in the eyes of the respondents has less to do with general social mores or the wider cultural values of Australian society, and more to do with their own experiences or awareness of others\(^{19}\). In the last few years Facebook has rapidly increased in popularity as a medium for social interaction, and now plays a significant role in how the respondents maintained contact with each other (West et al. 2009). Despite its utility and ubiquity Olivia was very careful to contextualise her use of Facebook in order to minimise any negative perceptions of her high level of use:

Fucking love it... It’s generally always on my laptop, on the backburner, I don’t like to think that I spend too much time on it but because the number changes if someone comments on something or whatever I will see the number change and I will check it, so I generally tend to be on it a lot. But I didn’t get the push notifications for my iPhone and I know a lot of people that have got that, that seems stupid to me because it pretty much sends you a text message if you get anything happen on your Facebook, and so it could be 3 o’clock in the morning and some drunk person is commenting on something and you get a text message

\(^{19}\) There is a broad and multi-faceted literature on deviance that encompasses many aspects of the respondents’ discussions on liminal activities. However incorporating this body of research into this thesis proved problematic as it did not appropriately reflect the experiences of the respondents.
that wakes you up, so that’s stupid... There is definitely a line, but I do love it.

[Olivia]

Olivia’s use of Facebook is frequent and sustained, allowing her to feel connected to her friends and family while she is otherwise engaged in studying, writing assignments or relaxing in another pursuit. But she does not want to present herself as someone who is preoccupied or dependent upon Facebook, even though her statement “I don’t like to think that I spend too much time on it” indicates it is something she is worried might be a possibility.

Sharon’s objections to Facebook were centred on the distances artificially bridged between people through the posting of personal information for everyone to see:

Bane of my life [laughs], no I really like Facebook but that’s because I have lots of people overseas that makes it very easy and convenient to keep in contact with them, in that regard it’s great, but you know creeping all over people’s walls that I haven’t seen for five years, that’s just kind of creepy.

Why creepy?

Well you don’t really know people, and then they’re just... people that have hundreds and hundreds of people on their Facebook, and are like ‘oh yeah I saw this person is engaged’, ‘you haven’t spoken to them in five years, how do you know this?’ That kind of stuff, it’s kind of creepy. Finding out information about people without them knowing. [Sharon]
Sharon was less concerned about the amount of time that she spends on Facebook as she was by the feeling that the relationships were not real. Recently she ‘culled’ the number of people on her friends list, removing many of those people with whom she had not spoken recently or had little interest in maintaining connections with. Like Olivia, Sharon’s concerns about Facebook were around the scope for abuse, though instead of being concerned about the possibility of dependence and obsession, Sharon is worried about the possibility of stalking, or being seen as a stalker.

Being a liminal activity, interest or pursuit changes how the practice is engaged in or discussed with others, requiring a greater amount of self-monitoring. It may not affect the importance of the activity to the individual, or how frequently it is engaged in, but it will affect how the individual’s present themselves to others. The emerging adults in this study do not engage in these activities because of their status as liminal, rather their status as risky, illegal or socially transgressive, and the associated stigma, is something that has to be accounted for (Cusack and Kavanagh, 2001, Cusack et al., 2003, Redmon, 2003). This often causes the respondents to be ambivalent about the activity, but it is clear they engage in these activities despite their status as liminal.

Discussion

This chapter explored how the emerging adults in this research used their time, showing that the respondents devoted the majority of their time to working, studying, and socialising with their friends. Social relationships were of primary importance to the
respondents, all of whom talked about their desire to spend as much time with their friends and (usually) family as possible. This was reflected in the wide array of places, spaces and activities that the respondents discussed which had a significant social component, as well as a preference for ‘play’ activities involving other people. Work and study were important for other reasons, but the fact that they provided significant social interaction made them enjoyable, or at least bearable. The flexibility of work and study schedules could be advantageous to the respondent, but it could also be limiting; more than one respondent regularly worked 6 or 7 days per week during semester, and had combined work and study commitments exceeding 40 hours a week.

The respondents did have time to engage in a wide variety of leisure and cultural activities, but they also spent considerable amounts of time on more functional activities related to maintaining their health and homes. The choice of ‘play’ and ‘cultural’ activities was often influenced by how quickly and easily (i.e. cheaply) they could be engaged with, anything that required too much investment was often beyond the reach of the respondents’ means. The functional activities demonstrated the respondents’ needs and the ways in which the individuals were addressing them; primarily this began with the drive towards financial independence and security through working, but included activities in the domestic sphere as well as physical and mental health.
Almost every respondent had medium and long term goals that they were gradually working towards, but more 'spectacular' activities based around creativity or liminality were rare and engaged with infrequently. The respondents chose ‘aspirational’ activities that required dedication, effort, sacrifice and commitment to complete, despite the lack of quick pay off, and at the expense of more immediate pleasures. Like the ‘functional’ activities these were often about the respondents’ needs, focusing on future financial security and personal development. The ‘creative’ activities were often sources of passion for the respondents, but the amount of time and money required to engage with them was prohibitive, as such they were frequently overlooked in favour of other activities. The ‘liminal’ activities showed that the respondents were not uncritical of their own behaviour, they were aware of those activities that were potentially hazardous and took steps to monitor their own risk. The peculiar mixture of activities in this category also demonstrated how subjective the notion of ‘risky’ behaviour could be, most of the respondents felt that social drinking (even to excess) did not merit attention despite the popular discourses on Australia’s “binge drinking culture”, but other behaviour which might be unlikely to draw wider attention (such as photography) required monitoring because of personal experiences.

The period of emerging adulthood is characterised in part by the plethora of possibilities in how a young person can choose to spend their time and the various interests they can pursue, the broad range of activities nominated by the respondents is somewhat supportive of this notion. However the respondents had a number of structural
limitations to contend with in the course of their day-to-day lives, which limit their opportunities and possibilities due to work and study commitments, or a lack of resources (van der Poel 2006). The lack of money was repeatedly mentioned as an impediment to activities such as travelling, even domestically, and to other less complex activities such as eating out at restaurants or attending the cinema (Cook 2006a). All of the respondents mentioned restrictions placed upon their time due to work or study commitments, which limited some of the activities they engaged, and influenced their choice of some activities due to their being easily accessible.

These two propositions seem at odds with each other, the idea of ‘limitless possibilities’ versus the limited resources of the majority of emerging adults. However, the choices made by the respondents in this study were informed by both sets of circumstances; the realisation that one person couldn’t do everything meant many respondents chose one activity or pursuit over another, and made that a priority. This was the logic behind the ‘aspirational’ category of activities, these were choices selected from the entire range of possibilities that the respondents were willing to pursue, and occasionally these shifted, depending on whether a field of study continued to interest them or whether the goal proved to be reasonable. This was also the logic behind much of the ‘creative’ category of activities, these activities often held significance because the respondent had to ‘choose’ other activities over these pursuits.
The choice of activities made by the respondents is reflective of their past experiences, their present situation and their future aspirations. The majority of activities involving a preference in ‘taste’, such as those involving ‘cultural’ or ‘creative’ objects and forms, and many of the ‘play’ activities, stem from well established choices or patterns of behaviour that were unlikely to shift. This was evident in the protective way that many of the respondents talked about their specific tastes in music or books, and their reluctance to talk about these activities with others unless they shared those specific tastes, as well as the limited exploration of ‘new’ activities (for example, a respondent might mention trying a new board game, but usually because they already enjoyed board games).

There was a greater sense of exploration around future aspirations and social relationships. The respondents’ social relationships had to cope with considerable change, involving new and temporary spaces (universities, workplaces, homes) and new modes of engagement not as available to adolescents (nightclubs, bars, restaurants, etc.). The unstructured and independent modes of social engagement required some exploration in order to find suitable settings, and the relationships with family and romantic partners also required new modes of engagement as they evolved from adolescent standing. The medium and long term goals is the other significant area where respondents could explore their identity, travelling and the selection of career trajectories providing opportunities for genuinely novel experiences, as opposed to the shifting of existing tastes, or adding to past experience.
Emerging adulthood is characterised as a time of being “in-between” adolescence and adulthood, and the respondents’ choice of activities reflects that state in numerous ways. The significant role that the ‘functional’ activities play in all of the respondents’ experiences demonstrates their focus on accepting responsibility for their own financial burdens, their domestic situations, and their physical and mental health. These were developed differently for each respondent, often related to their living situations; those living at home acknowledged that their financial and domestic responsibilities were lightened by their parents, and physical health was not (yet) a priority for many of the respondents.
Chapter 4 – Managing Personal Communities

During childhood, we inherit a number of imposed relations (original family), and we build ties, some of which prove durable, at school or in various activities. Entry into adult life marks the occasion for a significant renewal of our entourage. Family is relegated to the sideline, and the contexts of our activities (studies, work) generate new relations as well, most often, the constitution of a new family with its share of associated relations (family-in-law, spouse’s friends). (Grosetti 2005, p. 300)

The second research question asked: how do emerging adults create and maintain relationships with others? Being an adult is a socially constructed process, the exploration of the respondents’ personal communities provides insight into the relationships that shape and impact their self-identification as an adult. This chapter explores the evolving nature of emerging adults’ personal communities, how they maintain long-term relationships (particularly when circumstances change, such as after graduating or when leaving a job), and the part these relationships play in the day-to-day life of the emerging adult. Family is important in emerging adulthood; it is the period when young people are moving away from the influence of their parents, and establishing the beginning of their own families, a process which is often characterised as difficult. This chapter also maps the changing dynamics of friendships as the young people move from stable and structured social situations such as high schools (where everyone attends during the same hours for a significant length of time), towards less structured situations, such as universities and shift work, where schedules may overlap, but the amount of time two people might spend together varies from week to week.
Chapter four presents the discussion on different relationships in the order that they emerge and change across the life stages. The last fifteen years has seen considerable research exploring the consequences of ‘late modernity’ and individualization, with arguments that traditional forms of family and community are disappearing, enduring relationships are being eroded, and new forms of community and domestic living arrangements are becoming common (Allan 2001, Giddens 1991, 1992, Knorr-Cetina 2000, Putnam 2000, Sennett 1998, Wittel 2001, Wolak et al. 2003). Emerging adults are at the forefront of these changes, as family of origin relationships undergo a period of change as young people establish their independence, making connections to parents and siblings a matter of choice (Friedman and Weissbrod 2004, Kenyon and Koerner 2009, Scabini and Galimberti 1995). Relationships defined and contextualised by the spaces young people inhabit (workplaces, universities, etc.) are often built upon shared interests and values, however there is an awareness that these relationships are likely to be transient, as has occurred with the majority of contacts from high school. Friendships that are relationally sustained are based upon a shared history, and can endure considerable separations of time and distance. Romantic relationships can be more serious than in adolescence, but not necessarily a priority for young people, who may view committed relationships as being of importance later in life.

The relationships discussed in this chapter are discussed in the literatures on family, communities, friendship and close relationships that appear in sociology, psychology
and social network research. In particular this chapter employs the notion of ‘personal communities’ (Allan 2006, Chua et al. 2011, Pahl and Spencer 2004a, 2004b, Spencer and Pahl 2006, Wellman and Potter 1999), which includes the broader context of relationships and includes those groups that are formed around spaces, places, activities, and social relations, from the perspective of an individual. The focus on personal community allows an exploration of groups and relationships that would otherwise be unconnected; for example the friends of the respondents were unlikely to mix with their family. This focus did not include many people that were considered only superficially connected to the respondents, including the vast majority of work colleagues, fellow students, neighbours, extended family and, on occasion, siblings and housemates. The personal communities thus described by the respondents were composed of those people they felt were significant relationships of one form or another, organised in a manner meaningful to the respondent, but not readily apparent to an observer and in keeping with the phenomenological approach of this research.

The sections of this chapter are framed within the discourses on family, friendship and close relationships, and the thematic discussions are presented with the dominant themes at the beginning, and other common themes following.

**Family relationships during emerging adulthood**

For most young people the period of emerging adulthood is the time when they establish independence from their family of origin. Legally, a young person is
considered an adult at eighteen; it is between the ages of eighteen and the mid twenties that the majority of Australians will become responsible for supporting themselves financially, as well as moving out of home for the first time. How these changes affected the relationship between parents and the respondents can be good or bad, depending on the relationship with the parents as they start university or work (Buhl 2007). These relationships are an important area of research as having a good and close relationship with parents during emerging adulthood has strong predictive links with overall happiness (Demir 2009, Shulman et al. 2009a), but is also linked closely with educational achievement (Grosetti 2005).

In Australia young people must balance the expectation that they will establish their own household and take responsibility for themselves with the considerable difficulties involved in finding affordable accommodation, particularly if they are working part time and studying. There is a growing trend throughout the Western world for young people to stay at home with their parents for longer periods of time, or to return to the family home after having moved out. These circumstances have spawned a wealth of research, much of it positioned as a failure on the part of the young person to achieve independence or to sufficiently mature to the point where they can look after themselves (Mitchell and Gee 1996, Okimoto and Stegall 1987, Paine 2012), and is often portrayed by the media as a source of considerable conflict between parents and their stay at home adult children. However the diminishing role of the welfare state, increased participation in tertiary education and changes to the labour market in
Western countries, including Australia, often leave young people in their late teens and early twenties with no alternative but to rely on their parents for financial support, whether they live at home or not (Clark 2007, Majamaa 2011, Schneider 2000).

The respondents in this study included a mixture of those still living at home with their parents and those who had moved into independent living quarters. The respondents had a variety of relationships with their parents, from stating an active dislike for one or more of their parents, to apathy, to affection, and in some cases the relationship had evolved to a point where they considered each other friends and equals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Living with parents</th>
<th>Good relationship w/ parent(s)</th>
<th>Georgia, Bianca, Phoebe, Wendy, Sharon, Jackie, Cyril</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor relationship w/ parent(s)</td>
<td>Eric</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living independently</td>
<td>Good relationship w/ parent(s)</td>
<td>Fiona, Lisa, Henry, Tiffany, Victor, Alan*, Melissa, Dean, Olivia*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor relationship w/ parent(s)</td>
<td>Ryan*, Tiffany, Zane, Kevin, Nathan*</td>
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</tbody>
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Table 4.1 Respondents' relationship with family of origin

All respondents made some effort to keep in contact with at least one parent, however there were significant differences in how often this occurred and the frequency of contact. Living at home usually meant that contact with parents was a daily occurrence; however cohabitation was no guarantee of meaningful interaction. Living

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20 Tiffany appears twice as she indicated having a good relationship with her mother and stepfather, but a poor relationship with her natural father. Her biological parents divorced at a point before she turned 18 or left home.

* These respondents lived a considerable distance from their parents, with three living interstate and Nathan’s parents being located in the northern part of Queensland.
independently required the respondent and their parents to make a concerted effort in order to have contact, for these respondents interactions with parents were often more significant but far less frequent; for those living close to their parents contact was usually around once a week. In those instances when either the parents or the respondents had moved a long distance from each other this could mean that face to face interaction was something that occurred only a few times a year, and the majority of interaction was through the use of a telephone or the internet. Siblings were almost always considered to be at different stages of development, either still maturing or establishing their own independent lives. As such, even when well liked and respected, the relationships with siblings were rarely given the same importance as those with parents.

**Living with parents as an emerging adult**

With one exception the respondents still living at home did so because they had good relationships with their parents, and enjoyed their company. The freedom and autonomy that comes with independent living were not a major incentive, and none considered the costs involved, financial or otherwise, as prohibitive. Sharon, for example, had previously lived overseas while on exchange in Canada, and afterwards returned to live with her parents. Sharon knew that she could easily support herself financially, and had proven that she was capable of being independently autonomous and responsible, but had little motivation to move out and find her own place:
I suppose it’s convenient because it’s too expensive to live out of home, you know. And also having your meals cooked and that is also very convenient but for the most part I am there because it’s easy to be there and I get on well with [my parents], I don’t really have a reason to leave if that makes sense. I don’t have some deep desire to leave but I’m not because it’s too expensive, I’m quite content living there. [Sharon]

Living at home had further benefits, it allowed Sharon to save money so that she could travel at the end of the semester, she saved time and money by living closer to her university than she would otherwise be able to afford, and her parents often left for the weekend allowing Sharon the sole use of the apartment. As long as her relationship with her parents remained good Sharon had no motivation to leave home, sentiments repeated by most of the respondents living at home.

A common theme in the discussions of all but one of the respondents who lived at home was the difficulty in finding time to interact with their parents. The relationships were described as good, but they followed the same patterns that had been established over decades, and had to be negotiated with respect to the flexible work and school schedules of both the respondents and their parents (Turtiainen et al. 2007). Wendy lived with her parents and her older brother, but Wendy’s work and university schedules meant that she was usually up early and in bed early, which put her at odds with her Dad’s work schedule. Shift work complicated matters, as Wendy was often working weekends when her Dad had free time. Thus, despite having a close relationship, built
upon years with her Dad as he took Wendy to early morning training and triathlon competitions, they rarely spent any length of time together:

Dad works six days a week so I don’t really see him much at all, I see him at home but we don’t do like activities together or anything… In the mornings before I go to uni or before I go to work I might talk to him for ten or twenty minutes, but because he’s not home at dinner time, he doesn’t get home until like 9 o’clock and by then I am going to bed, so we kind of miss each other a lot… My Dad is probably the most important person in my life, I don’t see him that often but I guess I’ve always been closest to him because we used to go to training and everything, he used to drive me to races and everything so I’ve spent a lot more time with him than my Mum probably. [Wendy]

In order to combat the kinds of difficulties presented by Wendy, some of the respondents reported engaging in activities that they could share with their parents. Tennis and Rugby were specific activities that Jackie and Georgia engaged in for the purposes of spending time with their parents. They know that these are activities of interest to their parents, and as they are distinct events they can be scheduled and planned around:

I watch the State of Origin, with my Dad, because he thinks I enjoy it. But I kind of just enjoy watching him dodge back and forth like this, trying to, you know. I mean sometimes I will sit and watch whatever Dad is watching on the TV but it’s more just to hang out with Dad, and have a chat with him, if you can actually distract him from the TV for five minutes to get two words in, but no I don’t regularly watch sport. [Georgia]
Tennis is really there for my Dad’s sake, I pretty much only do it with him... With him it’s a real bonding thing. [Jackie]

For those living at home unplanned interactions were the most common reported by the respondents, whether it involved watching TV, eating or simply inhabiting the same space. There was rarely a stated intention by the respondents to spend time with the parents, continuing a similar pattern to those established in adolescence (Turtiainen et al. 2007). Cyril was the one exception to this, he had recently returned home after living abroad for two years and had lived out of home for four years before that. Cyril had moved back home with his parents specifically in order to spend time with them, aided somewhat by their semi-retired status and his job as a salesman, which allowed him to set his own hours and work from home.

Only one respondent living at home had a poor relationship with his parents. Eric had very little to do with either of his parents, not because he actively disliked them but because that was his preference:

I tend to blame it on the Aspergers, but really familial interaction has never been very interesting to me. I don’t really see much reason for it other than necessity. [Eric]

As with other respondents living at home Eric had infrequent contact with his parents (including a minimum of unplanned interactions), in this instance through choice as
much as anything. The distance that this allowed Eric from his parents ensured that he was able to live at home comfortably.

The common theme throughout the discussions of the relationships with parents for those respondents living at home was that they were comfortable. The respondents still living with their parents had little reason to move out, at the time of interview at least. The respondents had varying levels of responsibility regarding their living situations (e.g. Phoebe was responsible for keeping the house clean, Wendy paid her own bills and was responsible for her own transportation), meaning they had found a balance between their independence and contributing to the household that they found acceptable. For a few people this was aided by schedules that meant the respondents had infrequent interaction with their parents, particularly Eric. All the respondents living at home except Eric found the lack of quality time with parents unfortunate, both Jackie and Bianca bemoaned the fact that they seemed to only spend time with their parents at dinner, or while watching television.

Living independently and maintaining relationships with parents

Moving out of the family home is one of the more significant steps in attaining independence, and results in the continuation of family relationships becoming a matter of choice and personal agency (Allan 2008). In the best case scenarios, Lisa, Fiona and Henry, the relationship between parents and respondents had grown to become one of friendship and mutual respect, a process of “suffusion” in which family members were
seen to be both friend and family (Pahl and Spencer 2004b, pp. 212-5). Lisa had been living out of home for some time, and lived thirty minutes or more from her parents. However Lisa set aside at least one day a week to visit her parents because of the importance she placed on maintaining contact:

I’m friends with my parents, I don’t know how many young people can say that about their parents, I don’t know, but I talk to them about any decision I want to make I get all their opinions and advice about everything. I have an older brother and younger sister whom I get along with pretty well, we share a lot of the same interests. I just like spending time with them, my family is a place where I feel like I belong, totally accepted, whatever, it’s never awkward I guess. So I really value the time we get to see each other. [Lisa]

Lisa, Fiona and Henry considered their parents among the most important people in their social network, and their relationship to be based on mutual respect and equality. These respondents have developed a relationship beyond the authoritarian parent-child model, and now consider their parents a source of comfort, support and friendship. Though keeping in contact with their family requires more effort than for those living at home, something which can be quite difficult for people without cars or with busy schedules, when the respondents have good relationships with their family they will make the effort.

Five of the respondents, Olivia, Alan, Zane, Nathan, and Ryan, had moved a considerable distance from their parents, either for university, for work or in order to move to a
larger city. This meant face to face contact with their family required driving from Brisbane to their home towns, involving several hours and access to a car. These respondents had few opportunities to make such trips and were much more likely to keep in regular contact through phone calls, though this frequently involved just their mother. Alan and Olivia’s parents lived in cities in northern New South Wales. Alan moved to Brisbane after finishing his degree, Olivia moved in order to study at a university in Brisbane. Both regularly made a journey back every few months, ensuring they spend several days together with their families. Both rang their families at least once a week, if not daily:

I probably talk to my Mum more so than my Dad or my brother simply because she’s more inclined to want to talk, whereas my brother is not a talkative person, I should point out he’s eighteen, he’s yeah, in his own little world, and Dad more so because he’s never near the phone. That’s not to say I don’t talk to my Dad, I certainly get along with my parents equally.  [Alan]

I don’t have problems with my family at all but, like Dad for example is not particularly great at talking on the phone [laughs] so I wouldn’t be able to talk to him every day on the phone because he just doesn’t generate things to talk about, whereas mum can be like “oh you know and then I went shopping and this happened and”, you know just your boring everyday stuff we can talk about, where Dad gets through his list of things that he’s done and is sort of “yep. That’s it.” And then you sort of have to wait a couple weeks before he has anything to talk about again [laughs].  [Olivia]
Alan and Olivia both had good relationships with their parents, but their mothers were the ones most comfortable chatting on the phone. For the majority of the respondents living away, their mothers served as a contact point that allowed them to keep track of the goings on within their families. Zane, Nathan and Ryan’s relationship with their parents were more difficult, and their contact with their family was less frequent. They made less effort to travel the long distance to see their families, and called less often, but still maintained contact when possible.

Moving out of home and living independently was not the same as declaring independence or being entirely self-sufficient. Victor had just recently moved out of home, and in to share accommodation within walking distance of his parents’ house. Though he was enjoying the independence, he was apprehensive about the difficulties that he would encounter due to the extended periods of full time practical work required while completing a graduate diploma in education:

Generally like my parents are good when it comes to things that I need, so they will have no problem supporting me, they are really well off financially, but they are not, they’ve never really spoilt me in any way, but when it comes to things, if I am studying full time for my graduate diploma they will be able to, they will probably be able to help me out if I needed it. [Victor]

Victor felt certain that he could rely upon his parents for support that he may require, and though it was not his preferred option Victor knew that he could move back in to his parents’ home, particularly if he had to resign from his job. Tiffany was similarly
fortunate in being certain that her mother and stepfather would be able to help her out should she ever need the assistance, though Tiffany was fiercely independent and careful to always ‘prepare for the worst, hope for the best’. The majority of respondents felt that their parents would be a continuing source of support (financially and emotionally) during this period of their life, should they ever be called upon.

Five of the respondents, Ryan, Tiffany, Zane, Kevin, and Nathan, had difficult relationships with their parents at different times. Some of those relationships had improved considerably once the respondent moved out of the family home. Tiffany had a difficult relationship with her step dad while living with her mother and step father, they would have blistering rows about her perceived lack of respect, in part due to the cultural clash in being Australian born with a Vietnamese mother and Australian step father:

I think [I moved out] when I was about nineteen. I had, because of studying and I used to go out a lot at home, and I didn’t get along with my step dad very well, and he asked me to leave, which I was happy to anyway, so it was a good push, I guess otherwise I’d still be there. And I moved out, and then I moved in with Hamish for a couple years, and I’ve been out since then... My step dad and I get along better now than we did when I was living at home so I think that was a positive to moving out, I guess my parents sort of see you more as an adult and we can have proper conversations now, they don’t have to tell me what to do. [Tiffany]
Though moving out did not immediately repair their relationship, over time Tiffany was able to forge a stronger relationship based on mutual respect. It should be noted that even while Tiffany was having blistering rows with her step father, he was providing considerable support for her as she studied, contributing to text books, school fees and study aids such as a laptop.

Tiffany had developed a good relationship with her step father, but her relationship with her natural father was much more antagonistic. Tiffany described the highly competitive bragging about their children’s accomplishments that was the norm in the Vietnamese community in Brisbane, and because Tiffany was unmarried, had no degree, children or career at the advanced age of 23, her lack of achievement was a source of friction in her relationship with her father:

I think with the relationship with my Dad, less is more, like if I have less contact with him it’s better, because yeah, he’s just, he has such high expectations from me, and he doesn’t help, which is fine but, don’t pressure me to do stuff so that you can show off to your friends that I’m so great. [Tiffany]

Though Tiffany was moving to Melbourne less than a week after the interview was conducted after months of planning, she still had not told her father that she was moving. Tiffany described her father as a displaced traditional Vietnamese man who wanted to return home to his friends and family:
My Dad, he’s still sort of living in Vietnam or he wants to be in Vietnam, he doesn’t really like it here that much and he hopes that, when all the kids grow up to be eighteen, he can just move back to Vietnam. He says it’s quite, I guess it’s quite lonely for my Dad to be here, he thinks it is, because all his brothers and sisters are still over there, and his mum and you know, it’s just a different culture in Vietnam. [Tiffany]

The considerable differences in culture between Tiffany (who self-identified as primarily Australian) and her father made it difficult for both to find common ground, a not uncommon source of family conflict for children of immigrant parents (Ho and Birman 2010, Kang et al. 2010). Rather than have to deal with the disappointment she perceived in her father’s attitudes towards her, Tiffany chose to have as little interaction with him as possible.

For Zane, moving out of home to attend a university in Brisbane, some distance from the family home caused considerable distress to his mother:

For about two years or so, my mother would, just about every time I see her because I see her once a month, for lunch and some such because she works in the city, she would always demand towards the end that I would move back home and that I was hurting her by not living at home… That stopped at about midway through my third year of university, when I told her that I wasn’t going to listen to that any more. [Zane]
Zane’s parents “didn’t view that I was able to do everything on my own or be independent”. Zane’s relations with his parents were strained for some time, until they changed their perception of him and his abilities. Fortunately Zane persevered and had developed a good relationship with both his parents.

Despite the difficulties Kevin had with his parents he still made an effort to keep in contact. Kevin saw his family regularly, ‘every couple of weeks’, but didn’t feel close to them nor felt inclined to make them a significant part of his life. He would talk to them about financial affairs, and occasionally share some of the details of his life, but beyond that their relationship was somewhat distant:

I don’t get along with them that well socially. I care about them, but I just don’t socially get along with them. I go to a family thing and I won’t talk to them very much at all. [Kevin]

Kevin had moved out at a young age, partly because of the tensions that had arisen at home. The distance that Kevin felt between him and his family did not stop him from valuing the relationship enough to make the effort to see them regularly.

The methods and responsibility for maintaining contact with parents shifted for the respondents who had moved out of home. All of the respondents living independently had to set aside time in their schedules in order to have contact with their parents. Those respondents who had moved away from their parents had little face to face
interaction, as it was frequently difficult to make the journey. However, whether the respondents had a good or bad relationship with their parents they all made an effort to keep in contact in one way or another.

**Sibling relationships during emerging adulthood**

Sibling relationships are an important area of study due to their enduring nature spanning a life time, and the levels of social support they can offer (Hendrick 2004, pp. 68-9, Holland *et al.* 2007). All of the respondents except Bianca had at least one sibling, with varying degrees of separation in age. Though generally speaking the age gap was within a few years Nathan’s eldest sibling was almost twenty years older than he was. Sibling relationships were frequently nominated as being significant to the respondents; and there is considerable research exploring the effect siblings have on identity formation during adolescence and emerging adulthood (Wong *et al.* 2010), however the reported level of interaction was considerably less than those with parents. For the most part the relationships with the respondents suffered due to the disparate age of the siblings. When the siblings were younger they were often considered too immature to have a relationship between equals, and when the siblings were the same age or older then the respondent and/or their siblings were often engaged in the difficult tasks of establishing their own independent existence. This did not lessen the significance of the siblings to the respondents’ sense of personal community, but the relationships did not usually involve frequent interactions or close connections. With siblings that are
emerging adults themselves, they are often in the process of establishing their own independent lives, such as Sharon’s older brother and sister who lived overseas:

My sister has lived in England for the last four years, she’s ... seven years older than me, so I guess growing up we didn’t really know each other that much just because she is so much older than me and then she moved out fairly early on because she came out as a lesbian and it didn’t go down so well with my parents, and so she wasn’t really kicked out, it was easier for her not to be at home, so I didn’t see her much growing up so I’ve only really started getting to know her really well in the last couple of years which is really exciting, she’s actually a really cool person. [Sharon]

Sharon had established an adult friendship with her sister, now that they were both mature and able to establish their own relationship. However the distance between them and their separate lives made it an infrequent relationship. With siblings that are older and have families, such as Nathan’s older brothers and sisters or Ryan’s older sister, they have well established lives, and their own families are prioritised. In these instances, whether the relationship is good or bad, there is seldom time to spare for bonding or socialising.

The relationships with siblings were a mixture of good, bad and indifferent, but the common theme was distance. With younger siblings the distance was in maturity and interests. Victor’s older sister is finishing her studies in Melbourne where she currently lives, and they do not regularly keep in contact through email or phone. Victor’s
younger brothers still live at home, close to where he currently lives, but the difference in age (Victor is 23) and maturity can be a considerable divide that needs to be bridged:

I have three brothers, and I have got a sister in Melbourne, I don’t talk to my sister that much, not because we don’t get along, I think she’s a bit busy, but it’s good seeing her when she is up. And my three brothers, yeah I guess I see them quite a bit, but they are kind of like 17 to 19 so they are quite obnoxious sometimes, so I will probably end up liking and talking to them more maybe in a couple of years if I am still here, when they have a more mature perspective on things. [Victor]

Even though Victor was only a few years older than his brothers the differences in maturity made it difficult to get along, and as they were living at home and just finishing high school the differences in life experiences reduced the number of things they had in common. However Victor expected the differences to level out with time.

Differences in maturity were not necessarily limited to younger siblings. Wendy’s older brother worked full time as an accountant, and spent his weekends drinking with friends in nightclubs:

He comes home drunk every weekend, and wakes us all up and vomits on the carpet, like he just is an idiot, so yeah he needs to get out and start looking after himself and not letting mum and dad do everything for him... I’m a lot more independent than my brother, like I have a car, my brother doesn’t have a car, I drive myself everywhere, I cook my own food, mum cooks dinner but I cook all
my other food, he just expects mum to do everything for him. He’s 23 this year. [Wendy]

Wendy’s description of her brother fits closely in with the somewhat stereotypical view of the young person living at home dependent on his parents, while engaging in risky behaviours. However this is not behaviour that Wendy considers acceptable, and causes conflict between her brother, Wendy and their parents:

They both want him gone, we all want him gone, but Dad just kind of, I don’t know, I guess Dad is scared to kick him out but it’s what he needs, it would be the best thing for him... I think he’s a good person inside, but he’s just such an asshole on the outside and he acts completely like a dickhead to mum and dad, so I think when we are older we will be able to get on a lot better. When he moves out it will be better. [Wendy]

Wendy’s and Victor’s sentiments, ‘when we are older we will be able to get on a lot better’, is one repeated by many of the respondents with younger or similarly aged siblings. The difficulties of growing up and establishing a stable sense of self are not always conducive to congenial sibling relationships, but many of the respondents in this study are hopeful that this can change. Where large gaps in maturity exist the passage of time is seen as the eventual solution, the respondents expect that their siblings (and themselves) will mature into adults that they can have a more developed relationship with. Between adult siblings with good rapport the issues revolve more around finding time to spend together, the varied demands on the respondents’ time as well as their
siblings’ time due to work or study (and family) commitments make it difficult to align schedules long enough to interact.

**Spatially contextualised friendships**

Spatially contextualised relationships are those based on proximity, a continued involvement in spaces, places or activities that allow for frequent interaction. These spaces provide context for relationships by providing definition to the conduct of the interactions; workplaces, schools and universities all have expectations about individual conduct, as well as guiding the interactions within their boundaries, and a shared engagement in these places and spaces forms a common bond between individuals. Spatially contextualised relationships become increasingly important over the life course, as interactions in the workplace begin to dominate an individual’s social interactions once they become embedded in full time work or careers (Grosetti 2005). Relationships formed within spaces such as schools, workplaces and universities are important arenas for the development of social capital and finding emotional or social support outside the family (Heikkinen 2000, Reynolds 2007). Leisure and recreation are areas where social bonds can be formed (Cook 2006b, Glover 2006, Glover and Hemingway 2005, Glover and Stewart 2006), however the respondents were only rarely involved in any kind of formalised or organised activity; a shared interest in an activity was more likely to be significant as a way for respondents to bond with another person (Warde and Tampubolon 2002, Warde et al. 2005). A considerable proportion of the respondents’ personal communities consist of people that they spend time with regularly due to
circumstance, because, for example, they are work colleagues or studying in the same courses and classes at university. Frequent contact was not enough to lead to a friendship, other factors such as correspondence in tastes, values and lifestyle were important, as well as the context in which relationships were founded.

To be included in this research the respondents were asked to nominate individuals in their personal community they considered to be significant. The ways in which they defined who was significant were left as open-ended as possible, mirroring the intent of other research into personal communities (Pahl and Spencer 2004a, pp. 74-78). The spatially contextualised relationships that had been recently formed in circumstances that were still ongoing, such as current workplaces or universities at which they were studying, had two broad themes that tied them together: shared interests and shared values. Many of the places the respondents worked and studied had numerous people that they could potentially befriend, and the respondents often spoke of friendly atmospheres where they could engage in conversation with lots of people whose company they enjoyed, but only a small handful of those people ever became significant to their social network. The exploration of common interests and/or shared values served to help the respondents differentiate potential friendships from those worth investing in.

Henry worked at a supermarket, mostly stacking shelves. He described the work as uninteresting and undemanding, giving Henry plenty of opportunity to interact with his
colleagues, most of who were around his age. However from the potential pool of friendships Henry only nominated a small number of people that he chose to interact with. For the most part these relationships were casual and without commitment, but Henry had developed a deeper connection with one of his colleagues:

Kev, I would consider, after Tom, one of my better mates, but I mean I think it’s just because we have a lot in common. I mean there are some people at work that I don’t want to talk to and don’t want to make friends with, whereas, I mean they are all guys, so you know, it’s just when we are there we have a lot in common to bitch about and we are also around the same age and we can go out and drink and play cricket. [Henry]

With all of Henry’s colleagues at his work place he was able to share a number of social activities, including complaining about the management, but it was only with Kevin that Henry felt he shared a lot in common. It was because of this shared commonality, particularly their shared interests in cultural and play activities, that Henry and Kevin developed a friendship more significant than the one Henry developed with his other colleagues.

Finding a point of common ground can be difficult, sharing the same space is not a guarantee two people will interact and find a commonality. At times the points of introduction require the intercession of a third person to connect the respondent with the other person, or they require the right set of circumstances, as with Wendy and her friend Brooke:
I went to high school with [Brooke] but we got close through going to the gym, so I am not sure. I wasn’t really friends with her during high school… I saw her at the gym one day and she said “You do accounting, I have an assignment due tomorrow and I have no idea”, so I helped her do an assignment and then we became friends… Brooke goes to the gym a lot, like everyday with me, and we are doing the same course but she is majoring in Marketing, so we talk a lot about uni as well. [Wendy]

Wendy had known Brooke for a number of years, but they had not become friends while at high school. After graduating they found themselves sharing the same places, both Wendy and Brooke were doing a business degree, and both valued exercising and taking care of themselves physically. It was not until Brooke asked Wendy for help that they found enough common ground to develop a friendship, despite the fact that they were aware of their shared interests and values long before that point in time.

Many of the respondents’ spaces were populated by people very like themselves, as the workplaces and universities often had a number of people around the same age in similar circumstances; however the significant number of friendships was often only a fraction of the pool of potentials. Olivia lived on college campus during her first year as an undergraduate, in an all female dormitory with more than 30 people sharing her floor. The college environment meant that Olivia always had someone to talk to if she wished, though there were more than her fair share of personality conflicts that she had
to deal with. Olivia had a wide number of acquaintances with whom she could socialise, but only a few of those people were significant in her personal community.

[Ville] loves Star Wars, we have a lot of sort of stuff in common, things that we like to watch, you know we first sort of really became friends when she just said a random quote from ‘Dr. Horrible’s Sing-a-long Blog’ and I finished the sentence and sang along a little bit and everybody looked at us like we were weird and from that moment we were friends. [Olivia]

Ville was one of Olivia’s closer friends, a friendship that developed when they realised they shared a number of interests. These interests weren’t necessarily unusual or rare amongst the population, but they served both as an initial point from which Olivia and Ville could build their friendship and as a way for Olivia to measure the likelihood of having more than one common interest with a person. Nimbus also lived on campus with Olivia, however the friendship between them developed because of shared values rather than shared interests:

[Nimbus is] a very driven person and I really appreciate that, she works as well as going to college and going to uni and I appreciate that because the majority of people going to college don’t go to work. And I find her to be a really good person to study with, she’s very thorough, very organised, that sort of thing that I like. [Olivia]

Olivia was one of the few people living on campus that supported herself by working, something which affected her impressions of the maturity of others. Nimbus was
similar to Olivia in a number of ways, particularly in her serious approach to her studies and the similar experiences of needing to be self sufficient. These qualities made Nimbus someone who Olivia considered worthwhile developing a friendship with, as having a peer group that values high grades can contribute positively towards motivation (Wallace 1966, p. 69). The respondents were usually able to identify a commonality that linked them to their spatially contextualised friends; the identification of a homophilous connection was often the starting point for a fruitful relationship.

Housemates are an interesting sub group of the spatially contextualised relationships, as the frequency of contact was much greater, the ability to choose was limited and the opportunity for conflict was higher. Many young people in their twenties are likely to live in shared households with non-related peers at some point (Heath 2004, 2009, Heath and Kenyon 2001, Maffesoli 1996, Watters 2003), the shared living space can be the locus of much of an individuals’ everyday social interaction. 12 of the respondents were living in share accommodation, with between 1 and 5 housemates. In some of those cases the housemates were people of significance, Victor had moved in with school friends, Alan’s housemate was both the person he spent the most time with and one of his closest friends. In other cases some, but not all of the housemates were significant, Lisa was close to Sonya but not the other two of her housemates, Melissa liked and was close to three of her housemates, but had considerable conflict with the fourth. The reason for conflict with housemates varied, but was often linked to cleaning and the management of personal space:
Well I keep my door closed a lot to my bedroom, I don’t really have a walk in policy which other people in the house do, and I generally tend to keep my stuff to myself, our main living area is usually relatively clean, the kitchen is everybody’s responsibility to deal with their own stuff, it’s generally ok like that. The bathroom kills me. It absolutely kills me. And I don’t want to clean it. I know I like cleaning, and to be honest when I am living on my own or when I was living at home with my parents I was quite happy to clean the bathroom, I actually found it to be quite therapeutic, but there is just so many people’s germs in there that no one gives a shit about it and it just tends to get messier and messier and you clean it and no one bothers to leave it like that they just throw shit everywhere, wow this is really gross, I am sorry. There is so much hair in the drain, and that sort of thing just disgusts me beyond belief. So yeah I hate that. [laughs] [Olivia]

Olivia had the same issue that Lisa and Nathan had with their housemates, her preferred level of cleanliness was not matched by that of those she lived with. The difficulty in getting housemates to be responsible for their own mess is a common complaint.

Zane’s situation was slightly different, his housemate was a 60 year old man whom he described as a ‘good dude’ but whom he had nothing in common with. Despite the considerable amount of time that the respondents spend with their housemates, the same conditions seem to apply – only those people considered significant by the respondents are the ones with whom they share similar values and interests.

The spatially contextualised relationships formed the bulk of the respondents’ regular social interactions, though only a portion of those relationships were nominated as
significant enough to be included. The nominated relationships were significant because the respondents considered these individuals to share something beyond the activity that bound them to the shared space, usually shared values or interests. In their present state these relationships were largely defined by the shared space, however the common ground the respondents shared with these people allowed for a greater depth of interaction, and the possibility of a relationship that would develop beyond the spaces they shared.

**Relationally sustained friendships**

Relationally sustained friendships are based upon choice rather than circumstance, the friends choose to associate whether they are regularly in the same space or not. These friendships are a result of ongoing processes that develop over time, “relations arise out of certain contexts, may eventually free themselves from these contexts and become more and more complex and change in nature” (Grosetti 2005, p. 297). Personal communities evolve until they reach a relative state of stability during adulthood, though they continue to change throughout the life course, particularly around major life events (Allan 2006, Bidart and Lavenu 2005, Brooks 2002). Often this evolution involves creating a new set of social relations around cultural or recreational pursuits (Cardon and Granjon 2005, Warde *et al.* 2005), such as those discussed in Chapter 3. These relationships were much more likely to be considered ‘close’ by the respondents, and reported as sources of considerable social support, though they were often limited in number (Baumeister and Leary 1995, Hendrick 2004, Holland *et al.* 2007).
Maintaining close friendships for long periods of time is far more difficult, continued contact requires a mutual effort and compatible schedules. For those working part time or casually this can be problematic as work schedules vary from week to week, and the requirements of university degrees vary across the semester. However the respondents valued the relationship enough to make the effort whenever possible, often finding other common interests to base social interaction around.

Primary school and high school are environments in which adolescents are kept in close proximity to one another for a number of years. People’s experience during these years varies considerably; stories of alienation and isolation are common, as are reports of extended social networks. Whether the individual was popular or not during high school all school leavers face the same issue: how, and who, to keep in contact with once they no longer share the same space regularly. In many cases the respondents make similar statements about the friends from primary and secondary school that they have managed to keep and the friends they have left behind. Jackie had a large number of friends in high school, a small group of which she still manages to keep in contact with:

It’s hard because they were all my closest friends in high school, they were my group, this was like my thing in high school, I used to know them really, really well in high school and I just don’t know them that well any more...

**How come you managed to keep in contact with Clara?**
I don’t know, we just um, we went to Bluesfest at the beginning, in April, last year and we just really, really clicked and now we see each other all the time basically, also we go to a lot of gigs together. I don’t know I’ve just sort of found a way to make more time for her because she’s found more time for me. We just had like a click moment and so we see each other all the time, where as with these girls, like we were really, really close, but also we like really worked because we were at school together, you know what that’s like you sort of had friends at school because you were at school with them, whereas when you move out of school you really pick according to who works really well with you. [Jackie]

With the exception of Clara, Jackie had moved away from her high school friends as it became more difficult to keep in contact. Jackie and Clara had also drifted apart after high school, until a shared experience at a music festival. This experience redefined the relationship for Jackie, broadening the basis for their friendship and giving her reason to “make more time for her”. In contrast the relationship with her other school friends, all of whom were also at Bluesfest, Jackie described as being largely centred on a shared interest in music.

Drifting apart from those people who formed the core of a respondents’ social network before was repeatedly recounted. Once the respondents graduate they lose the connections to both the school and its associated activities, considerably reducing the amount of common interests they shared with their school friends (Degenne and Lebeaux 2005, pp. 354-7). This included those with whom the respondents later reconnected; the respondents reported a lull in how frequently they maintained contact
with them, for one reason or another. The reason why school friendships are not
maintained was clearly articulated by numerous respondents, Victor or Sharon’s
discussion of their school friends is typical:

If I met them now, I’d be like, there’s nothing wrong with them but you know
there’s not, you don’t have as much in common with them, but because they are
your school friends you still see them... They are friends that you will just see at
gatherings, but you won’t go out of your way to meet with. [Victor]

I barely even liked them in high school [laughs], no, that’s not fair, they were nice
people... when we stopped just having lunches together, like sitting together at
lunch at school, and I actually had to make effort, people just stopped making
effort, me as well as them. [Sharon]

Being at school together provides significant shared experiences, however these aren’t
enough to motivate the respondents to keep in regular contact with most of their school
friends. Despite the similarities in age and status amongst school leavers, personality
differences or differing interests can mean that there is simply no reason to continue
the friendship in any significant fashion. However all but three respondents nominated
a school friend as a significant member of their personal community, often someone
they considered to be close to them. These few friendships persisted despite long
periods without contact, such as when people moved interstate or became preoccupied
with study or relationships. One of Wendy’s longest standing friendships endured a
period of considerable social isolation during high school:
Shannon has been my best friend since we were six, I guess we don’t even have to say anything we can just sit next to each other, and I tell her everything, she tells me everything... We lost touch in high school a bit because I was training so much, so when all the girls started going out to parties and everything I wasn’t going out with them on weekends but when we left school we both worked at Fitness First full time together so we got close again then. [Wendy]

Wendy had spent a lot of her teens training to be a triathlete, leaving her little time to socialise with Shannon (or anyone else). However the qualities that made Shannon a valued friend did not change over time, nor did the closeness of their connection.

This survival of relationships through change was repeated by a number of respondents, including Henry’s friendship with Tom, who worked in Western Australia for a while, and Cyril’s friendships while he lived in Germany for two years. Fiona had recently moved interstate from South Australia, her nearest and dearest friends were still in Adelaide. Fiona’s three closest friends were still in Adelaide, people she had known through high school. The distance between Fiona and her friends did not diminish their importance to her:

The people I am closest to I am not as frequent with in terms of my contact, because they live in a different state, mostly, apart from my family and [Fiona’s boyfriend], but the three people I mentioned as being really, really close with, because they live so far away they are not going to be as represented as frequently I suppose. [Fiona]
The people that Fiona spent most of her time with in Brisbane were her housemates, her work colleagues and those studying in her course. The majority of these friendships were relatively new, being less than 18 months old. Fiona valued these friendships, but considered them to be in no way as close as the three friends from South Australia, despite only talking to them occasionally on the phone. At some point relationally sustained friendships do not require continual renewal but persist through long absences.

Permanency in friendships is rare, the transition between spatially contextualised and relationally sustained friendships requires considerable effort that the respondents are aware they probably won’t be able to make. It is not uncommon for personal communities to increase and decrease markedly around significant life events (Bidart and Lavenu 2005). This applies to all spatially contextualised relationships, as the workplaces, living arrangements and school environments for the respondents are temporary:

Stuff sort of just falls away, it always does. People that were important in high school aren’t important now, and not because they are bad people or because we had an argument or anything, just because that’s what happens. So I would assume that the same thing would happen after leaving work. [Olivia]
It was often difficult for the respondents to predict which of their spatially contextualised relationships would continue, as most of these friendships did not have obvious reasons for keeping in touch. In some cases there were other ways that respondents expected to keep in contact:

I guess like on Facebook and that kind of thing, that really helps keeping in touch ‘cause it’s really easy to talk to each other, and I will probably see Amelia at uni and that kind of thing, but Charlie is going overseas soon, if I go overseas I would definitely try and meet up with her, we’ve already talked about that... I’d probably try and meet up [with Amelia] before or after uni, but not really go out on the weekend or anything. [Wendy]

Facebook has increasingly been used in the last few years to keep contact with people that are no longer frequently seen (Lewis and West 2009, West et al. 2009), though the amount of direct interaction is limited; most respondents reported a passive engagement that involved watching other people’s status updates. In some instances respondents were able to identify places or circumstances that they may see spatially contextualised friends (such as with Wendy and Amelia at university), but most frequently the respondents admitted it was unlikely that they would make the effort to maintain the shift between spatially contextualised to relationally sustained friendships once they moved on from the temporary space. Relationally sustained friendships usually begin as spatially contextualised relationships, but for the respondents in this study they had to evolve while the friends shared the same space.
Time was the biggest limiting factor for the continuation of relationally sustained friendships. The variable schedules that come with university study and with part time, casual or shift work can make it difficult to plan ahead, particularly when the other person is in the same situation. Melissa worked full time, but did so by collecting part time shifts as they became available, meaning that she often worked 7 days a week with little notice. Dean worked full time as a chef, during hours when many of his friends were together, leaving him to spend most of his socialising during the week over the phone, as it was difficult to find appropriate times to meet in person. Cyril had befriended Glenn while working together in a call centre, and though they managed to keep in contact while Cyril was overseas they rarely caught up:

Glenn’s a special case as well because I hardly ever see him now he’s not very good at keeping in contact, and he’s kind of just a friend on his own. I don’t have other friends associated with him any more... it’s really only happens once every six months that we see each other. [Cyril]

While Cyril was willing to make the effort to keep in contact, Glenn was less able or willing to reciprocate. The lack of a group setting complicated things as well, the respondents needed to value the friendship highly in order to make the effort to see people one on one. Group settings, such as parties, barbecues and gatherings, were regularly mentioned as preferred ways for the respondents to keep in contact with those relationally sustained friends that they did not consider to be exceptionally valuable, particularly high school friends. However the time involved in organising these
gatherings could be prohibitive, particularly when there were no readily available spaces. Kevin lived in share accommodation with people that he did not know well. A combination of factors, Kevin’s full time work schedule, the living arrangements and the difficulty in organising a gathering, helped to limit the amount of time that he spent with friends:

I just I’m not that organised to get people together in a group, at a barbecue is a bit different but it’s very rare that I would have, I used to have them all the time but these days I don’t. When I get my own house and my own entertainment area it will be different, I will be able to get people around for a barbecue and stuff because I love that. [Kevin]

Kevin wanted to be able to spend more time with friends, as did all the respondents, but it was difficult to find the time or make the effort outside of a limited group of core friends. The respondents had very different sized core groups, but a limited personal community was not necessarily a problem:

I know that I don’t go out of my way to spend time with people outside of that core group mainly because I don’t give myself a lot of time to spend with other people, and I have so much fun with that group anyway. I am not really one about creating groups of friends, if I am happy I am happy. [Henry]

Henry spent the majority of his time between working, study and his girlfriend; by choice as much as through necessity. Henry recognised that there were opportunities to socialise with others that he was foregoing in order to concentrate on his studies, but
ultimately derived enough joy from that core group that he was happy with his choices. Henry was one of the lucky respondents to have found a good work/life balance, an impressive feat when study is also included. However most of the respondents felt they had not achieved this delicate balance, as expressed through the desire for more time to spend with friends repeated by most of the respondents.

The variable commitments on the respondents’ time that come with casual/part time work and study, and freedom from having to structure their lives around obligations such as children or full time work, did not necessarily make it easier to spend time with friends. In some cases the varying schedules of the respondents and their friends were difficult to synchronise, without a space that they regularly share for other reasons (such as work or study) the time and distance between seeing each other could be considerable. However the infrequent contact did not diminish the importance of these friendships for the respondents. Rather the respondents found the time to meet where they could and kept in contact through other means, such as Facebook, text messages and talking on the phone.

Romance, commitment and partnering

Family of choice refers to the set of relations that individuals develop as adults to form the core of their personal communities; they are the familial ties that supplant the family of origin. The ‘nuclear family’ is often used as the baseline for discussions on the development of the family of choice, examining the partnering of heterosexual
relationships for the purpose of procreation, though this is far from the only family model that is in use in Australia or the Western world (Roseneil and Budgeon 2004). Emerging adulthood is defined, in part, by the absence of formalised relationships, however that doesn’t preclude the existence of large and extended sets of relationships that have many of the characteristics of a family of choice (Watters 2003). In terms of the scope of personal communities the period preceding committed relationships, particularly those involving cohabitation, marriage and parenthood, is of considerable importance, as these events coincide with sharp decreases in sociability due to an inward focus on the partner and family (Bidart and Lavenu 2005, Kalmijn 2003, Wellman and Wellman 1992, Wellman et al. 1997).

Emerging adulthood offers considerable opportunities to explore relationships as part of a greater exploration of self-identity and future aspirations. Much has been written about the increasing gap between adolescence, marriage and parenthood or other forms of commitment, as well as the ‘casual’ nature of adolescent dating (Connolly et al. 2000, Cotterell 2007). Romantic relationships in emerging adulthood are arguably more ‘focused’ in their explorations (Arnett 2000a, p. 471), as people try out different types of relationships and decide what qualities they require in a partner. However residential and economic instability in young people’s lives can be detrimental to the continuation of a stable relationship (Blais et al. 2012, Giddens 1992). Partner relationships were frequently nominated as the most significant relationship for the respondents, in terms of the frequency of contact, the involvement in the respondents’ activities, and the
respondents’ feelings of closeness. Ryan and Olivia had been friends with their partners for more than a decade, Henry and Fiona met their partners in spaces they continued to share, the others had met in a variety of circumstances usually involving shared engagement in activities such as attending a musical performance, which were irregularly engaged in. However all relationships, including those that were long term, had to take into consideration the restrictions and time pressures inherent to the period of emerging adulthood.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Long term relationship</td>
<td>Eric, Bianca, Cyril, Fiona, Tiffany, Henry, Victor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New relationship</td>
<td>Jackie, Ryan, Olivia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recently single (&gt;1 week from interview)</td>
<td>Melissa, Kevin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Georgia, Phoebe, Sharon, Nathan, Lisa, Alan, Dean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>Wendy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple casual relationships</td>
<td>Zane</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.2 Relationship status of the respondents*

Of the 21 respondents that participated in this research, 13 were in relationships of one form or another. 7 of these are termed ‘long term’ relationships for the purposes of this research, existing for between six months and four years at the time of interview. 3 were in ‘new’ relationships, having started dating within the last six months and still in the process of testing the waters. 2 were ‘dating’, Kevin and Zane had a number of female friends whom they would see casually. Wendy’s partner had travelled north for two weeks and they hadn’t communicated satisfactorily since his return, and at the time of the interview she was concerned and uncertain of their relationship status. The other
8 respondents were in various stages as well, some were happy having been single for a long time, Melissa had ended her relationship of more than a year the week before the interview, and Georgia was unsure whether one of her friendships was on the verge of becoming more serious.

The significant difficulty that the respondents in relationships faced involved finding the appropriate balance between time spent working, studying, with family and friends, and with their partner. Partners and spouses play a central role in personal communities, being both the person most connected to and sharing the majority of connections in an individual’s social network (Bott 1955, 1971, Milardo and Allan 1997). For 9 out of the 10 respondents in relationships their partners were the person who dominated their social lives, yet they still reported feeling as if they didn’t get to spend enough time together. Conflicting work and study schedules were the most significant barriers:

Depends on what sort of timetables we have, some semesters we have timetables that won’t clash at all, so we both have the same day off, whereas other times [Henry’s girlfriend] will need to do an assignment on the day that I have off so it’s very difficult to find time and she’s just as dedicated as I am, if not more, so it’s very hard. [Henry]

He’s very important, but I don’t see him very much at the moment because we are both very busy, so that’s kind of crappy. [Olivia]

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21 Cyril is the exception, as he cohabited with his partner.
Henry and Sharon had been dating for several years after meeting while working together at a supermarket. Olivia and Robert had known each other for more than a decade and went to school together, but had only been dating for a few months. In both cases the amount of time they could spend with their partners was hampered by the amount of time that they and/or their partners required for studying. Similar problems occurred for Bianca and her partner, and both Jackie and Victor had partners that worked full time during business hours, when the respondents were likely to have free time. Fiona’s partner Stephen was in the same course at university, and a significant part of her social group there, making it easier for her to spend time with him, however she still didn’t consider it enough.

Although most of the respondents in relationships decried the lack of time they could spend with their partners, it was frequently the result of a conscious decision on their parts. Henry and Sharon had talked at length about their future together, their decision not to live together or to spend every day together was a sacrifice they both accepted in order to devote adequate attention to their studies. Similar accounts were given by other respondents; they considered their relationships important but they were just one of a number of priorities that had to be accommodated:

I don’t know how I am going to deal with having a full time relationship, because that’s what it is, at the moment it’s sort of like part time, but down there it’s full time, and I don’t know if he thinks it’s going to be different the fact that I am down there but time wise I am still studying, still working, still going to hang out.
with friends, and have work friends, and you know it's not like just because I am down there doesn’t mean 100 percent of my time is devoted to him. I think he needs to understand that and I think I’ve told him so many times, “you know what I am just moving down to Melbourne not because you are there, well you are a bonus”. [Tiffany]

Tiffany had been in a long distance relationship with her partner Ben for several years, and was shortly moving to Melbourne for study. Tiffany did not want to immediately live in shared accommodation with Ben, nor did she wish to live with him at his parents’ home, preferring to establish her own household. Tiffany had discussed marriage, children and home ownership with Ben, but her priorities at the time of the interview were on finishing her studies and starting a career. Tiffany worried that this would be a source of conflict between them, as Ben had recently turned 30 and wished to formalise their relationship sooner rather than later.

The accounts of the respondents who were single or dating generally stated that they were not in a romantic relationship simply because they had not found someone that interested them. Dating and the forming of new relationships is an activity that many of the respondents engaged in, though only two, Kevin and Zane, were organised in their approach. Kevin’s current partner was leaving Brisbane due to work, and he would soon be single. The possibility of being alone was not something that Kevin welcomed, but fortunately he had established casual relationships that could serve for temporary companionship, even if he expected nothing of them in the long term:
Yeah, if I’ve got a lady friend that wants to, um, I date a lot. I’ve got probably, sounds bad, three or four girls sort of, that I can call upon. But none that I really like [laughs]. I’m looking for someone that I like. But obviously between, between finding someone I need to hang out with other people. [Kevin]

At least one of these ‘lady friends’ was an ex-girlfriend, Kevin considered Britney to be a close friend and a significant part of his personal community. The others were less significant, and Kevin’s interactions with them were confined to the activity he generalised as “dating”. In contrast Zane had a number of friends whom he had met initially through dating, in one form or another, and who had then become friends as well as casual lovers:

Jess I met at the Mana Bar, quite some time ago. We went out, we had sex, and we found that outside of sex we still enjoyed each other’s company, and some such, so we hang out and have a bit of fun. [Zane]

Zane had three women in his personal community whom he had met, slept with, and then developed a friendship. Zane also had a couple of friends whom he had later started having sex with, and he now continued casual sexual relationships with all of them. Like Kevin he was happy to enjoy their companionship, and though he considered them to be friends Zane didn’t consider that there was a realistic possibility of a serious relationship.
Being involved in a relationship might be desirable for many of the respondents, but not at the expense of other priorities. Two of the respondents, Dean and Georgia, talked about specific people they were interested in, but the rest of the single respondents had other concerns. For Sharon the opportunity to travel repeatedly over the next few years was more important than finding a partner for a stable relationship:

I haven’t found anyone. I have been single for years, two years or something. It’s nice to have someone around but no, haven’t found anyone that pushes my buttons... I think with the guy that I used to go out with, that ended fairly messily, I think I was bitter and twisted about that for a little while, and now not so much, but not being in Brisbane for long periods of time and making friends with all these foreign kids that leave the country after six months or so, it’s not the best strategy if I was looking to find someone to settle down with. [Sharon]

Sharon’s priority at the time of the interview was travelling, she was preparing for a trip to South America and heavily involved in a university organisation aimed at helping overseas students on exchange settle in to their new surroundings. Sharon was open to the possibility of finding a significant other, but like the other single respondents and Kevin and Zane, it was not a matter of pressing concern.

For both the single and the attached respondents there was no urgency surrounding their relationship status at the time of interview, while they considered relationships important their focus was not on actively building the foundations of a family of choice. Existing romantic relationships had many of the same issues for the respondents as their
relationally sustained friendships, they felt that there was not enough time to devote to their significant other as they would like. At the time of interview the partnered relationships exhibited few of the properties that have characterised relationships at the point before marriage, such as dyadic pairing, in which the partner becomes the centre of the individuals’ social network and connected to the majority of their friends and family (Fischer et al. 1989, Milardo et al. 1983, Shulman 1975). For the majority of the single respondents and those with partners there was one person who was vastly more important to their personal community than the rest, either the partner or a best friend. In both cases these people dominated the personal community of the respondent, however this relationship was always secondary to other obligations or objectives.

Discussion

The results of this research show that the high value placed on social interaction across the four relationship areas studied was often subject to the restrictions placed on the respondents by the irregularly structured schedules of their work and study commitments. The four relationship areas studied were family of origin, spatially contextualised relationships, relationally sustained relationships and romantic relationships. The purpose of exploring these four relationship areas was to examine how personal communities shift from adolescence towards adulthood during the highly unstable period of emerging adulthood. Adolescents’ social circles are dominated by their family of origin initially, and later the spatially contextualised relationships centred on relatively stable environments such as schools and neighbourhoods. As they mature
more spaces are added to the adolescents’ personal community, with extracurricular activities and entry into the workforce. Connections with people that are relationally sustained can begin with any relationship that evolves beyond the spatial, but these are harder to develop and maintain as an adolescent who is dependent upon parents for basics such as transportation, money and access to communications.

Emerging adulthood is characterised as a time of feeling “in-between” adolescence and adulthood, by extension these respondents are “in-between” their family of origin and their family of choice. The respondents had begun the process of distancing themselves from their family of origin as they established their own households, and laid the groundwork for their family of choice through dating, casual and serious relationships. The respondents’ family of origin play a significant role in their personal communities, regardless of whether they lived at home or independently, and often despite any personal problems they might have with one or more of their family members. The respondents living at home were faced with the difficulties of moving towards autonomy and independence, for some this required existing in parallel with their parents; others had evolved their relationships with their parents to a point of mutual respect and friendship. The respondents who had moved out were able to self regulate the contact they had with their families, only interacting with their parents when they chose to. The fortunate majority developed good relationships with their parents either while living at home or after leaving it, and chose to interact with their parents on a regular basis, whether through telephone or electronic communication or visiting them.
in person. A small portion of the respondents viewed leaving home as a break in the connection between them and their parents, choosing to spend less time with their families, including them in a smaller part of their lives and reporting a sense of obligation in maintaining contact.

The majority of the respondents’ relationships with their siblings suffered from significant gaps in age, maturity or distance. The respondents with younger siblings, particularly those under 18, reported that it was difficult to maintain close relationships with siblings who were still at school or were somewhat immature. Age was not the only indicator of maturity however, with behaviour and attitude being sources of conflict for the respondents living at home. Lastly many of the respondents had adult siblings they had either moved away from or whom had moved away, making it difficult to keep in regular contact.

A substantial portion of the respondents’ personal communities were made up of spatially contextualised relationships, centred on contexts where they have a continuing presence such as workplaces or campuses. In part this was based on the limitations of the respondents’ lifestyles, as the majority of their time was focused on working and studying these were significant venues for social activity. These relationships are often based on how frequently the respondents see these friends, rather than a deep or meaningful friendship. The day-to-day lives of the respondents offer many opportunities to find others in similar situations, with similar tastes and lifestyles. The
respondents built friendships with those who had an interest in the same activities as themselves, or who shared similar values.

The respondents were forced to create relationally sustained connections to those school friends they wish to keep in contact with (if any), fragmenting the groups that were once closely bounded through shared engagement in the space. The respondents were involved in a number of spaces where new contacts can be made, such as shared households, university campuses and workplaces. The variable time pressures of studying or casual and shift work can make it difficult to maintain relationally sustained connections, or make it possible to spend a considerable length of time together depending entirely on the circumstances of the individuals and groups involved.

Those relationships that were relationally sustained were usually more significant to the respondent, even when they had limited opportunity to see them regularly. The respondents make the effort to keep in contact with these people because of the importance of the relationships, and report feeling close despite long periods without contact (Fischer 1982a, 1982b); it is no longer important to share spaces or activities to maintain such friendships. Some of the respondents stated that friendships failed (or would fail) to move from spatially contextualised to relationally sustained because the effort involved in keeping contact was greater than either party was willing to make.
Romantic relationships were significant for respondents with partners, but they shared with the single respondents a sense that their individual goals and aspirations were higher priorities than planning for the future with a partner, at least for the foreseeable future. Eleven of the respondents were in relationships at the time of the interview, in various stages of seriousness. Though the individuals were not married or living together the relationships took on many of the same features, with their partners dominating the respondents’ social lives and playing significant roles in their decision making processes. Most of the respondents were happy in their relationships at the time, and many had considered marriage (in the distant future) as a favourable possibility. However, the respondents in or out of relationships all shared a similar value: no one was in a hurry to enter into a formalised committed relationship. For the respondents the sense that emerging adulthood is a time of possibilities translated into a sense that the construction of a family of choice could wait until other goals had been accomplished, rather than being used as an excuse for casual relationships.
Chapter 5 – “Do you feel like an adult?”

Although the conception of the transition to adulthood held by young people in their twenties is characterized by individualism, it is not necessarily an unbridled or selfish individualism. On the contrary, for many young people becoming an adult necessarily means that individualism is tempered by the development of character qualities that emphasize social and communal considerations. Egocentrism and selfishness are character qualities they see as part of adolescence, and becoming an adult means overcoming these tendencies and learning to take other people’s interests and needs into account (Arnett 1998, p. 309).

The final research question asks: in the social world of the participants, what makes an adult? This question explores how the respondents measure the significant steps they are making towards self-identifying as an adult, and being accepted as an adult by their peers. This question addresses the structural, cultural and social conditions of emerging adulthood, as the respondents must place their own experiences within the contexts of their own needs, the expectations of their peers and parents, and the broader conditions of life in early 21st century Australia. In particular this question focuses on the period of emerging adulthood as being characterised by 'possibilities' and 'uncertainty', exploring how this impacts the respondents' understanding of becoming an adult.

Chapter five presents respondents' understanding on the nature of adulthood in early 21st century Australia, as well as their experiences with uncertainty and possibility. The
criteria that the respondents identify as being important to be considered an adult largely agree with the research in the emerging adulthood literature: financial independence, autonomy and taking responsibility for one’s actions (Arnett 2000a, 2001, 2004, Arnett and Schwab 2012, Arnett and Tanner 2006). However, maturity was also a common theme, as a maturing of tastes, behaviour and attitudes is seen as a feature distinguishing adolescence and emerging adulthood. The 'markers' employed by transition studies were recognised as being associated with a broad understanding of adulthood, however only a few respondents identified one or two markers as being directly relevant to their situation. The respondents were able to highlight numerous examples of uncertainty in their past and present to show how their choices about work, study and living situations were affected. The respondents' reflections on their futures were tempered by feelings of uncertainty and possibility; the difficulties that this presented were accepted as an inescapable part of the life of an emerging adult. These results were evident through direct questioning, but greater depth came through exploration of the context, as the respondents’ circumstances impacted their conception of adulthood. For example, those respondents that discussed maturity as being important for self-identifying as an adult were more likely to nominate functional activities relating to their day-to-day upkeep, and feel that they had less space to be frivolous with their time and money.
Self-identification as an adult

Australia has a very clear legal understanding of when someone becomes an adult, the overwhelming majority of adult rights and responsibilities are conferred once the individual turns eighteen years old. However the social recognition of an individual as an adult is less clear cut, whether someone is identified or self-identifies as an adult is dependent upon an enormous array of variables. The threshold for adulthood is no longer centred on the achievement of life transitions such as marriage, but includes more individualistic criteria, such as achieving financial independence (Arias and Hernández 2007, Arnett 2001, 2004, Arnett and Schwab 2012, Molgat 2007, Nelson and Chen 2007, Nelson et al. 2004). Many 18 to 25 years olds do not consider themselves to be adults (Nelson and Barry 2005). Which criteria are important depends on the individual, their understanding of adulthood and their experiences growing up. When asked whether the respondents felt like they were an adult, they responded in one of three ways: yes, no, and sometimes yes/sometimes no.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“Do you feel like an adult?”</th>
<th>Olivia, Lisa, Zane, Melissa, Ryan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Tiffany, Sharon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uncertain</td>
<td>Victor, Nathan, Kevin, Eric, Jackie, Georgia, Fiona, Dean, Bianca, Phoebe, Alan, Cyril, Henry, Wendy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 5.1 Respondents’ self-identification as an adult
Very few people were able to give definitively clear statements one way or the other about feeling like an adult, only five interviewees, Olivia, Lisa, Zane, Ryan, and to a lesser extent Melissa, could state that they considered themselves to be adult. Olivia linked adulthood with the ability (and the necessity) to take care of herself:

I have to deal with adult problems. I don’t know, things like getting my wisdom teeth and my replacement tooth done, that’s going to cost quite a bit of money, and you call the parents and they sort of say “oh well that’s your problem now”, that sort of thing makes me feel like an adult [laughs]. Definitely. I guess taking care of myself as well, I mean not that children or young adults can’t take care of themselves when they are sixteen years and whatever else but I think that I am at a point where I am doing it ok, a decent job of it. [Olivia]

In this instance Olivia links her self-identification back to her experiences of the recent past. While completing high school her mother had a workplace accident that left her relying on the assistance of others, particularly Olivia. When Olivia left home to go to university she lived on campus in college residences, at which time the majority of day-to-day necessities were taken care of for her:

The first time I ever felt like an adult was when I was living on college residence for a year and I decided not to go home to my parents’ place for the three month summer break, moved into a house with some girls and was doing the share house thing, that’s the first time I felt like an adult. [Olivia]
The difference in the quality of experience between living at home assisting her mother, living in residences and being taken care of, and living independently for the first time highlight for Olivia the distinction between being an adult and being an adolescent or emerging adult. For Olivia, being an adult is more than simply being independent, as when she lived on campus, it is about being responsible for her own well being.

Zane’s attitude towards adulthood had a similar association, though he linked it less with his experiences as an emerging adult and more with having matured as a person:

I feel like I am an adult, like I view that I always have a choice to do the responsible or the right thing, or not do the responsible thing, and just being able to know that there is that choice is part of being an adult in itself... To me growing up is all a thing of the mind, it is how you feel and how you view yourself and your surroundings and situations. I don’t think it is something that can come with a degree or a job or anything else really. [Zane]

Zane links adulthood to development as an individual, specifically excluding the markers of adulthood that are often used to measure progress through the transition to adulthood. In contrast to Olivia’s view of responsibility as something she experiences, Zane sees responsibility as something he recognises during his day-to-day life. It is not just that he is able to take care of himself but that he makes the choice to be responsible.
Lisa has no issues with feeling independent or in taking responsibility for herself, and though she is not exactly well off Lisa is in a position to look after herself financially. Lisa links becoming an adult with a growing maturity in tastes and interests:

Do you feel like an adult?

Yeah, generally. I remember as a kid I would, like when you are at parties and barbecues and stuff, parents would talk about real estate, and I could not stand it, it was so boring, and now I am older I really like talking about it. So I guess for me that’s something, when you are older you eat more food than you used to and you talk about more things than you used to, so in those ways I think I feel older [laughs].

Are there any ways that you don’t feel older?

Mostly when I am in social settings the things that I enjoy doing and the jokes that I find funny, other people really don’t, so in social settings I guess it’s easier to be a lot more immature. It’s so random. [Lisa]

At 22, Lisa does not yet feel as if being an adult is a permanent state of being, rather something which it is still possible for her to slip out of. In this sense Lisa’s conception of adulthood arises from substantially the same reasoning as Zane: adulthood is a state of mind as well as a way of behaving, as much about how she thinks she should act as how she actually acts.

Though Melissa eventually declared herself an adult it was only after some debate with herself. Melissa had a difficult relationship with her parents during her teenage years,
which resulted in her leaving home at a young age to live with her partner. Living independently for more than a year forced Melissa to rapidly develop the skills needed to take care of herself, and though she eventually returned to live with her parents the relationship between them had changed:

In some ways, in some ways... I discussed it with my parents when I moved back in with them when I was in early high school, no, late high school, and we decided that I was an adult. So from then on I felt like an adult in making my own decisions, and taking care of myself and doing all that kind of stuff for myself but I don’t think I really live the life of an adult because... No I’m an adult. I think I am an adult by my standards. [Melissa]

As Melissa put it she saw them more as equals, less as providers, and better understood that the things they were doing that she had found unreasonably restrictive were for her benefit and protection. The hesitation about defining herself as an adult stemmed from her lifestyle: Melissa had worked almost continually since she was in her early teens in low skilled jobs, lived in share accommodation, travelled on several occasions, and though she had a wide network of friends and lots of ideas about the future, she was currently without a stable romantic relationship, significant assets, or a definite plan for her future, both near and distant. The hesitation came because Melissa didn’t live the life of someone she would consider to be an adult, but because she knew she was capable of living as an adult Melissa eventually felt able to declare herself adult.
Of the three characteristics that Arnett and others repeatedly identify as being important for adulthood, financial independence, autonomy and responsibility for your own actions (Arnett 2000a, 2001, Arnett and Schwab 2012, Arnett and Tanner 2006, Badger et al. 2006, Nelson and Chen 2007, Nelson and Barry 2005), the latter two are those identified by the respondents who do positively feel that they are adults, particularly responsibility. Additionally the respondents identified maturity as being important to their own self-identification as an adult, and in distinguishing their peers as adults, qualities that are less prominent in the emerging adulthood discourses. Changes in taste, attitudes and behaviours are seen as useful ways of discerning adults from adolescents; however maturity is seen primarily as the recognition of what is required to live as an adult, and the willingness to make the hard choices when necessary.

All five respondents who did self-identify as adult were living independently at the time of interview, but did not refer to any of the other markers (marriage, parenthood, buying a house, careers or finishing education) as being important to their own sense of adulthood. While they may not be considered adults using the markers commonly employed as standard measurements for the transition between adolescent and adulthood, they have reached the point where they consider themselves to be capable and responsible, the equal of any other adult.
Feeling “in-between”

One of the characteristics of emerging adulthood is that it is a time of feeling ‘in-between’ adolescence and adulthood (Arnett 2000a, 2001, 2004, Arnett et al. 2011b, Arnett and Tanner 2006, Sirsch et al. 2009). The definitive positive statements of feeling like an adult presented by Olivia, Lisa, Ryan, Zane, and to a lesser extent Melissa, are unusual among the responses from the emerging adults involved in this research. The responses to the question “do you feel like an adult?” were more often a qualified ‘no’ or a variation of ‘sometimes yes, sometimes no’. Tiffany and Sharon both declared that they didn’t feel like an adult:

**Do you feel like you’re an adult now?**

No. I feel more independent yes, but I’m not very stable as such because well I’m still studying and the work choices that I have would have to come second to studying so, you know, and if worse comes to worse I still probably need to rely on my parents for support, if work and study falls out and I couldn’t work, so in that sense I probably can’t really, I can most of the time stand on my own two feet but I am not completely sure that I will. [Tiffany]

Tiffany’s parents are Vietnamese, and her father had very traditional ideas about what was expected of Tiffany. Her experience of emerging adulthood has been very different from many of her peers in the Vietnamese-Australian community, Tiffany moved out of home several years ago, has worked to support herself, has had little in the way of support from her parents (Tiffany’s step father contributed to her books and supplies during her first year at TAFE) and is still studying at 23. Many of her peers would stay at
home and study while their parents supported them completely, and would continue living at home when they started working full time, often until they married and moved into their own home. In numerous ways Tiffany’s experience of emerging adulthood is similar to that of many of the respondents, but her cultural background and her uncertainty that she can depend on herself under all circumstances makes it difficult for Tiffany to confidently declare she is an adult.

Sharon felt that she had ‘regressed’ somewhat, having spent a year on exchange in Canada living independently, and then moving back in with her parents to continue her studies upon her return:

**Do you feel like an adult?**

Sometimes. Sometimes. I think sometimes I feel like I’ve got things sorted out a bit, I can go travelling, and book things on my own and do this and that and the other, but like really I am not, I still live with my parents, and I you know, still get sick and call my mum which I don’t think adults do, don’t know when I am going to stop doing that, but you know. So no I don’t think [laughs], I can vote and I can drink and I can do these things but no... I think it’s my living with my parents that is the deciding factor that makes me not an adult, because I am still dependant on them...

**Can you think of the circumstances in which you’d feel like an adult?**

Yeah yeah what ticks the boxes to be an adult, like picket fence and little dog and stuff. I don’t know, because I know adults that aren’t in career paths, and don’t have spouses or anything so I guess that’s not really what it is. Kind of sometimes thought that one day I’ll wake up and say oh yeah, look at me, I’m an
adult, self sufficient, look. So maybe looking after myself perhaps is what would make me feel like an adult.

**But you looked after yourself when you were away?**

Yes, I felt like more of an adult then, may have regressed a little when I came back, moved back in with mum and dad and it got a lot easier. [Sharon]

Sharon had had a period of independence, during which she took responsibility for her own well being. Even while living at home Sharon was able to be independent, she worked two jobs, could come and go as she pleased, and could afford to move out and live independently if she wished. However, Sharon chose to remain at home with her parents. When asked if she stayed because it was convenient or too expensive to leave, Sharon replied:

I suppose it’s convenient because it’s too expensive to live out of home, you know. And also having your meals cooked and that is also very convenient but for the most part I am there because it’s easy to be there and I get on well with them, I don’t really have a reason to leave if that makes sense. I don’t have some deep desire to leave but I’m not because it’s too expensive, like, I’m quite content living there. [Sharon]

Sharon’s parents lived in an apartment on the water, near her university, with easy access to many of the amenities she considers essential, and living there allowed her the opportunity to save to go travelling overseas. In addition her parents were often absent during the weekends, allowing Sharon free run of the home. The aspects of Sharon’s life mirror that of many of the respondents, and the deliberation with herself before
declaring that she was not an adult is similar to the winding path Melissa took before declaring she was an adult. Both women have the same criteria for understanding what separates an adult from an adolescent, taking responsibility for your self. In Sharon’s case she felt that she was not an adult because she was in some way opting out of that responsibility by living with her parents.

Victor had difficulty identifying solid criteria by which he could gauge whether he was an adult. When asked if he felt that he was an adult Victor replied:

Maybe gradually I am getting there. It’s hard, I am not married, I don’t have kids, but I don’t think you need those to be called an adult though. I have just moved out of my parent’s house but they just live like five minutes up the road so I still kind of have dinner there every now and then, go there, take some vegies, bring them back home, but now I am paying more bills myself. I’d say I am gradually becoming an adult, as the years go on you get more responsibilities. [Victor]

Though he mentions marriage and children Victor quickly disqualifies them as being useful measures by which to answer the question. Eventually he settles on financial independence and responsibility as indicators that he is “gradually” moving towards adulthood. This positioning “in-between” adolescence (as characterised most often by dependence on parents) and adulthood is a recurrent theme in discussions with the respondents, as is the use of ‘responsibility’ as an indicator of adulthood. What Victor never made explicit is how much responsibility was required to qualify as an adult.
While many of the accounts given by emerging adults are similar, Nathan stood out as he had the least positive perspective on adulthood. Nathan associated becoming an adult with the loss of the open-ended possibilities that are characteristic of emerging adulthood:

I think I don’t feel like an adult like my parents feel like an adult, and I don’t think that I ever will, because I think for a lot of them feeling like you were grown up came with the responsibility of looking after children, and that feeling that I think a lot of people associate being growing up with having a lot of your options taken away, and I don’t ever foresee a point in my future where my options are taken away, because that’s important to me to keep those open. So I think in the sense that my parent’s generation feel grown up I probably will never feel like that, well I hope I will never feel like that. [Nathan]

Open-ended possibilities are more than just a feature of Nathan’s current life, but are also an ideal, not one that he wished to give up. This didn’t mean that he had no clear idea of where he wished to be in the future, Nathan had spent a considerable amount of time thinking about the different jobs he wished to work in, the places that he would like to live and the different things he wished to achieve. But all of Nathan’s plans allowed for the possibility to change direction at any point.

Nathan’s aversion to adulthood was deeper than a desire not to be constrained by the lack of options. Nathan’s understanding of adulthood stems from observing his parents and older siblings’ relationships:
I actually don’t spend a lot of time thinking about if I feel like I’m grown up, but sometimes I think about the things that people who believe they are adults stand for and the things that they hold in high regard, and those are not things that I think are very good at all. Like certain things, I don’t know, like hiding the way that you feel about the situation and just dealing with your problems, like not dealing with your problems but putting up with other people in your lives, like in work situations if they are behaving in a way you say well if you are an adult you just deal with it and you stick it out. I don’t believe you should, I think you should change the things that, I just think that most things can be changed and I don’t see any reason why you should ever have to put up with something that makes you uncomfortable or makes you unhappy. And I find that a lot of people, well the few people that I do know who seem to have this strong feeling of maturity, they seem to be, I don’t know, in a constant state of simmering despair [laughs]. Well the few that I know who make a big point about making everyone think that they are all grown up and I don’t like it, I don’t want it. [Nathan]

Nathan recounted stories of witnessing domestic abuse of various types growing up, which had affected his views on relationships, and he stated that even in the distant future when he retires he plans to be alone. Nathan’s family served as the initial role models for what life as an adult entailed, he associated their difficult and tumultuous experiences with being an adult. Having to “put up” with the difficulties of relationships or work issues related to the notion of having options taken away, Nathan saw ‘adult’ situations and relationships as being intractable, places from which there was no option but to accept the status quo. Nathan placed such value on the possibilities and opportunities that were available to him during this stage of his life that he intended to
ensure they are always a part of his life, even though he recognised that they will inevitably decline.

Nathan is the only respondent to have a negative view about what it means to be an adult. The other respondents offered considerably more positive appraisals of what it meant to be an adult:

Well baseline you should really be saying over eighteen, I think that’s a really important aspect of it, I don’t think that people under that age should be considered to be an adult and that it would be quite sad if they had to be, and then I guess further to that it would be having responsibility for ones’ self or for others, or um, I guess just not having that caretaker above you. I guess you have always got your parents if they are still alive and whatever else, but when they break away from doing everything for you. [Olivia]

More recently I have been going out for coffee with people, it’s weird, I never used to do that. That’s another grown up thing, I guess that being younger I was never interested in, but you can sit down and just chat I guess, over coffee. [Lisa]

Olivia is the only person to link an achievement with adulthood, that of turning eighteen. This could be because of her young age (20), but her identification of responsibility for ones’ self and others as indicative of adulthood is certainly reflective of Olivia’s experiences growing up and having to care for her mother. Lisa identifies the development and changing of behaviour to adulthood, in this case the willingness to chat over coffee is an external reflection of her becoming an adult.
Being an adult is a mindset, it is the ability to discern the responsible and right thing to do, as opposed to what you want to do. [Zane]

I guess independent and able to look after yourself and able to make your own choices. [Wendy]

Sacrifice. I think, see when I think of an adult I think competency right? The ability to take care of oneself, independence... I think it is being able to make the decisions like, a thousand little sacrifices are a lot harder to make than one big one, it’s very easy to say I won’t do this for someone, or I won’t do this to get this, but it’s really hard to say I won’t do this because it might benefit me later... I think really it has to do with being prepared to sacrifice things and seeing what is important long term, and then getting to a point where you can make those choices. [Ryan]

Zane, Wendy and Ryan identify more abstract qualities as being indicative of adulthood, though always including taking responsibility for themselves and their actions. This is not an easily measured characteristic; an emerging adult can only demonstrate that they are responsible through the continual process of decision-making in everyday life. Being responsible requires an individual to self monitor their actions and choose the most appropriate options with the best possible outcome, especially when that requires delayed gratification.
The difference between the two groups of respondents would appear to be confidence, those who were able to declare themselves adult felt confident in their ability to take care of themselves and to act and react to situations responsibly and maturely. Those who declared themselves in-between adolescence and adulthood were less confident that they were actually taking care of themselves and being responsible, mature adults. The emerging adults who considered themselves “in-between” placed a greater emphasis on their circumstances than those who were more confident in declaring themselves as adults. Those “in-between” were more likely to make reference to dependence on their parents for security, financial or otherwise, though in all cases respondents considered themselves to be autonomous. Living at home with parents obviously contributes to that feeling of dependence, even if the respondent was making their own decisions, looking after their own finances and being responsible for themselves, the fact remained that they could turn to their parents if needed.

For the respondents in this study adulthood is a state with which they must self-identify. Many of the in-between respondents had similar living circumstances as those who considered themselves to be adults, they lived out of home, worked part time, full time, in casual jobs or on benefits, and all of them were clear that they made decisions for themselves. Separating the self-avowed adults from those in-between is not ability, or behaviour, or life goals and achievements, but rather the confidence that they are living the life of an adult. Many of the in-between respondents have the capability of living as adults, but do not feel that their lives meet those criteria. This is purely subjective;
there is often little or no difference in the living circumstances between those who self-identify as adults and those who feel in-between adolescence and adulthood. But then, uncertainty is also a significant part of emerging adulthood.

**Markers of adulthood**

The sociological literature that encompasses the experiences of emerging adults, the sociology of youth and transitions studies, uses five markers to measure an individual’s progress towards becoming an adult: leaving home, finishing schooling/starting a career, buying a home, marriage and parenthood. The decades of research and analysis on these markers has demonstrated an increasing gap between the end of compulsory secondary education and all of these markers (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Pollock 1997, White and Wyn 2013). In some instances there are bodies of research exploring the back and forth across a marker, such as with the phenomena of “boomerang” or “yo-yo” kids (Biggart and Walther 2006, Du Bois-Reymond and Blasco 2003, Mitchell and Gee 1996, Okimoto and Stegall 1987), emerging adults that leave their parental home and return, sometimes more than once. There has been considerable discussion around the decline of marriage rates, the decrease and stabilisation of birth rates, the increasing number of “double income, no kids” (DINKs) families, the increasing difficulties in living out of home or buying a home, and the multiple career paths and periods of higher education that an individual is likely to have during their lifetime (Devadason 2007, Schwartz et al. 2005). But there has been far less discussion about the relevance of these markers to emerging adults in the early 21st century. Given the increasing
unlikelihood that an emerging adult will achieve one or more of these markers in a timely fashion after having turned eighteen, are these markers useful ways of understanding whether someone is an adult or not?

**Marriage...**

Marriage has long been considered a defining marker in dividing adults from adolescents and children, as it is a near universal experience that exists in one form or another across cultures and throughout recorded history (Arnett 1998, Schlegel and Barry III 1991). Since 1974 the age at which Australians get married has increased, and the number of Australians who ever get married has decreased (ABS 1997a, 2008, 2010d, Baxter et al. 2005, Carmichael 1987, 1991, Linacre 2007). The types of relationships that are recognised have vastly increased, and marriage is no longer as linked to commitment and responsibility as it once was.

For the respondents in this study marriage is no longer linked to adulthood either. While the idea of having a committed relationship was important to the majority of the respondents, opinions were sharply divided over whether marriage was desirable, and did not take it as granted that it would be a part of their future (Brannen and Nilsen 2002, Hockey 2009, McDonald et al. 2011). Respondents such as Zane viewed marriage as an outdated institution that held no relevance for them. Others, like Tiffany and Olivia, did see marriage as a future goal many years in the future, and not one that defined their sense of self, past, present or future (Sanders and Munford 2008).
However, not one respondent linked marriage with being an adult, though some were able to identify people they knew who did.

This change in values can be attributed in part to the redefining of marriage as being less about status and social identity and more about commitment:

I think it links back to that idea of responsibility, once you are married you are responsible for caring for another human being. But being married doesn’t make you an adult, being married means that you are supposed to do these things, it’s whether or not you can discern these decisions. [Zane]

For Zane being an adult means recognising that there are responsibilities which take priority over individual desires or whims. Marriage is an extension of that, as it involves recognising that another person’s needs must be met and accounted for. But as Zane points out being married isn’t a guarantee that a person will behave with care and responsibility, and therefore can’t be used as a measure of someone’s maturity as an adult.

Similarly Wendy sees commitment as being a sign of maturity, but doesn’t necessarily link that to marriage. Marriage is no longer a given in Australian society, as Wendy points out a proportion of the population never intend to marry, or will marry later in life:
People get married at all ages, and some people don’t ever want to get married so it doesn’t not make them an adult because they don’t want to get married, I guess having a proper relationship can define you as an adult, it makes you more mature having to care about someone else and not just make decisions for yourself, but not necessarily marriage. [Wendy]

Wendy points to a ‘proper relationship’ as a better indicator of adulthood, meaning a committed relationship in which the needs and desires of the other person are considered, as opposed to adolescent relationships which are usually more casual in nature. Identifying the point at which an individual has a ‘proper relationship’ and is therefore an adult is extremely difficult, but marriage is not a useful guide.

The idea of getting married young is anathema to the emerging adults in this study, who value the multitude of possibilities that are open to them:

My friends who think that being an adult is getting married and having children, that seems really strange to me, because I’ve had a few that just, you know, they’ve gotten out of school and they’ve gone and gotten pregnant and they are with the same person from high school, and to me I think that couldn’t possibly be the right thing to do... I think especially at that young age it seems like the worst thing possible would be to settle, I’m talking about maybe nineteen and twenty, and getting engaged around then and then getting married and building a house or buying a house and having children, and staying like that forever, it’s just horrible, the thought for me is just the worse thing ever. I couldn’t imagine it, and I don’t want to. [Nathan]
Nathan sees the commitments made by his friends as a closing off of opportunities for exploration and development, which he counts as one of the benefits of being an adult in his early twenties. Nathan’s long term plans do not include a partner, nor does he expect to change that to accommodate someone in his life. Nathan places little value in marriage, and he doesn’t understand those who value it over the possibilities that emerging adulthood offer.

Tiffany does value marriage, and is in a long term committed relationship with Ben, who is 7 years older than her. However Tiffany also values the opportunities that emerging adulthood have to offer:

I don’t want to get married, or I don’t want to have kids within ten years. Beyond that, probably... My boyfriend and I have discussed it and he wants kids in two years and I’m like no. If you can’t support yourself why would you want to have kids? And you know if I am still studying or even if I start work what am I going to do with the kid when I go to work? Is he able to support me and the kid and pay for the mortgage and provide for us? Probably not. [Tiffany]

The practical realities of marriage and parenthood are daunting to Tiffany, and one of the aspects of emerging adulthood that she values is the opportunity it offers to establish her financial situation. Tiffany’s short term plans involved completing her degree in medical science, and then finding work in a highly competitive field. Mortgages and children would hinder Tiffany’s plans, especially when they are not in a position to cover the costs involved.
The respondents in this study are acutely aware that marriage has a substantially less significant role in contemporary Australian society than it did for previous generations, and their understanding of its relationship to adulthood is reflected in this. Marriage and commitment are no longer synonymous (Carroll et al. 2009b), as one can be in a committed relationship without marriage (and vice versa, if you consider the high rates of divorce). Marriage no longer imparts the same social status either; it is not seen as necessary to legitimise a relationship, and there isn’t the same stigma attached to being unmarried or divorced as there was in generations past.

... and parenthood

Becoming a parent is one of the longest commitments an individual is likely to make, and is usually considered to be paired with marriage. In Australia birth rates have remained relatively stable for the past few decades, with a recent rise often attributed to the Federal government’s Baby Bonus Scheme (ABS 2005, 2011b, Pink 2008b). However the number of children being born out of wedlock is increasing as fewer couples choose to get married.

For the respondents in this study parenthood had a stronger link to the notion of being an adult than marriage:
Do you think marriage or being a parent is an important part of being an adult?

Oh god yeah, especially being a parent, like not so much marriage because I don’t really think marriage is yeah, I don’t think it is particularly conducive to adulthood, but taking care of someone else, having responsibility for another life. [Olivia]

Being a parent involves taking care of someone who is completely dependent, unlike marriage which is seen as a commitment between two adults capable of autonomy and self reliance. This distinction that Olivia and other respondents make is evidence of a cultural shift that values autonomy and taking responsibility for one’s actions. Olivia states that she doesn’t think marriage “is particularly conducive to adulthood” because she sees in it a ceding of autonomy, and the potential for dependence on a partner to be responsible for finances and decisions. However parenthood requires a high level of responsibility for a considerable length of time, a trait which the respondents linked closely to their understanding of adulthood.

Some of the respondents tapped into a broader set of social issues around teen pregnancy, mirroring research that shows that people from upper and middle socio-economic backgrounds have a predominantly negative view of teenage pregnancy (Turner 2004, Yardley 2008). Wendy argued that a girl of fifteen can become a mother but that is not a guarantee that they will behave responsibly:
What about having kids?

Ooh, I don’t think that makes you an adult. Like because people have kids at all different ages, some people get pregnant at fifteen and that doesn’t make them an adult. [Wendy]

Wendy viewed that it is not the act of becoming a parent that makes one an adult, it is the act of taking responsibility for one’s self. In the same way that marriage and commitment have become separate ideas in Australian culture, parenthood and responsibility are no longer seen as being necessarily linked together.

The respondents gave a variety of responses when asked if they would like to become a parent in the future, with most stating they would, under the right circumstances:

I feel like at the moment I am not ready to be a good enough father that I could be, or that I would want to be. Parenting is a huge responsibility, and nearly you know eighty percent of problems can be solved with good parents, so yeah, I guess, in ideal circumstances I would want kids but it would be in ideal circumstances. Definitely ideal circumstances. I wouldn’t want to just have kids because I wanted to have kids, I would have to be in a place where I could support the child and the kid would have a good life and I would have to be in a place where I was happy enough to be a parent, because I don’t think there is anything worse than sad parents. [Ryan]

Ryan’s response is partly a reflection of his own upbringing, not knowing his father and having a mother who had to work long hours in order to support them. All of the
respondents regardless of their desire to be a parent or not were aware of the considerable difficulties and responsibilities that it entailed. One of the values that this period of emerging adulthood offered the respondents was the opportunity to prepare for the financial burdens, and to develop as individuals.

The ambivalence expressed by many of the respondents about becoming a parent is demonstrative of the changing value placed on parenthood in Australian society:

**Do you think that society still expects people to get married and have kids?**

I think to an extent, but maybe that’s not like the epitome of being successful, you look at Julia Gillard she’s not married, doesn’t have kids, but she’s still the Prime Minister of Australia which is pretty damn high up. So I think generally we derive success in more ways than one... I guess marriage is still [a measure of success], and children, I guess that still counts but if you don’t have them you can still be counted as successful. [Victor]

Victor did want to have kids, though not in his twenties, and he accepted the idea that he might not ever become a father depending on circumstance. Like the other respondents Victor’s motivations were individually based, he did not feel that there was pressure on him to become a parent in order to be fulfilled as a person, or as a productive member of society. Rather Victor and the other respondents measured their ‘success’ as an adult (and as a person) in terms of their happiness with their lives.
Leaving homes, buying homes

The establishment of a home away from the influence of parents was historically linked to independence and responsibility, both of which were unambiguously associated with becoming an adult. Buying a home was also linked with being an adult, because of the requirements for being financially independent and responsible in order to meet the continuing costs involved. Neither situation was simply equated with being an adult by the respondents. Instead the requirements for living out of home were seen as similar to those criteria important for being considered an adult, and a lot of the value in moving out was associated with attaining a sense of independence and autonomy (Lahelma and Gordon 2003, Molgat 2002, 2007). The considerable responsibilities that owning a home entailed were viewed as best approached when established as an adult.

The respondents living at home recognised that they had less pressure on them to take care of themselves completely, and that this lessened their opportunity for independence (Schneider 2000, Schoeni and Ross 2005). Wendy worked part time, studied full time, cared for her health, maintained her own car and took responsibility for driving herself around. However because Wendy lived at home she didn’t have to take care of things like laundry or cooking, which impacted how she viewed her own degree of independence:

I guess that definitely, that’s like the first step in to being independent, because it’s hard to be independent when you live at home, you don’t have to control
everything, you just kind of get home and a lot of things are already done, so I guess when you move out you have to work things out for yourself. [Wendy]

This didn’t mean that Wendy was not independent or responsible, but because she was not forced to take care of herself Wendy felt this lessened her standing as an adult. The respondents living out of the family home mirrored these sentiments, seeing moving out of home as being a critical step towards independence. Olivia strongly identified herself as an adult, in part because she had moved away from home for study. However it was not the act of moving out that was considered important; rather it was being financially responsible that was critical to self-identifying as an adult:

**What about moving out of home?**

I think that plays a big part of it, because that would go back to that not having the caretaker to do everything for you sort of model, once you move out of home you are sort of responsible for yourself then. [Olivia]

For both Wendy and Olivia moving out of home did not equate to being an adult, but the requirements of independent living were similar to those criteria they nominated as important for being an adult.

The idea of purchasing a home was strongly linked to the idea of adulthood, though not entirely in a positive fashion. Nathan recognised that home ownership is part of the Australian identity for many, something that many Australians aspire to, and something that two of his friends have realised. However Nathan also recognises that the
practicalities of home ownership are significantly removed from the ideal, particularly for young people in poorly paid jobs:

I think these days Australians think that they are an adult when they own a house. There seems to be lately a lot of people are always talking about how important it is to own houses and I know a few people that have gone out of their way so they can get houses, but like, for an example, I have some friends in Melbourne and they have a house, and that probably wasn’t the best thing that they should have done... whenever you talk to them they make it sound like they are doing this wonderful thing and they’ve got all their priorities sorted out and they’ve got this perfect life, except they just spend all their time working in these jobs that don’t bring them any enjoyment, just so they can pay off their house, but they have this sense that they’ve achieved something which I suppose in a way they have. [Nathan]

Nathan’s friends work more than full time hours, just barely covering the costs of their mortgage, and while he admires their sense of accomplishment Nathan is unwilling to make the same sacrifices.

Many of the respondents desired to buy a home, but only when their circumstances allowed for it. Tiffany and her boyfriend Ben had had a number of discussions about their future together, including on the subject of buying a home:

I guess at some stage I would like to, I hope so, but I’m not in a rush to buy a house at all, but my boyfriend is, so... but then I don’t want to settle with something that I don’t like because it’s meant to be your home you are there for
most of the time and if I hate it then yeah, but if you can’t afford it I feel like you just shouldn’t buy it. And I’m happy to rent, you can rent some really nice places.

[Tiffany]

Tiffany recognised that their finances weren’t going to cover the costs involved, particularly for a place that she would find suitable, and was therefore happy to wait until they were ready. Although buying a home was one of Tiffany’s long term aspirations it came second to being a position of financial security.

Being financially secure was a common concern for many of the respondents, particularly when it came to discussing buying a home. Victor considered frugality and prudence to be virtues, and disliked being in debt:

I am kind of cautious about over reaching my credit, not that I am on credit, just the American, you know the financial crisis with the housing market, I am kind of suspicious about buying a home [laughs]. No I think so, I don’t have a credit card, I am kind of conservative when it comes to my spending, so I think yeah I’d have to be like economically well off and then I’d consider buying a home. But like the way things are happening, not just in Brisbane but in any kind of major city, more apartments are coming up, so yeah I’d consider buying an apartment as well. I’d probably buy an apartment over a home, just a bit cheaper. [Victor]

Victor found the idea of having a substantial mortgage distasteful, given the high cost of purchasing a home in Brisbane (and other Australian capital cities) and the uncertainty created by the global financial crisis. This didn’t mean that Victor never envisaged
owning a home, only that he needed to feel financially secure before he would consider purchasing.

**Finishing school to start a career**

The school to work transition has been closely linked to the achievement of adult status, and the changes in this transition over the past 40 years have been widely studied. The respondents had to cope with the lack of clear outcomes and available jobs related to secondary and tertiary education, which made it difficult for them to make decisions about their futures (Mørch 2003, White and Wyn 2013, pp. 148-150). The extended period of education has a number of positive associations with the personal development and identity achievement of adults in their late twenties (Fadjukoff *et al.* 2007). Many of the respondents who were studying at the time of interview considered their continuing involvement in education as being related to their sense of not fully realising adulthood. However the respondents linked this to their own sense of valuing adulthood:

I don’t think I’m adult because I haven’t finished studying, ‘cause that’s the important thing for me, I think maybe a lot of different people have different points at which they feel like they are an adult and for me my point I believe is going to be when I finish my studies and I’m in a career, I guess for my other friends for them it was when they got a house, for other people I guess it’s when they finally become a manager or, but for me personally I don’t think, I don’t know if I necessarily project an image of being an adult... I don’t see myself as an adult. But I probably will when I finish my Masters. [Nathan]
Nathan had a long career trajectory planned out leading to a position with the World Bank, which required a considerable amount of studying. Nathan placed a high value on education, though many of his family and friends did not, and while he considered the completion of his studies as the pathway towards feeling like an adult, Nathan was aware that few of his friends had the same view. Olivia considered herself an adult even though she was a student due to her life experience, but her opinion of other students, particularly those living on campus, was less positive:

All the people that I was at college with, they would be the same age as me, and I think that they all are actively trying to avoid becoming adults, so I think their idea about it has nothing to do with age but you know more about getting a real job, settling down with someone, that sort of thing... I think that getting a job that made me able to support myself was probably something that was very instrumental to me being able to meet all my criteria, but settling down with someone I don’t think is particularly important. [Olivia]

Olivia’s personal view of adulthood focused less on achievements such as marriage and more on the ability to take care of herself responsibly. The sheltered nature of campus living meant that many of her peers did not have to accept the range of responsibilities that had fallen to Olivia and shaped her understanding of adulthood, which contributed to her view that they were not yet adults in the same way that she was. In Olivia’s estimation her peers living on campus measured adulthood through the attainment of future achievements, allowing them the freedom to behave less responsibly than she
might have liked; something which had impacted her choice of friends and on her choice of living arrangements, moving into shared accommodation in part because she believed it to be a better environment.

The finishing of school and the beginning of a career was one achievement frequently mentioned in relation to adulthood, however it was rarely a definitive statement. Victor had finished his first degree and at the time had a clear idea of what to expect:

> I always had this notion which was completely not grounded in reality that once I had finished my degree I would easily get like a fifty grand bank job, you know I’d be right, I’ve got my degree, and then reality kicked in, and, I don’t know. Then kind of I guess I started listening to my parents more, about my career paths and just general things, like just using their knowledge... Maybe just generally knowing that you don’t know a lot of things, that you are young and don’t know a lot of things, I think that was probably the moment when I became more of an adult. [Victor]

Victor had a difficult time finding full time work after finishing his degree, he had expected a well paid graduate job would be waiting for him and the long period of job hunting was a dispiriting experience. Victor was able to reflect on his job hunting failures to reconsider the realities of his situation, forcing him to mature in his outlook and to alter his expectations of what was reasonable. Victor went back to university to do a graduate diploma in education, in the hopes of finding a teaching position that allows him to utilise both his Bachelor of Arts and a teaching degree, but was not
entirely hopeful about his chances. Though he did not consider himself wholly adult at the time of interview he felt that his relationship with his parents and his attitude towards his future were much more adult.

One of the key aspects of the respondents’ situations was that they were not engaged in work that they considered part of a career, as expressed by all the respondents whether they were working full time, part time or casually. There are differing accounts of the difficulties that young people in Australia have in engaging in full time work after they have completed studying (Marks 2005, Wooden 1996, 1998), however it is important to distinguish between full time work and careers. The types of work the respondents were engaged in lacked the necessary features to sustain their long term goals, though many of the respondents were uncertain of what type of work would keep their interest.

Cyril worked full time as a salesman, for a company based in Germany. Cyril had a degree in theatre studies, unrelated to the products that he was selling, although his training on the stage was useful. Cyril wanted a career that allowed him to express himself creatively, but he was aware of how unlikely it would be for him to find work in theatre, particularly in Brisbane:

I enjoy a bit of the bullshitting of sales, and that sort of thing because I am quite outgoing, but I wouldn’t say that it ultimately fulfils me because there is a limit to how creative you can be with business I think, especially when you are just selling a simple commodity.

**Is it something you could see yourself doing in five years time?**
I can see that I would do it as an acceptable compromise, but I would hope that by then I would also be making inroads in other areas, or looking at other things. I don’t know what, but hopefully something. [Cyril]

At the time of the interview he had no idea what direction a career might take, but he knew he did not want it to be sales. The desire for a challenging career was expressed by all the respondents, and was something they found lacking in their jobs. Jackie found working in a call centre useful while completing her degree, but the idea of staying there longer than absolutely necessary was anathema:

Not in five years time. For the rest of my uni degree, and maybe even for a little while afterwards to save to travel. But no I couldn’t do it for that long probably, it’s not really very challenging is it? Well, it’s fine when you’ve got uni, and you’ve got this other motivation, it doesn’t matter that it’s mindless, you sort of want something that’s mindless, but I couldn’t do that full time. I would just get so bored. [Jackie]

Jackie was fortunate in that she had a very clear idea about her future career path, and her degree in speech pathology had clearly defined entry paths into the profession. The value of the jobs the respondents were engaged in lay in the support they provided for their ambitions, and occasionally in the opportunity for career advancement, usually through skill development. In some cases their dislike of the job had positive aspects for the respondents, as in Nathan’s case. Nathan had spent a considerable amount of time planning out his future career, and though it was a long, difficult road ahead of him his current employment helped to fuel his determination:
You don’t need to be actively engaged in the job to be able to do it, so it frees your mind up to think of other things and I find that I get quite a lot of work done for university at work, and that’s where I do, since I don’t like being there, that’s where I spend most of my time thinking about my future. So I would actually say if it wasn’t for that job I wouldn’t be so focused on my future. [Nathan]

Nathan and Jackie had very clear ideas of what constituted their career paths, and were both cognisant of how far removed they were from starting their careers. Of the 21 respondents interviewed only Kevin and Lisa felt that their current occupation was linked to a future career path, and neither wanted to be in the same job five years from the time of interview.

The respondents’ understanding of the links between adulthood and the markers that are traditionally considered to be representative of adult status highlight the shift in attitudes and circumstances for young people in contemporary Australia. The social markers, marriage and parenthood, are less important to the respondents as measures of adulthood than they are as a measure of the maturity of the individual and their willingness to be responsible with regards to the needs of others. Three of the financial markers, buying a home, finishing schooling and starting a career, are associated with adulthood but not necessarily as a marker of adult status. Buying a home and starting a career were seen as distant possibilities by the respondents who did not expect either to be easily or quickly achieved, and therefore something that was accomplished as an adult rather than in order to be considered adult. Finishing education was seen as
linked to adulthood by some respondents; however the experiences of many were that education was an ongoing process that did not guarantee a permanent position, meaning that low paid casual and part time shift work continued for some time afterwards. Leaving home was the marker that was widely associated with adulthood, as it required the individual to take responsibility for their actions, was predicated on a measure of financial independence and allowed the respondent autonomy.

**Uncertainty, possibilities, and adulthood**

The markers of adulthood are based on a set of assumptions around the likely life-course that the majority of young people will follow during their late teens and early twenties, which is increasingly distant from what is probable or possible in contemporary Australia. The social and structural conditions underlying these assumptions have shifted as the role of traditional institutions and the State diminished (Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Pollock 1997, Schwartz et al. 2005, White and Wyn 2013), placing greater importance on self determination by the individual. Giddens, Bauman and Beck argue, in different ways, that this has resulted in uncertainty; uncertainty about the future, uncertainty about the present, uncertainty about how to define one’s self as an individual (Bauman 1991, Beck 1992b, Giddens 1991). This is certainly true of the period as an emerging adult, when many of those structures that help define an individual and remove some of the uncertainty, such as stable relationships, careers and living circumstances, have yet to be entered into. Arnett characterises this aspect of emerging adulthood as “instability”, but sees this balanced by being a time of
“possibilities” (Arnett 2000a, 2004). The lack of strong social norms guiding choices along the life-course may contribute to a sense of uncertainty, but also allows individuals to choose from a great many more opportunities (Eitle et al. 2010, Gunter and Watt 2009). This dual nature of emerging adulthood, the sense that anything is possible yet might all be taken away at a moment’s notice, has considerable consequences in how the respondents of this study understood how they reached their current situation, who they are now, and the directions they could take in the future.

**Past examples of uncertainty and possibility that influenced choice**

This dual nature manifests in numerous areas, education is rarely a straightforward journey from start to finish and often involves one or more reappraisals of which courses are undertaken, as the likelihood or desirability of particular career paths is reassessed and the reality of the course material versus expectations sinks in. Sharon’s current interest is in behavioural economics, though she bemoaned the fact that while economics has very good graduate outcomes, the specialised area that she is interested in is also the hardest area to find a job. After several years at university Sharon still has eighteen months or more left in her degree:

It’s like the fourth degree that I started, yeah [laughs] I am one of those. I started in engineering, because at school I was great at maths and science and stuff, so I was like yeah, great, maths and science, I will do engineering, and when I got there I was like this is all just maths and science, so I got out of that, and then screwed around in Arts for a while, and did a bit of psychology then and
criminology, and then did commerce dual with economics, found the economics more interesting than the commerce, so I dropped the commerce so I wouldn’t have to do accounting, because I didn’t really want to end up being a business manager or something. Not that I do know what I want to be. [Sharon]

Extending the amount of time Sharon has to spend at university (and her HECS debt) is not as important as having a qualification in a field she enjoys, whether this leads to a viable career path or not. The willingness to experiment with tertiary education despite the costs involved is shared by a number of the respondents in this study, Cyril had dropped the education part of his dual degree, Eric had studied philosophy before studying political science, Melissa had studied several different courses at TAFE and university, without ever deciding on a course to follow. Tiffany had a similar experience, following a non-linear course through her studies and a number of things disrupting her studies over the course of the last several years:

A lot of things happened in my life, like moving out of home, and thinking that you can’t afford it which maybe I couldn’t and then yeah moving out, enjoying being free so much and having such a cruise-y job that it’s like, it’s not really like a job, but I think it was good because during that period of time I could think about what I wanted to do, not, not it doesn’t have to be like thinking about it all the time, but you slowly began to realise what it is that you don’t want to do, so you isolate everything else and you are like ok I am left with like this thing. [Tiffany]
Initially Tiffany had wanted to study radiography, but didn’t have a high enough exit score from high school, and has at various times been enrolled in a bachelor of science, a bachelor of health science, a bachelor of health science majoring in paramedics at a different university, and has completed a TAFE diploma in medical technology. Though some of the reasons Tiffany had for changing courses included dissatisfaction with the aspects of the course (e.g. she did not like the management aspects of the health science degree), mostly they revolved around the considerable difficulty of working and studying at the same time. The only reason she was able to complete her TAFE course was because of the consistency of the class schedules, giving Tiffany the ability to structure her working hours around them.

Graduate outcomes are less certain for many young people than in previous generations; the rise of credentialism has resulted in a considerable number of entry level jobs requiring degree qualifications without actually using the knowledge gained; jobs that can be poorly paid and uninspiring to the new graduate. The non-linear progression through education is not uncommon (Shildrick and MacDonald 2007) and was not considered problematic; many of the respondents saw the logic in furthering their qualifications in order to be better placed for a job in the future.

**Areas of uncertainty and possibility in the present day**

Many of the respondents expressed ambivalence about aspects of their current situation, most notably their jobs. Exploring the relationship between young people and
poorly paid, insecure work is a common theme in sociological research focusing on adolescence and the period of emerging adulthood (Cockburn 2001, Furlong and Cartmel 1997, Shildrick and MacDonald 2007). The need for paid employment is an unavoidable feature of modern life, but the types of employment available to emerging adults are rarely the kind considered rewarding, stimulating or desirable. They also have the disadvantage of often being shift work, poorly paid and unstable, with high rates of staff turnover. But these types of temporary work often have the advantage of flexibility, a trait rarely found in nine to five, full time work. Tiffany would prefer to be working in a pathology laboratory, as it is one of the first steps along her intended career path. However the competition for such positions is high, and the requirements of the job make it impractical while Tiffany is studying:

It’s too hard to get a job in science at the moment, well in the lab, because well, when I tried applying for lab tech jobs I did speak to, you know, the head scientist in several places and they said yeah it’s quite competitive at the moment and people applying for lab tech jobs have like degrees and honours and research, because well the government sort of cut funding for medical research, so everyone that used to do medical research is coming back to doing diagnostic pathology. So you know for me to be getting in there and be picky because I am doing uni, I can’t do these hours, you know, it got to be too hard. [Tiffany]

Like many of the respondents Tiffany had settled for a low paying job in a call centre.

Her employers allowed Tiffany to schedule full time hours around her study schedule,
and there was enough down time during the job that she could study and write assignments. However the work itself was entirely unrelated to her future career ambitions and the only aspect that Tiffany stated she would miss were the relationships she had built with some of her colleagues.

Only one of the respondents in this research was currently unemployed, the rest had a mixture of full time, part time and casual jobs, and sometimes held more than one job concurrently. Of these twenty respondents only Dean held a position which had required substantial training, as a chef. Dean works 42 hours a week in a pub kitchen, as a fully qualified chef who has completed a four year apprenticeship. Despite the considerable amount of training that Dean undertook to gain his qualifications a career as a chef was not something he was considering:

I like the job, I just don’t like the hours... I really want to change to a different job, teaching English to overseas students. [Dean]

Dean’s circumstances allowed him the freedom to consider his alternatives, and the possibility of acquiring TESOL qualifications appeals greatly to him, especially if that furnishes opportunities to fulfil his desire to move to South Korea. Dean expressed a clear intention to move out of the employment he was currently in, and in to a field that he found more interesting and more rewarding, as did almost all the respondents. The amount of time that had been invested in these jobs was immaterial to the respondents, they were not positions that offer any significant rewards in the long term either.
financially or intellectually, and they were often actively disliked because of it. Georgia was ambivalent about her job, moving from hating to liking and back again numerous times in a single sentence, making it somewhat unclear how she felt about working there:

I hate the work itself, it’s interesting, it can get really monotonous because I mean it’s just kind of typing, but every so often you will get a call that’s actually something interesting and not just old biddies talking to each other about their bowel movements. So I mean I guess I enjoy it and it’s nice you know when you get a compliment, someone says oh you’ve done a very good job, or someone says thank you or something like that, so yeah it’s not bad. [Georgia]

Georgia had no clear career path in mind, or any specific intentions after finishing her degree, other than working somewhere other than in the call centre. Most of the respondents described their current employment as having qualities they enjoyed and qualities they hated, which allowed them to stay in jobs they disliked for some time without actively searching for alternatives, as long as they had something else to focus upon.

Employment was not the only area in which the respondents expressed ambivalence related to their current situation. When Sharon was asked if her parents considered her to be an adult, she replied:
Yeah, perhaps when it’s convenient I am an adult [laughs]. You know, “I am an adult so I should be responsible enough to make good decisions”... but sometimes it’s very convenient to be like “you’re just a child Sharon”. And I think that’s the same for everyone, I think that’s the same, sometimes I feel like much more of an adult than other times and I think that’s a lot of time when it’s convenient for me, I can make myself feel like an adult. Like when I want to get things done I can be “no I’m an adult, I can do this” and when I am like sad or something I can be “no, I’ll just call my mum.” [Sharon]

Sharon knows she is capable of living and acting like an adult, but because she lives with her parents Sharon has the luxury of not having to always be an adult. This is something expressed by many of the respondents who were living with their parents at the time of the interview, even though they considered themselves to be autonomous, taking responsibility for themselves was seen as being more like a choice. This contributes to the sense of feeling “in-between” adolescence and adulthood, without the forced necessity of being responsible the respondents are uncertain as to whether they are living as adults.

**Ambivalence about the future**

The respondents’ plans for the future are often tempered by considerable uncertainty, largely because they aren’t able to distinguish what is possible from what is practical (Brannen and Nilsen 2002). However one of the features of all the respondents’ experiences was that they were in situations they expected (or wanted) to change in the short term, within the next few years. Kevin had the most stable employment of all the
respondents in this study. At 22 he worked full time as a car salesman, a job which required 50+ work weeks, and Kevin was one of the only people to emphatically declare that he ‘loved his job’. Despite that Kevin stated that ‘if’ he was still in the car sales business in five or ten years he would want to be in a management position, preferably as a general manager:

I’m thinking of doing a marketing or business degree part time in a couple of years, starting within a couple of years. Or possibly maybe a human movement degree when I am in my thirties, just for something to do. Something I am interested in, but it’s only going to be a part time thing, because I have to have the full time job because I still need the money. [Kevin]

There is little in the way of certainty in Kevin’s life, in the past five years he has been continuously employed in numerous jobs, including apprenticeships, casual and part time jobs and a brief stint in the air force. But even though Kevin loved his job and it paid well, he was not certain whether it was a career. Kevin is well aware that his circumstances might change at any time, and he keeps his options open with the possibility of study and travel in his future; the only certainty in his life is the fact that he needs to work. Lisa was the only person whose job was related to her intended career in disability services, and the only other person to respond positively when asked if she enjoys her work:

I do, I really do... Most of the time [laughs].

**Is it something you see yourself doing in five years time?**
No it is not. It’s good for a little while I think, and it will really set me up to be an interpreter, I am hoping for that in a couple of years, but with the relay service, it’s not a career path for me, it’s just a fill in thing for me. [Lisa]

The part time work she was employed in offered little in the way of future advancement and was low paid. Though neither was centrally important to Lisa, she did want a job where she felt she was helping people in a substantial way, which she did not get at her current job. Lisa and Kevin were the only two people employed in jobs that they felt might be related to future careers, yet neither had any long term interest in remaining where they were. This was one of the few constants reported by all the respondents, neither the full time nor the part time workers saw a future in their current jobs. In fact for most of the respondents the idea of still being in the job after five years was a horrible prospect:

**Can you see yourself doing it in five years time?**
No. If I’m still doing it in five years time you have permission to scoop my eyeballs out with spoons. [Georgia]

**Is it something you enjoy?**
No. But it pays the bills. Sometimes.

**Can you see yourself doing it in five years time?**
Do you want the realistic answer or the um, or the optimistic answer?

**How about, is it something you want to be doing in five years time?**
No. No, definitely not.
But you can envisage the possibility?

Yes. Seeing Rob [fellow employee] coming in every day makes it easier to imagine too, to see that happening. [Eric]

Both Georgia and Eric had strong reactions to the idea of working at a call centre or at a supermarket for an extended period of time, and though neither thought the possibility likely, they were aware that the possibility did exist. Eric’s colleague Rob had seen that possibility come to fruition, as Rob lacked a clear idea of where and what he wanted to be doing he had ended up working at the supermarket for many years. For the respondents the idea that this might end up being their reality was upsetting, none of the respondents was comfortable with the possibility.

Being committed to a degree or course of study was no guarantee that the respondents were confident about their future. Wendy was in the middle of a degree in accounting at the time of her interview, something that she had fallen into because it seemed like a good idea at the time. But Wendy had no clear idea of what she wished to do once she had finished, especially as she had other areas of interest that she was considering pursuing:

I think I want to work in accounting like obviously for a few years, but I don’t think that’s what I want to do long term, I was thinking of doing further study, I am not sure yet. You can do like a chartered accountancy thing, so that you can become a proper accountant, there’s a few different avenues you can take…
Does the prospect of going back and doing another degree scare you?

Not really. I would probably like to work in accounting to get some money because I’ve obviously been poor for the past three years, so that would be good, and then if I can, go back to uni. But I have no idea what I want to do yet, I guess I am glad that I still have a year left to think about it. [Wendy]

Wendy was most of the way through her business degree, however her preferred course of study was dietetics. By the time that Wendy had realised this it seemed more practical to finish her studies in accounting, and the possibility of earning a full time wage was appealing even if the thought of a career in accountancy was not. Wendy felt that it wasn’t necessary to have everything worked out immediately, and was quite happy about having time to reach a decision. Few of the respondents felt that they knew what the short term future would hold for them with any degree of certainty, but only Wendy seemed to be happy about it.

The uncertainty that is a feature of many aspects of the respondents’ lives centred largely upon the wide range of opportunities available to them, particularly around those elements that are transitory such as employment and education. However uncertainty is not something that had to be dealt with on a regular basis and the respondents were not focused on the instability of their current circumstances (Brannen and Nilsen 2002). The respondents were not concerned that they would lose or be unable to replace their current employment, which they considered to be temporary, they were uncertain about their future prospects for permanent and stable employment
in a preferred position. Similarly uncertainty around studies was less about being able to choose a course of study and more around finding a course that was interesting and fulfilling in the long term. The ambivalence that permeated the respondents’ discussions of long term decisions stemmed from a sense that there were a wide range of possibilities open to them, yet they were uncertain about how to distinguish the worthwhile choices from the rest.

**Discussion**

This chapter explored what it is to be an adult, from the perspective of those emerging adults that exist in the limbo between the legal identification as an adult, and social acceptance as an adult. The criteria that the respondents identified as being important to be considered an adult largely agree with the research in the emerging adulthood literature: financial independence, autonomy and taking responsibility for one’s actions. In addition maturity is a common theme that arises in discussions with the emerging adults, a maturing of tastes, behaviour and attitudes is seen as a distinguishing feature between adolescence and emerging adults. The question is significant as it provides an understanding of the guides that emerging adults have for making decisions about their future, their actions and the values that they hold as being important. In early 21st century Australia there are conflicting understandings of adulthood based on the radically different experiences of multiple generations. The current generation of emerging adults are becoming adults in distinctly different circumstances to that of
Generation X, their parents, and their grandparents, all of which contributed to their understanding of what it means to be an adult.

Whether or not the respondents identified themselves as an adult was largely dependent upon their personal experiences. Those respondents who did identify as an adult were able to provide definitive statements about what an adult is and why they qualify. In these instances the respondents had past experiences they related to their understanding of adulthood. Those emerging adults who clearly stated they did not feel as if they were adults related this feeling back to their current living circumstances, living at home with their parent(s) meant they still considered themselves dependent even if it was entirely by choice. For those who were ambivalent about considering themselves to be adult some had clearly defined points in time at which they may consider themselves to be adult, such as upon graduating from their studies and embarking on careers, while for others it was a gradual process with no clear endpoint.

Of the six markers used in transition studies only two had particular significance for the emerging adults in this study. Leaving home was linked to independence and autonomy, though it is not by itself enough to make someone an adult. Finishing studies is also an important milestone, though it is not high school that the respondents referenced but tertiary education. Marriage and parenthood were not considered to be important to the majority of the respondents. Though they expressed a muted desire to marry if the conditions were right, the respondents were uncertain as to when or if such an event
would occur; as such they did not consider their own attainment of adult status to be linked to these social markers. Purchasing a home was not linked to adulthood by the respondents, as the costs and logistics involved are too great and too impractical to be a consideration in evaluating someone as an adult. These values are reflective of the shifts in social and cultural meanings associated with each of these acts, shifts which are more pronounced amongst the middle class and result in emerging adulthood being a predominantly middle class experience.

Uncertainty and possibility are two important features of emerging adulthood, highlighting a significant tension of the period that has considerable impact on individuals. The respondents in this study related numerous experiences in which they had taken advantage of the opportunities that were available to them, in such areas as pursuing different courses of study and travelling. However the respondents’ stories also had elements of uncertainty, particularly when asked to consider where they would be in the future. The temporary and transitory nature of many elements in the respondents’ lives meant that they lacked long term stability, but they did not consider their current circumstances unstable; their uncertainty lay in knowing which choices would be practical when looking for more stable living situations.

This chapter has highlighted the individualized nature of adulthood, the respondents varying accounts of how they define adulthood for themselves focused on criteria that have more to do with individual attainment and personal growth than social recognition.
of adult status or commitment to long term stable situations (such as careers and relationships). Structural changes in Australia over the last forty years have contributed to this individualization by making many of the markers traditionally associated with adulthood (such as careers and home ownership) unattainable by the majority of young adults, and increasing the difficulty of moving out of home and tertiary education. Similarly the social changes in Australia have lessened the importance of traditional institutions, such as marriage, as a measure of adulthood.
Chapter 6 – Emerging Adulthood in Reflexive Modernity

What does it mean to become an adult in early 21st century Brisbane? The respondents in this research have been able to define their answer to that question for themselves, using individualised criteria for their success as both an emerging adult and an adult in Australian society. The criteria that the respondents adopted are reflective of their individual experiences, as well as their social, cultural and economic standing. These criteria suggest how the notion of ‘adulthood’ has been transformed in Australian society over the past few generations, and highlight that the respondents recognise there is a distinct period of life between adolescence and adulthood. These findings support the argument that traditional institutions, such as marriage or adulthood, are undergoing a process of reflexive modernization, and that the current social generation (“Gen Y”) have defined these terms with greater individual salience than in previous generations. That the measures and experiences of the respondents are closely aligned to those featured in the emerging adulthood literature suggests that this framework provides a useful analytic framework for understanding of this period of life, from the perspectives of both respondents and researchers. These results argue for a greater focus on the role that structural and social conditions have in shaping the understanding of adulthood for emerging adults, which can shift depending on the individual’s circumstances.
Emerging adulthood in Brisbane: Summary of findings

In broad terms the goals and aspirations of the respondents were closely related to the social and cultural norms of early 21st century Australia, in particular those related to the values of self-sufficiency, independence and autonomy. This was reflected in a number of aspects of the research, as in the criteria considered significant for adulthood (financial independence, autonomy, maturity, and leaving home) and the dominance of work and study amongst the quotidian activities of the respondents. Uncertainty was a feature of many parts of the respondents’ lives, making it difficult to make long-term plans or predict the course of their future, affecting both their choices and the stability of their relationships with others. However this was not seen as an overriding problem for the respondents, rather it was seen as an inevitable consequence of the way their lives were structured during this time period.

The question of how an adult is defined in contemporary Australia is significant as it provides an understanding of the guidance that emerging adults have for making decisions about their future, their actions, and the values that they hold as being important. In early 21st century Australia there are conflicting understandings of adulthood based on the radically different experiences of multiple generations (Dwyer et al. 2003, Dwyer et al. 2001, Wyn and Harris 2004). The respondents in this study were becoming adults in distinctly different circumstances to that of Generation X, their parents, and their grandparents, all of which contributed to their understanding of adulthood. The dominant model for sociological understandings of adulthood, using
markers which allow the measurement of a transition from adolescence to adulthood, was (largely) rejected by the respondents as being related or necessary for being considered an adult. Those aspects of the markers that held value for the respondents related to the individualistic criteria they nominated; for example, leaving home was closely linked to independence and taking personal responsibility.

The criteria that the respondents identified as being important to be considered an adult largely agree with the research in the emerging adulthood literature: financial independence, autonomy and taking responsibility for one’s actions. In addition, maturity was a common theme that arose in discussions with the respondents; a maturing of tastes, behaviour and attitudes is seen as a distinguishing feature between adolescence and emerging adults. Whether or not the respondents self-identified as an adult was largely dependent upon their personal experiences. Those respondents who did identify as an adult were able to provide definitive statements about what an adult is and why they qualify, providing examples that reflected these criteria. Those emerging adults who clearly stated they did not feel as if they were adults related this feeling back to their current living circumstances, living at home with their parent(s) meant they still considered themselves dependent, even when it was entirely by choice.

The central problem for the respondents and their choices of day-to-day activities was the time pressures that they endured due to work and study commitments, and their lack of resources. The majority of the social activities the respondents engaged in were
structured around work and/or study schedules, and often involved little cost. The choice of ‘play’ and ‘cultural’ activities was often influenced by how quickly and easily (i.e. cheaply) they could be engaged with, anything that required too much investment of time or money was often beyond the reach of the respondents’ means; this also limited the number of creative activities people engaged in, many of which were seen as requiring a substantial amount of time to do properly. The functional activities other than working and studying added to the time pressures of the respondents, the necessity of taking care of their responsibilities often superseded their desire to engage in more entertaining pursuits, but was also seen as being reflective of their move toward more adult behaviours. Similarly the aspirations of the respondents in the short and medium term often reflected their criteria for adulthood; many of the activities related to independent development and exploration, and required the respondents to take responsibility for their planning and financing.

The social relationships that were of primary importance also suffered from the time constraints placed upon the respondents. The respondents frequently expressed a desire to spend as much time with their friends and (usually) family as possible, reflected in the wide array of places, spaces and activities that the respondents discussed which had a significant social component, as well as a preference for ‘play’ activities involving other people. However those friendships that were no longer spatially contextualised had to be negotiated around the work and study schedules of the respondent and their friend, which could mean extended periods of time between
seeing each other. Likewise those who lived away from home were required to find time to spend with their families, a problem which was exacerbated when that involved several hours of travelling. The majority of time spent with others was in spaces such as a workplace or university, however there was no expectation that these social relationships would endure beyond the temporary engagement with those situations. The time constraints on the respondents mirror the burdens of many adults, however the loosely structured work and study schedules, and the in-between nature of their living circumstances (between the parental home and a stable household consisting of people who choose to live together) are patterns much more common to those in their late teens and early twenties.

**Relationship of results to the existing literature**

The findings of this research closely match the description of emerging adulthood and attest to its emergence in the course of the structural, social and cultural changes in Australian society over the past 40 years. The loosely structured work and study schedules of the respondents are a result of the widespread economic and structural changes in Australian society (and Western society in general), particularly the decrease in available full time unskilled work, the increase in casual and part time employment, and the demand for tertiary qualifications (Jeffrey and McDowell 2004, Walther 2006). The significant increases in housing prices and the cost of living have contributed to the need that many of the respondents had to work, as well as influencing the choice of living situations towards living with parents or in shared households, although the fact
that most Australians do not have to move great distances for study is a contributing factor (Kenyon and Koerner 2009, Klein 1990, Patiniotis and Holdsworth 2005).

The focus away from committed relationships towards other individualized priorities, such as studying, is the result of social changes which have lessened the emphasis on “traditional” relationships. The “individualization” of late modernity outlined by Giddens (1990, 1991), Beck (1992b, 2003) and Bauman (1991, 2007) creates a greater need for the respondents to be self sufficient and self reliant, as they are unable to rely upon the state for support. Among the consequences of late modernity are significant changes to social forms, including the ways in which social networks are created (Pescosolido and Rubin 2000). The civil rights movement of the 1970s resulted in a greater number of women in the workforce, and fewer women who were expected to be dependent upon a husband for economic support; the parity of experiences between the respondents of both genders reflects the similar trajectories that men and women take in their late teens and early twenties.

These structural and social shifts have altered many aspects of Australian culture related to adulthood and its surrounding social processes over the course of generations. The difficulty young people have in being able to start a career, or in buying a home has reduced their relevance as measures of adulthood to the respondents. The diminishing importance of Christian values, particularly those regarding sex before marriage and the institution of marriage, have resulted in many of the respondents seeing marriage as
being unrelated to becoming an adult, and for some ultimately unimportant as a part of
a committed relationship (Carroll et al. 2009b). The social and structural changes of late
modernity have impacted the cultural understanding of adulthood, reflected in the
criteria the respondents considered important as measures of adulthood, and the value
placed on establishing an independent household, despite the difficulties faced in
moving out of the parental home (Molgat 2007). Changing cultural values are linked to
generational change; this research found little evidence of generational cultural conflict.
The attitudes of most of the respondents’ parents reflected sensitivity to the difficulties
their children faced establishing themselves in their late teens and early twenties. In
particular this was shown in the willingness of many parents to allow their children to
remain at home while they studied and worked without undue pressure on the
respondents to move out.

The results of this research argue for significant changes to the sociological literature on
the transition(s) to adulthood. The research demonstrated that the markers used to
measure progress towards adulthood are increasingly seen as irrelevant to adult status.
More importantly this research demonstrated that working towards these markers is
not a significant part of this period of life, with few of these markers being immediate
goals for the respondents. The exception to this is finishing studies; those respondents
who were studying expected to finish their current studies within a relatively short
period. The understanding of adulthood implicit in the transitions model and the
markers it uses is not reflective of the respondents’ experiences or their values, suggesting that an alternative model is needed for future research.

The discourses around ‘social generations’ draw attention to the structural and social changes that influence the circumstances of the respondents, as well as possible differences between their cultural values relating to adulthood and those of earlier generations (Chisolm and Hurrelmann 1995, Smith 2005, Wyn et al. 2008, Wyn and White 2000, Wyn and Woodman 2006). What in the 1960s and 70s was seen as “rebellion” and in the 1980s and 90s was seen as “selfish slacking” (Arnett 2007d), is now seen with a peculiar mixture of positive and negative attributes. The consequences of spending years on personal development without attendant responsibilities has often been characterised as producing ‘spoilt’ and ‘self-indulgent’ young people with unrealistic expectations of what is possible (‘Gen Y can't afford to be 'job snobs'' July 26 2009, Ranke Sep 27 2012, Stokes Dec 26 2012), characterisations which have been equally often challenged for being inaccurate (‘Stereotype broken on Generation Y’ Feb 13 2011, Elsworth and Tin Mar 13 2012, Kemp Jul 30 2010). This thesis has shown that the loose set of descriptions associated with popular terms such as “Gen Y” or “Millennials” fail to provide a coherent or useful overview of the experiences of young people in Australia during their late teens and early twenties.

**Emerging adulthood**

The literature on emerging adulthood offered a framework for a thick description very
close to the experience and values of the respondents. The three criteria consistently nominated in studies into emerging adulthood as the most important for defining adult status are taking responsibility for one’s actions, autonomy and financial independence (Arias and Hernández 2007, Arnett 2001, 2003, 2004, Badger et al. 2006, Facio et al. 2007, Nelson and Chen 2007, Nelson and Barry 2005). In the Life-Patterns research program the life goals ranked highest (by a first cohort of 27 year olds in 2000 and a second cohort of 17 year olds in 2005) included “to have financial security”, “to develop my abilities to the fullest”, and “to care and provide for a family” (Smith et al. 2007, p. 6, Wyn et al. 2008, p. 25). Both sets of responses are about individual capabilities; the need for financial security and/or independence, taking responsibility for one’s actions can lead to being able to provide for a family, and the ability to make one’s own decisions is certainly related to the development of one’s abilities to the fullest. These responses closely match those given by the respondents of this research, whose understanding of adulthood and their own adult status was largely centred on the development of individual capacity for autonomous self-reliance.

Emerging adulthood is a social construction, as are adulthood, adolescence, youth and childhood, and specifically a product of late modern industrial society. While the respondents do not have the level of agency and self-determination that are suggested by the emerging adulthood literature and the individualization thesis, it does form part of the context in which young people develop towards adulthood (te Riele 2004, White and Wyn 1998, Wyn and White 2000). Few studies in emerging adulthood have
involved Australian respondents, or have been conducted within an Australian context. This study demonstrates that the values and experiences of the respondents are closely aligned with the characterisations that are provided by this body of literature, and that it provides a useful thick description that fleshes out the particulars of the current ‘social generation’ of young people.

The characterisation of emerging adulthood as a time of self-focus and of identity exploration is closely linked to the individualization thesis. The ‘choice biographies’ (Du Bois-Reymond 1998) and ‘reflexive project of the self’ (Giddens 1991) are life long endeavours, and constrained by gender, class and cultural considerations (Bynner 2005, Côté and Bynner 2008, Skribis et al. 2012, White and Wyn 2013). The respondents activities and relationships reflected this sense of self-focus and identity exploration, including many activities related to the development of a sense of self (particularly study), and with romantic relationships being relegated to a position less important than individual pursuits.

The characterisation of the period of emerging adulthood as a time of ‘instability’ and of ‘possibilities’ reflects the social and structural changes in Australian society. In the emerging adulthood literature ‘possibilities’ usually refers to the range of personal relationships that are socially acceptable (Arnett 2004, Carroll et al. 2007, Lanz and Tagliabue 2007), and instability often refers to the changing living circumstances of the young, who are much more likely to move houses on a regular basis. The idea of
emerging adulthood being a period of ‘possibilities’ is certainly congruent with the individualization thesis, the necessity for individuals to make their own choices rather than relying upon the state and traditional norms for guidance, as well as the opportunities afforded for and by education and travel can convey the impression that anything is possible\textsuperscript{22}. The working conditions for the respondents involved employment that was low paid and lacked security, making the time of interview a period of instability, particularly in times of hardship (Berzin and De Marco 2010, Pollock 1997). This was compounded by the respondents having little in the way of savings, time or assets (Cook 2006a, van der Poel 2006), and the dismantling of the social welfare state has meant the respondents were especially vulnerable to significant downturns in the economy, even when they came from backgrounds of privilege.

Emerging adulthood is characterised as a time of being “in-between” adolescence and adulthood, and the respondents’ choice of activities and their relationships reflects that state in numerous ways. The significant role that the ‘functional’ activities play in all of the respondents’ experiences demonstrates their focus on accepting responsibility for their own financial burdens, their domestic situations, and their physical and mental health. These were developed differently for each respondent, often related to their living situations; those living at home acknowledged that their financial and domestic responsibilities were lightened by their parents, and physical health was not (yet) a

\textsuperscript{22} Globalization is an important consideration in making emerging adulthood a time of possibilities, the opportunities afforded by international travel in particular. However the issues of globalization are beyond the scope of this thesis.
priority for many of the respondents. The respondents were “in-between” their family of origin and their family of choice. They had begun the process of distancing themselves from their family of origin as they established their own independent households, and laying the groundwork for their family of choice through dating, casual and serious relationships.

Implications

The expectations of what it means to be an adult have changed, from the perspective of emerging adults, their parents, and society as a whole. Societal and media views still focus on the traditional markers, defining adulthood principally through the transition markers of marriage, parenthood, careers and leaving home; however these are no longer considered necessary achievements in order to be considered an adult by the majority of young people approaching adulthood. The individualistic criteria that emerging adults identify as necessary for adulthood are achievable without reaching any of the markers, as is recognition as an adult (one can live at home and be unmarried yet still financially independent, responsible and autonomous). This makes the period of emerging adulthood a time of ‘feeling in-between’, where they recognise that they are distinct from adolescents, but do not feel that they are fulfilling the ill-defined role of adult (Arnett 2004).

The implications of this research are that the areas that youth policy should be focusing on are around financial independence and autonomy. It should facilitate the
explorations of emerging adulthood rather than focusing on apparently failed ‘transitions’. Emerging adults are not just ‘in-between’ adolescence and adulthood, the place they occupy in society puts them in between the mainstream values of contemporary Australian society and those that outright reject the cultural values of the majority. The policies of the State identify the vulnerabilities of young people in order to guide them into adopting mainstream values and an appropriate lifestyle (Catalano et al. 2004, Walther 2006, White and Wyn 2013, Wyn 2009). Where possible these policies should be targeted towards helping young people attain financial independence, and find suitable living arrangements that allow them autonomy.

On a broader scale this research suggests that there is scope for public debate regarding the nature of adulthood and the period of life after adolescence in contemporary Australian society. The language of the moral panics of the 50s and 60s, the negative aspects of the discourses on youth and Generation X (Arnett 2000b, Faucher 2009, Klein 1990), and the popular characterisation of “Generation Y” as selfish, apathetic slackers are widespread (Arnett 2007d), affecting how young people are treated by their peers, their parents, the media, their employers and the state, as well as informing their own sense of self during this period. The positive aspects of this period of life such as the freedom from responsibility, the carefree attitude, the ‘boundless’ opportunities and the sense of being ‘other’ from society, are used to market to the cohort of young people. The results of this study are significant as they highlight the lack of accurate descriptions of the experiences of the current social generation of emerging adults.
Popular depictions of “Gen Y” or the “Millennials” are chaotic, and ill formed. The sociological models focusing on young people in the years directly after adolescence are not framed in terms that hold significance for the cohort being discussed\(^{23}\). The broader theoretical discussions of the conditions of late modernity hold some value, but have a noticeable tendency to be Euro-centric, to inflate the dangers of modern life for the individual, and to be unable to account for empirical studies into the reflexive transformation of institutions such as religion and race. However it is useful when considering the concept of ‘adulthood’ as a traditional institution undergoing reflexive change in modern societies.

\(^{23}\) Arguably the psychological models focusing on this period of life, particularly those using psychosocial developmental models, undervalue the importance of the role that structural and cultural factors play. This is an important discussion, but has not been included in this thesis as the Erikson model has not been used.
Reflections

This research project initially set out to explore the lives of the majority of ‘youth’ in Australia that aren’t regularly the subject of sociological inquiry, with particular focus on their day-to-day lives and those relationships with family and friends that they considered significant. In addition the interplay between these two aspects of young people’s experiences was an area of considerable interest, with a novel approach to the capture and analysis of multiplex network relationships developed and employed. The approach was largely inductive, the phenomenological method created used open-ended questions to allow the respondents to narrate their experiences in as full and natural a way as is possible in the context of a single in-depth interview. The rationale for the project was simply that this was a novel approach to the sociological study of youth in Australia, which has been largely dominated by explorations of marginalised and ‘at-risk’ youth in the context of an increasingly individualised society.

Though the social network data collected did not end up being discussed in this thesis, the qualitative discussions that it stimulated were useful for providing insights into numerous aspects of this research. The structured collection of information on the significant members of the respondents’ personal communities provided considerable detail about the history and development of these relationships. Similarly the structured collection of data on the respondents’ activities, using a variant of social network techniques, provided more detailed exploration of outwardly ordinary activities, and lead to a more nuanced analysis of the ways in which the respondents organised
their everyday lives. Finally, the linking of activities and respondents (individually and in groups), and the subsequent network maps of their personal community that were produced, allowed for the respondents to reflect on the structures of their personal communities in unusual depth. Although the network data was not analysed in this thesis, these discussions provided considerable insight into the significance of the various relationships that would not have been apparent otherwise.

In the course of conducting the research it became apparent that an important issue lay at the core of these discussions with young people; the increasing individualisation that broadened the opportunities for self-determination in both choice of time use and in the development of social relations had also affected the conceptualisation of adulthood for the respondents. It became apparent that the respondents had considerable scope to decide for themselves how they defined adulthood, how they interpreted the social and cultural markers relating to notions of adulthood in Australian society, and most significantly how they judged their own progress towards achieving status as an adult. This realisation forced a substantial reconsideration of the sociological literature being used, as the transitions literature proved inadequate to explain these changes, and in many ways directly contradicted the opinions and experiences of the respondents.

The literature on ‘social generations’ (Wyn et al. 2008, Wyn and Woodman 2006) offered a sociological perspective on young people in the 21st century, however the
nascent study of ‘emerging adulthood’ (Arnett 2000a, 2004, Arnett et al. 2011b) provided a discussion much closer to that of the experiences described by the respondents. Emerging adulthood is a part of the psychology, drawing upon the developmental model originating with the work of Erikson (1951, 1959, 1968). In order to make the emerging adulthood framework compatible with the sociological traditions underpinning this thesis it has been repositioned as a ‘thick description’ (Geertz 1973) of the current social generation, and the research questions were expanded to include the theoretical concerns suggested by this body of literature. The interview method was revised to include a discussion on how the respondents conceived of their own status as an adult, and their understanding of adulthood in general.

The results presented in this thesis argue that the emerging adulthood literature offers a useful and accurate portrayal of the individualistic nature of the period between 18 and the mid to late twenties for the respondents in this study. The respondents’ conceptions of adulthood were much more in line with the individual criteria found in the surveys of emerging adulthood than with the markers used by transitions studies, whether the respondent considered themselves to be an adult or not. The structural conditions for the current social generation precluded the attainment of most of the markers within a timely manner after turning eighteen, and changing social and cultural values have lessened the markers importance as measures of adulthood, and in some cases as important goals along the life course. The day-to-day activities of the respondents and their various relationships were also characteristic of emerging
adulthood, the respondents had considerable freedom in their choice of leisure and recreation activities and their relationships were continued largely through conscious agency. However these activities and relationships were also subject to the structural constraints of the respondents’ economic circumstances, the demands of studying and working often served to severely limit the respondents’ choice in how they used their time and who they spent it with.

Narratives that emerge from the interviews demonstrated the interplay between the social, structural and cultural factors that emerging adults in Australia have to navigate. Olivia, Sharon and Victor’s stories illustrate the common conditions of emerging adulthood despite their different ways of dealing with them. Olivia was 20 years old at the time of interview, and was one of the few respondents to have always had a very clear idea of her intended career trajectory. Olivia had moved interstate to study speech pathology at UQ, and had lived on campus for her first year of study. Olivia’s experiences in that first year had a strong formative impact on her self-identification as an adult. Olivia had had to get a job in order to support herself while she studied, as her parents could not afford to subsidise her living and the government support was insufficient for her needs. Olivia linked the feeling of being an adult with experiences such as food shopping and paying for her dental work, experiences which made her realise that she was both capable of looking after herself and required to look after herself. Olivia viewed these experiences as setting her apart from many of the people
she lived with on campus, who did not have to work, look after themselves, nor feel that it was desirable to do so at this point in their lives.

Sharon’s experiences were quite dissimilar to Olivia, but reflected many of the same values and associations with notions of adulthood. At 22 Sharon was on to her fourth degree, with plans to move to a fifth in the near future. Sharon had not had a clear idea of what she wanted to study coming out of high school, and had chosen engineering because she was “great at science and maths and stuff”. However, when Sharon started studying she discovered engineering was all maths and science, so she transferred to an arts degree, then to a psychology/criminology degree, and was currently in an economics/commerce degree. Sharon did not want to end up a business manager so was planning on transferring to a behavioural economics degree, but was also aware that there were few jobs available in that specific field. Sharon had lived in Canada on study exchange for more than six months, during which she lived independently and looked after herself. However she currently lived with her parents, and this impacted on her self-identification as an adult. Sharon’s parents were well set up to support her while she studied, they lived near campus, Sharon had a good relationship with them and they frequently went away, leaving her alone in the apartment. Sharon knew that she could be independent and self sufficient, but because her current lifestyle didn’t require her to live like an adult, and because she did not have a definite idea about a future career path, she did not identify completely as an adult.
Victor was 23 years old, and at the time of interview had difficulty deciding whether he was an adult or not. Victor had started a dual economics/arts degree after high school, but had only completed the arts degree portion. When he graduated two years previously Victor had believed that he would easily find a graduate job with a $50k annual salary. Victor traced feelings of being an adult for the first time with his failure to find work using his arts degree, and having to confront the reality of his situation. That experience marked a change in the way he related to his parents, Victor started to listen to them more, and relied more on their advice and knowledge. More recently Victor was working part time at a call centre while studying for a diploma in education. He had moved out of home for the first time two months beforehand, but was only five minutes travel from his parents’, whom he regularly visited and relied upon for support. Victor was contemplating returning home in the near future, not because he was finding it difficult to look after himself, but because the requirements of his degree entailed an extended period of practical assessment during which he would not be able to work.

The narratives of these three respondents, like the narratives of all the other respondents, combined many disparate elements of their experiences since turning 18 into an understanding of what it means to be adult in contemporary Australian society. The 21 respondents received different levels of support from their family, both financially and emotionally, which affected how long they lived at home, how much they worked to support themselves, how much they worked while they studied, and how much effort they made to keep in regular contact. The respondents had different
visions of their future; some had very clear ideas of what their future study to work
paths would look like, most had tried at least one course of study that proved unsuitable,
and many of the older respondents had completed a course of study and found their
subsequent job prospects unrewarding. Relationships changed considerably, formerly
close friendships evaporated when circumstances changed, new friendships were
formed around new workplaces, living and study environments, and the respondents
had to find ways to make time for those people they considered most important. None
of the respondents felt that any one of these elements was linked to their self-
identification as an adult. Rather it was the recognition that all of these elements are a
part of adulthood, and the feeling as if they could, and were, handling these elements
successfully that was strongly linked to self-identifying as an adult.

**Future research**

This project gave the respondents the opportunity to define their understanding of
adulthood in their own terms, rather than through selecting from predefined choices on
a survey. The subsequent discussion was often fruitful but limited by necessity, and
could benefit from a closer examination, in particular through focusing on those criteria
that are excluded as meaningful measures of adulthood. Several respondents were able
to link their self-identification as an adult (or as being in between adolescence and
adulthood) to specific experiences in their lives, or to their expected attainment of
specific life goals. The respondents were asked to relate their experiences of being
treated as an adult (or not) by their peers and family during the course of the interviews.
Several of the respondents were able to relate specific experiences, which were not included in the thesis due to constraints of space. Time was devoted in the interviews to asking the respondents about their understanding of attitudes towards younger people in their situation from broader society and as they are portrayed in popular media. However this proved a difficult topic to address in the setting of the interviews, possibly being too large a shift away from the central questioning. Further exploration of these questions will allow for a broader understanding of the social and cultural factors surrounding the conception of adulthood in contemporary Australian society.

A considerable amount of social network data was collected on the relationships between the respondents and the significant members of their personal communities, and the ways in which they are formed around their day-to-day activities. The data provides a rich description of the multiplex nature of relationships, particularly regarding the relationship between feelings of closeness and shared engagement with the broader range of activities engaged in by the respondents. The method developed is a novel contribution to the field of social network research, and the analysis of the data collected requires a further development in the techniques used in the field. Though this data was a substantial part of the interviews, and was used to prompt qualitative discussions on many aspects of the respondents' community, there was not enough room within this thesis to address it fully, and will have to be the subject of future publications.
There were a number of issues that merit further research, but which were excluded from this study due to limitations in sample size and the restrictions involved in PhD research. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender respondents were not purposefully excluded from this research, but sexuality and gender identity did not form one of the foci of this research and such issues did not get discussed. Australian society has progressed considerably towards accepting the LGBT community, yet their experiences during emerging adulthood should be an area of future research. The sample size was too small to allow for a substantial exploration of gender issues, and the preferential selection of Australian born participants excluded the possibility of exploring issues related to ethnicity and race, yet these are both extremely important areas that need to be addressed by a larger study. While emerging adulthood is overwhelmingly a middle class experience, based on both cultural and economic positions, it is well worth expanding the interrogation of how adulthood is conceptualised to the broader population, including the working classes and older generations.

One of the more curious findings of this research was the respondents’ reported lack of involvement with their siblings; it is unclear whether this was due to a cultural shift in family interactions or is a feature of the period of emerging adulthood. The dynamics of the relationships reported by the respondents suggests considerable and unpredictable change in short periods of time, which are impossible to capture within the space of a single interview. At one point during the research the idea of revisiting the respondents in order to get longitudinal data on the network dynamics was discussed, and eventually rejected due to the existing scope of the project. Some information was gleaned by
comparing older respondents with those who had just recently left high school, and there were distinct differences, but not enough data to form a clear picture of how emerging adulthoods might evolve over time. An understanding of how the networks change would be a valuable contribution towards understanding the progression from emerging adulthood to more stable forms of adulthood.

Lastly, the theoretical positioning of emerging adulthood as a ‘thick description’ of Australia’s current generation of young people between the ages of 18 and 30 is a significant original contribution to the sociological study of young people. However, it has a limited development within the thesis, arising as it has after identifying issues with the available literature on young people in Australia, rather than being the focus of a theoretical work in its own right. The underlying theoretical basis of the emerging adulthood literature is placed in psychology, specifically the model of childhood development stemming from the work of Erikson (1951, 1959, 1968), work which has been frequently challenged by sociologists and may result in a number of objections to its use in sociological research. Similarly the idea of ‘social generations’ is one that has been challenged by psychologists, including Arnett (Arnett and Schwab 2012). The utility of this theoretical positioning is evidenced by this thesis, but there is still a substantial amount of theoretical work to be done for this particular framework to be accepted by either sociologists or psychologists.
Appendix A – Semi Structured Interview Method

Respondent’s Background:
How old are you?
Where were you born?
Where were your parents born?
How many hours of sleep a day do you average?
Do you study at university or TAFE?
  ♦ What do you study?
  ♦ Why did you choose that particular course/degree?
  ♦ How many hours a week do you spend on uni work?
What kind of work are you employed in at the moment?
What does the work involve? What happens on a normal day?
How many hours a week do you work on average? Do you have a set roster?
Do you enjoy the work? Is it something that you see yourself doing in five years?
Do you feel like an adult?
  • When do you think you will feel like an adult?
What do you think an adult is? What’s important to be considered an adult?
  • How would you describe what an adult is to a small child?
  • What do you think your parents would consider important to be considered an adult?
  • Do you think you’ve achieved these criteria?
  • Do you think it’s necessary to own a house? Get married? Have kids?
  • What do you think the media consider an adult to be? What about the average Australian?
  • Do any of your friends have a different idea of what it means to be an adult?

Activity Generator:
What do you do in your breaks at work or at uni?
What do you like to do when you have finished work or uni/TAFE for the day?
What do you like to do on your days off?
How do you relax?
What kinds of things would you plan to do for your holidays or weekends?
Are you playing any sports at the moment?
Do you belong to any clubs or organizations?
Do you have any hobbies that you haven’t mentioned already?
What kinds of things do you do with your friends or family that you haven’t already mentioned?

Additional questions to be asked if not already mentioned:
Do you listen to music regularly?
   ◆ Is there a particular genre or band that you prefer?
Do you watch television regularly?
   ◆ What kinds of programs do you prefer?
   ◆ Is there a particular show that you make sure to watch when it’s on?
Do you watch movies regularly?
   ◆ Do you watch movies on DVD, TV or at the cinemas?
Do you watch sport regularly?
   ◆ Which sports do you watch?
   ◆ Do you have a particular team that you support?
   ◆ Do you attend the games regularly, or do you just watch on TV?
Do you want to travel?
**For each nominated activity:**
On a scale of 1 to 10 how important is this activity to you?
What does this activity involve?
How often do you do this activity?

**Name Generator:**
Who are the people closest to you?
Who are the family members and relatives that you talk to regularly?
Are there other people that you make an effort to meet with?
Is there anyone you work with whom you consider to be a friend?
Who would you definitely invite to a party or barbecue at your home?
Do you keep in contact with any friends interstate or overseas?

Is there anyone you haven’t mentioned with whom you might engage in one of the activities you identified earlier?

**For Each Person:**  
Can you tell me a little about this person?  
What is your relationship with them?  
How did you meet?  
How old are they?  
What do they do for a living?

On a scale of 0 to 3, how close would you say you are with this person? A 3 would be intimately close to them, a 2 would be you know them pretty well, a 1 would be friendly but don’t know a lot about them, and a 0 would be they are closer to an acquaintance than a friend.

**For Each Activity and Person:**  
How often do you engage or talk about [activity] with [alter]? A 0 would be never, a 1 would be once every six months, a 2 would be up to once a month, a 3 would be several times a month, a 4 would be once a week, and a 5 would be at least twice a week.

Is there a group of people you would do or talk about [activity] with from the people you have mentioned here?

Do you have any questions or comments about the interview?  
Was there anything in particular you would have liked to talk about more, or that you thought was especially interesting?
### Appendix B - Respondent Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Full-time</th>
<th>Area of study</th>
<th>Currently relationship status</th>
<th>Relationship status</th>
<th>Living situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wendy</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Relay Officer</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Business, majoring in Accounting</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Long-term</td>
<td>At Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ryan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Medical Science</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>At Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phoebe</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Speech Pathology</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>At Home - sharing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliva</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Pizza Hut Call Centre</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>History (completed)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>At Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Psychology (completed)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>At Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alex</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Business, majoring in Medicine</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>At Home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alan</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Insurance Specialist</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Psychology (completed)</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>At Home</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The table continues with similar entries for other respondents.
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