The Spirit of Generation Y
Second Progress Report

Varieties of Spirituality amongst Australian Youth
A Qualitative Exploration

by
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Associate Professor Ruth Webber (Australian Catholic University)
Dr Andrew Singleton (Monash University)

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Project Website

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Executive Summary

The Spirit of Generation Y project is a large-scale, industry-sponsored, collaborative study investigating the varieties of spirituality among Australian young people. The project has three year-long phases; the first and third phases comprise lengthy, face-to-face interviews, while the second phase is a survey of a large, nationally representative sample. This report presents an analysis of the first phase interviews. The survey will be the subject of the next report.

The phase one interviews were designed to investigate:

- The patterns and ‘types’ of spirituality in Generation Y;
- Possible influences shaping these forms of spirituality;
- The consequences of these forms of spirituality for the way in which members of this generation participate in society.

For our purposes, spirituality is defined as a conscious way of life based on a transcendent referent. We define ‘transcendence’ broadly: any worldview qualifies as a ‘spirituality’ – even secular worldviews which themselves may well repudiate all notions of ‘spirit’, and ‘spiritual’.

Interviews were conducted with 71 young people aged 12-29; we spoke with secondary school students, university students, young workers and the unemployed. Our research method had several distinctive features: a preference for unobtrusive measures of spirituality, an emphasis on personal narratives and the use of evocative techniques.

Key Findings

- Among our informants, we encountered three types of worldview: Traditional (TRAD), Humanistic (HUM) and New Age (NEW). Spirituality involves both a worldview and an ethos. We found it useful to distinguish three ‘levels’ of ethos, which we coded as high (HI), medium (MED), and low (LO), referring to the extent, or the degree of intensity or commitment, with which the worldview is expressed in values and carried into practice. Quest (QST) is a variant of LO – a transitional form in the teenage years.

- In our sample, we observed the following spirituality types: TRAD/HI (23 informants); TRAD/MED (5); TRAD/LO (8); TRAD/QST (13); HUM/HI (7); HUM/MED (3); HUM/LO (1). The spirituality of nine of our informants was judged to be still embryonic (EMB); only two manifested the New Age type.

- The most common type of spirituality among teenagers was TRAD/QST. QST involves a revision of religious/spiritual practices and commitments, sometimes also of beliefs, even of identification. Some young people in this group present as confused, but still basically committed to their faith; while others seem close to angry secularist rejection of all religious belief, practice and identification.

- Growing up religious does make a difference. If religion is part of one’s life as one grows up, some of its effects remain even if many beliefs and practices are later abandoned.

- Consumers in the spiritual marketplace? We did not find, in our sample, as many New Age or Eclectic types as we had expected on the basis of recent theorising on spirituality. But we hesitate to conclude that this line of thinking is unfounded, or does not apply in Australia.
- **Acquiring spirituality.** Our interviews tend to confirm ‘social learning theory’, the idea that young people learn attitudes and behaviour from what significant others such as parents, teachers and peers, model and reinforce for them. Broader cultural factors independent of both family or school – a societal emphasis on individualism and secularity – also exert some influence, especially on TRAD/QST and HUM spirituality types.

- **Civic orientation.** In order to understand the ways in which young people participate in society, a classification schema was developed, describing a person’s level of ‘civic orientation’ (a combination of civic knowledge, capacities, attitudes and participation). In our sample, we observed the following types of civic orientation: High (19), Medium (20), Low: apathetic (26), Low: anti-social (3). (Information was available to classify 68 cases.)

- **Spirituality and civic orientation.** In our study spirituality did not appear to be strongly linked with a particular civic orientation. However, among the nineteen respondents who were rated as having high civic orientation, six were TRAD/HI and five HUM/HI. We also found a connection between informants’ high civic orientation and their acceptance of traditional Christian values – but not necessarily the beliefs.
1. Introduction

Scope of this Report

The Spirit of Generation Y project is designed to take place in three year-long phases, over the period July 2003 – June 2006. The first and third phases comprise lengthy, face-to-face interviews (about 70 each in years 1 and 3) designed to explore varieties of spirituality in depth; whereas the second phase is a survey of a large, nationally representative sample to explore the spirituality of young Australians belonging to ‘Generation Y’ in such a way that the findings could be generalised to the Australian population in this age range.

After completion of a Pilot study, Phase 1 of the main project commenced in July, 2003. The task of this phase was to conduct in-depth interviews with about 70 young people.

Interviewing commenced in November, 2003 and continued through mid-2004; the transcriptions were completed later in the year. Analysis of the interviews commenced when the first transcripts were received in February 2004, and continued into early 2005, during the preparation of the questionnaire for the national sample survey.1

The first Progress Report from the project presented five detailed case studies from the Phase I interviews.2 This second Progress Report contains our reflections on a comprehensive analysis of the whole set of interviews.3 It is designed to be read independently, without presupposing that the reader is familiar with the first.

The remainder of this Introduction briefly describes the context of theory and previous research in which the project is set.

The next chapter discusses the research method of phase I of the project – the first set of extended interviews. The three chapters then following correspond to the aims of the project:

- Describing the patterns of spirituality in Generation Y;
- Exploring possible influences shaping these forms of spirituality;
- Examining the consequences of these forms of spirituality for the way in which members of this generation participate in society.

Each of these chapters ends with a statement of conclusions on the aspect of the topic with which that chapter has dealt.

While the three authors collaborated in planning, thinking through and revising the whole report, primary responsibility for writing the various sections was divided as follows: Chapters 1-3 were written by Michael Mason, Chapter 4 by Andrew Singleton, and Chapter 5 by Ruth Webber.

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1 The survey is the main task of Phase 2 in the project’s second year. Fieldwork took place in February and March, 2005, and the data have just been delivered to the research team. The findings of the survey will be presented in our next report (the third report of the Spirit of Generation Y Project).
2 A copy of this report can be downloaded from the project website at: http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/research/ccls/spir/spir.htm.
3 We do not address here the responses of informants on the topics of religious education, school chaplains and religious services in schools, since we are not satisfied that the information from the interviews alone is sufficiently detailed or representative. We will seek to fill out these topics further in the national survey and the Phase 3 interviews, and they will be reported on at a later stage.
Perspectives on Spirituality

A review of the relevant literature will be included in the project’s final report. However it seems appropriate at this point to highlight some major themes emerging from theory and previous research which served to orient us in our approach to the design, implementation and analysis of the first interview phase of the project.

We were already tuned-in to the situation of religion in Australia because of our personal interests and our own previous research. We were well aware of the low and declining levels of participation in mainstream Australian denominations on the part of older teenagers and young adults.

As we began to read more intensively for this project, a strong early impression was made by the vast quantity of literature on ‘spirituality’: as of May, 2005, there are over 28 million internet references to ‘spirituality’ indexed in Google; and 31,061 current books on Amazon.com with ‘spirituality’ as a keyword.


 Nonetheless, amid a tidal wave of new writing, some key themes expounded by established scholars still claimed a hearing. In his Growing Up Religious (1999), Robert Wuthnow used a US national survey, supplemented by lengthy interviews inquiring into people’s ‘journeys of faith’, to build a strong case for the proposition that ‘growing up religious’ makes an enduring difference to a person’s outlook and values throughout adulthood, even if the faith of childhood is later laid aside (Wuthnow 1999). We found this thesis persuasive, and it influenced our shaping of the interview schedule, and later analysis of the data, so as to discover as much as possible about our informants’ religious identification, beliefs and practices while growing up, and those of their families.

Many authors explored the idea of the late modern or ‘postmodern’ world as a ‘spiritual marketplace’ in which consumers could ‘mix and match’ ‘unbundled’ components of spirituality from a very wide range of sources, rather than having to ‘buy’ one complete ‘package’. Among those most often cited were Wade Clark Roof whose Spiritual Marketplace (1999) compared the vitality and growth of New Age forms of religion to the mainstream traditional forms whose decline he had been tracing for several decades. Robert Wuthnow’s After Heaven (1998), made an influential contribution to this debate also, strongly stressing that for today’s young people, spirituality is a ‘journey’ rather than a home, a place where one settles. The metaphor suggested the fragmentary, temporary, experimental character of the spiritual ‘shelters’ constructed by today’s youth on their journeys. There seemed such a wide consensus on this issue in works from many other scholars, that we began to expect that New Age and ‘eclectic’ forms of spirituality might well be the dominant types we would encounter.

Although traditional religions propose ideal models in which beliefs and practices are harmoniously integrated, it has long been a commonplace of sociology of religion that people who do not attend religious services or identify with a religious institution or community may nonetheless maintain other religious practices, or affirm religious beliefs and values. Grace Davie (1994) had pointed to the large scale of what she called

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1 We use ‘late modern’ when referring to the contemporary situation, which others describe as ‘postmodern’, because we do not subscribe to the thesis that there is a radical discontinuity between the contemporary situation and modernity.
'belief without belonging' in contemporary Europe, where the last fifty years have seen steep declines in regular participation in religious services, yet an apparent contrasting maintenance of religious beliefs. This reminder that religious beliefs and practices often seem to come and go independently of each other alerted us to the need to gather all the fragments we could find of a person’s religious/spiritual life, rather than rely on one or two markers for religiosity. 

At the same time, a critical perspective seems warranted: a residual belief in God (for example) if it is unsupported by other beliefs or by identification with a religious community, and is not expressed in values and practices, is so far from what is meant by ‘belief’ or ‘religious faith’ in the strong sense, that it is debatable whether it is meaningful to describe it as a religious belief at all; it would probably be better to describe such ‘beliefs’ as inconsequential opinions on matters religious. In this light, the ‘belief without belonging’ phenomenon largely evaporates. It is not impossible in individual cases, but may not be very widespread at all. The contemporary situation may be much better comprehended in an adage attributed to an outstanding sociologist of religion of an earlier generation: ‘Utinus Christianus, nullus Christianus.’

As long ago as 1967, phenomenological theorist Thomas Luckmann, in a prescient and influential work, The Invisible Religion, proposed the provocative thesis that Western Christianity, in its institutionally specialised form of ‘church-oriented religiosity’, had lost its capacity to furnish the ‘sacred cosmos’, or hierarchy of symbols of ultimate significance, in the worldviews of modern societies, and that the effectively dominant contemporary ‘religion’, (called ‘invisible’ because it did not take the specialised institutional form of a ‘church’ or religious community), was confined to the ‘private sphere’ of personal and family life, and was centred around the values of personal autonomy, self-development and self-realisation.

Luckmann’s paradigm appealed to many because it offered a fundamental theoretical approach to the situation of religion in the modern world, and disclosed the role played by social-structural changes in opening the way for constellations of ideas and values such as ‘individualism’. In 2003, the European journal of sociology of religion Social Compass devoted a special issue entitled ‘Invisible Religion in Europe’ to an exploration of the applicability of Luckmann’s thesis in the late modern period (Knoblauch 2003). In some respects, religious life in Australia has more in common with that of Europe than with that of the United States; in particular, the decline in participation by younger people in mainstream religion mirrors rather the European pattern of secularisation than the American pattern of continuing vitality. Luckmann’s approach appears to have the potential to explain some important aspects of our situation.

Last in order, but high in significance among related research which has contributed to the orientation of the Spirit of Generation Y project is the National Study of Youth and
Religion (NSYR), a US study which began some years before our project and which has been an important resource. We found a great deal of common ground between our own project and this immediate forerunner in goals, methods and resources: ‘Youth’ was defined in the NSYR as teenagers aged 13-17, mirroring our interest in the spirituality of younger teenagers not normally included in social surveys of religion. As well as a telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of teenagers and parents, lengthy face-to-face interviews were conducted all over the USA. Working papers and research instruments were made available on the project’s website, so that we were able to consult these examples in the construction of our survey questionnaire. There is little similarity between the interview schedules used for the longer qualitative interviews in the two projects, but we attempted to replicate some of the NSYR survey measures.

The major publication from the NSYR has just appeared (Smith 2005), and provides a very useful reference point against which to compare and contrast our own findings.

Principal Investigator in the NSYR is Professor Christian Smith of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, who has established a high reputation as both a researcher and a theorist (Smith 2003a, 2003c). Progress reports on the NSYR have been presented at annual meetings of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) which have been attended by members of our research team, and Professor Smith has invited us to join forces with the NSYR research team to present, at the 2006 meeting of the SSSR, one or more joint sessions comparing the methods and findings of the two projects. We have accepted the invitation.

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9 http://www.youthandreligion.org/
2. Research Method

The Purpose of Qualitative Research, and Interpretation of its Findings

Our 71 interviews are drawn from what is obviously a very small and unrepresentative sample of the population of ‘Generation Y’ teenagers and young people. Because of this lack of representativeness, the findings of qualitative research cannot be ‘generalised’ – we cannot say that, since 73% of the sample showed ‘traditional’ patterns of spirituality, something like this percentage of Australians in the Generation Y age-group will exhibit these patterns.

Findings generalisable to the population require a large-scale, nationally representative sample. Surveys on this scale are very expensive, and so are limited in what they can explore. To enable the formulation of well-targeted survey questions, it has long been a standard part of survey research method (perhaps more honoured in the breach than the observance) to precede the survey with a smaller-scale, qualitative investigation, to explore in some depth the phenomena to be investigated, in a limited number of cases.

Qualitative research has significant advantages compared with large-scale, quantitative, generalisable surveys: it can deal with its smaller number of cases at much greater depth. It allows us to mine the levels beneath the surface which surveys can only map in a more superficial manner. Using fewer cases, each can be explored more thoroughly. A range of techniques is available: interviewing informants face-to-face and at length, employing a looser structure which leaves the interviewer free to follow up leads arising in the interview; making field observations of the informants in their natural settings, exploring their family and social networks, etc.

The interview sample is thus quite adequate for its intended purpose, which is not to enable quantitative conclusions to be drawn about the population, but to explore in detail a variety of forms of spirituality found among young Australians. The interviews give us an account of these forms of spirituality which is qualitatively far richer than anything obtainable from survey research.

Our project utilised extended interviews, supplemented by observations made by the interviewer of the subject and the setting. All of the interviews were face-to-face; many of them in a secondary school setting; all were transcribed verbatim from audio tapes or digital recording devices.

The interviews took between 30 minutes and an hour to conduct. A better measure of the amount of content is the approximate number of words spoken by the person being interviewed, which varied from 620 to 10,500. As might be expected, younger informants were less articulate, with some notable exceptions. The transcripts of the more extensive interviews ran to sixteen pages or more of single-spaced type.

This report describes the main themes that emerged from our interviews – patterns of spirituality, and their relationship with characteristics of the participants. Often, we have allowed the participants to speak for themselves, quoting directly from the interview transcripts. All names mentioned in quotations from interviews are pseudonyms; some

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10 ‘Generation Y’ refers to the cohort born between 1976 and 1990 and follows ‘Generation X’ (1961-1975) and the ‘Baby Boomers’ (1946-1960). The boundaries of these ‘generations’ are debated; the terms are better thought of as heuristic devices, useful markers for identifying very real differences between age cohorts (Rosen 2001; Vromen 2003). The youngest members of Generation Y were aged 13 when we began interviewing in 2003, and the oldest will be aged 29 at the end of this year, 2005.
other potentially identifying details have been changed. The interviewer’s words are in italics.\textsuperscript{11}

We believe that these descriptions are of interest and value in themselves for illuminating the topic of spirituality; but we would stress that they still represent only a very preliminary phase of our investigation. Recall that the primary purpose of this set of interviews was to guide the formulation of the topics and questions for the survey. For this purpose, the interviews proved invaluable. Some issues might not have occurred to us at all, had we not been alerted to them by our interview data. As a result, the team gained a much sharper focus on the issues that were more important to explore in the survey, on the questions to be asked, and how they could best be framed.

We were forced to question all the assumptions we had derived from previous theory and research, and to revise many of them. The questions asked in the survey are much better informed and likely to be relevant than if they had been based on the very assumptions that we have been compelled so often to revise! The interview data have enabled us to arrive at a (tentative) set of types of spirituality, and to begin to understand the very complex patterns among the different aspects of spirituality and the variation of these patterns across life-stages.

As we prepare to analyse and report on the survey, we have these live individual voices, heard in the interviews, echoing still in our minds; they serve to flesh out the quantitative survey data. Our readers, we believe, will also find listening to the voices of our informants in this report a good preparation for understanding the next report on the national survey.

Completing the cycle, we will return in the third phase of the project, 2005/6, to another round of interviews – some of them with the original informants after two or more years have elapsed – some with people contacted during the survey. This final stage will enable us to pursue issues that require further elucidation, and consolidate our understanding of changes occurring over time, as our teenagers move towards young adulthood, and the ‘emerging adults’ into adulthood proper.

The Sample

\textit{Target sample.} The sample was designed to include a diverse range of young people, including private and public school students, tertiary students, young workers, the unemployed and people from both high and low socio-economic backgrounds. We sought to have equal numbers of male and female informants, from an appropriate mix of rural and urban locations. The sampling was strategic: that is, we sought out people from each of these groups to get a sense of the types of spiritualities one might find among them.

\textit{Achieved sample.} In the core project, a total of 73 interviews\textsuperscript{12} were conducted with young people aged 12–29. Approximately half were female and half male. Two interviews could not be analysed because the recordings were not clear enough for more than a

\textsuperscript{11} We have edited the syntax of the excerpts only where it seemed necessary for intelligibility, or to correct apparent mistakes in transcription.

\textsuperscript{12} In the description of the sample in our first report, 8 interviews with 12-year-olds were not counted in the total because they were below our original age cutoff-point, 13 years. The total number of in-range interviews was 64. It emerged with further study that these interviews with the youngest informants were helpful in illustrating a significant transition taking place near the beginning of the teen years, so these 8 interviews are included in this report, plus one additional interview with a 25 year-old conducted later, giving a total of 73; two interviews included in the previous total were ruled invalid because only a small portion of each recording was clear enough to be transcribed, leaving a total of 71 valid interviews.
small part of the interview to be transcribed. The age distribution of the informants of valid interviews was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>No.</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12-14</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15-19</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Informants were recruited from a range of organisations. Over half were recruited through schools (four schools participated in the project, two Catholic and two Protestant). One quarter of informants were involved in ‘Youth Voice’, a week-long program devoted to the development of civic consciousness and skills among youth. The rest of the sample was recruited through a young women’s collective, a juvenile justice diversion program (‘Spin Cycle’) and a bible college.

The informants came from all Australian states and territories except for the ACT. Over one third lived in Victoria, while one quarter lived in South Australia and one fifth in New South Wales. 69% of informants lived in an urban area, 31% in rural areas.

61% of informants were born in Australia to Australian-born parents. A further 28% were themselves born in Australia, with one or both parents from overseas: 14% had parents from an English-speaking country (UK and New Zealand) and 14% from a non-English speaking country (Poland, Holland, Italy, Greece, Lebanon, Syria, Mauritius, Malaysia, Philippines, Papua New Guinea and Brazil). The remaining 11% of informants were themselves born overseas; 8% in non-English speaking countries.

**Developments in Method as the Project Proceeded**

Before the main project commenced, we conducted a pilot study to develop an appropriate method and interview schedule; 20 interviews were conducted and analysed as part of the process of preparing the interview schedule for the main project, and the method developed was later documented in a journal article (Singleton, Mason & Webber 2004). Further significant developments took place after the main project interviews commenced.

Probably the greatest change which will be noticed from the methodological position taken in the article just mentioned, is in the interpretation of our definition of spirituality: ‘Spirituality is a conscious way of life based on a transcendent referent.’

Previously, we interpreted ‘transcendent’ narrowly, excluding from ‘spirituality’ humanistic or secular ways of life. While this reading was more consistent with traditional conceptions of ‘spirituality’, it led to the anomaly of having to justify our investigation of the important humanistic/secular strands in the ways of life of Australian young people as an ancillary interest, on our part, in ‘deviant cases’ – people who have no spirituality.13 A broader understanding of transcendence, which makes ‘spirituality’ coterminous with worldview-and-ethos, includes as ‘spiritualities’ even secular worldviews which themselves may well repudiate all notions of ‘spirit’, ‘spiritual’ and ‘spirituality’.14

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13 We were aware of this anomaly, and had resolved to ‘wear it’; but it was also pointed out insistently, and argued against persuasively, by a very helpful anonymous referee of our published paper.

14 This unavoidable alternative anomaly seemed to us on reflection more tolerable than the former one.
Similarly, we now include as spiritualities outlooks which seem self-focussed or unreflective, since, on the one hand, personal autonomy and self-development are strong and pervasive themes which permeate most modern forms of spirituality; and on the other hand, the notion of a totally self-enclosed or unreflective person seems more like a purely theoretical extreme or ‘limiting case’. One can conceive it, but is unlikely to encounter it in reality, except in persons in whom spirituality is ‘embryonic’ – scarcely developed. We have not deleted the reference to transcendence from our definition, since spirituality is still seen as connoting a reference to an order of reality transcending the individual – at least in the elementary sense that it is through the primary social processes leading to the internalisation of a worldview that human beings come to the individuated, reflective consciousness which makes them Selves, transcending the merely biological level of existence (Luckmann 1967, p. 49).

In our first journal article, we presented an earlier form of analytical framework for spirituality itself, very different in appearance from that used here. Ten ‘dimensions’ of spirituality were identified: relationship to religion, expressions, coherence, eclecticism, salience, influence, anthropology, authority, medium and development. We consider the revised framework utilised in the two progress reports a great advance over the former one. It has arisen from further hard thinking and reading, from long debates among ourselves and with other colleagues, and most of all, by grappling with the actual data in our case studies – finding out what works in analysis, what helps us to get deeper into the meaning and significance of the accounts provided by our interview informants. Our former ten dimensions are all still present in the new structure, not now as isolated headings of inquiry, but much more tightly integrated with each other under the headings of ‘Worldview’ and ‘Ethos’, and in the analysis of influences shaping spirituality and consequences of spirituality for social participation. The previous dimension of ‘relationship to religion’ has been modified to form the basis of our set of ‘types of spirituality’.

**Expanded Classification of the Interview Data**

The following analyses are based on the coding of aspects of the interview data which came, with repeated reading and comparison, to seem more significant. Some of them were not even the object of intended interview questions, but emerged in the course of the conversation: e.g. whether the informant had experienced a parental divorce.

In addition to the basic classification of spirituality types, a detailed classification structure was developed, embracing many other aspects of the interview data. Why impose such a formal structure on free-flowing qualitative interviews?

The task of qualitative analysis is to identify the patterns linking different features of the stories told by the informants. When there are only a few cases, the analyst can retain in memory enough of the distinctive features of each interview to notice and compare these patterns, as we tried to do in our first report, based on five case studies. But once there are more than a handful of interviews, features of different stories tend to blur together in memory, and it is no longer possible to rely on intuitive recall to trace patterns across numerous cases. The analyst needs additional techniques to identify these patterns.

Current writing on qualitative methodology encourages the use of supplementary quantitative analysis (Richards 2005, p. 85). ‘Mixed-methods’ approaches include those which, like our project, use both qualitative interviews and random sample surveys, and also projects which perform quantitative analyses of qualitative codes to assist with pattern analysis (Bazeley 2004; Morgan 1998).

Two state-of-the-art research tools were utilised, designed specifically for analysing data such as we had to hand: NVivo and AnswerTree. NVivo works with text materials,
enabling the analyst to code recurring words, phrases and themes; AnswerTree is a ‘segmentation analysis’ program, which searches for relationships between variables constructed by the analyst – for example, between spirituality type and age, or between attendance of mother and attendance of subject – by grouping together cases (‘segments’ of the sample) which share sets of common characteristics. The SPSS statistical package was used to produce simple frequency tables and cross-tabulations of the coded variables, and to prepare the data for AnswerTree analyses.

The transcripts of interviews were read and re-read, groups of similar cases were discussed by the authors at fortnightly meetings. NVivo (as well as old-fashioned manual notes) was used to trace themes within cases and across cases, and from these themes, basic categories for analysis were developed and revised several times in the light of the data. Eventually a set of 63 variables was settled on as suitable for classifying cases. Every individual was classified on as many of these variables as the available information permitted.

The principal variables were:

- **Interview details**: case number, interviewer, date and place of interview, length of interview, organisation within which informant was interviewed (e.g. school), denominational affiliation of organisation if any;
- **Demographics**: pseudonym, age, gender, country of birth, parents’ countries of birth and occupations, ethnicity, family integrity, childhood state of residence; childhood urban/rural residence, current state and city/town of residence, urban/rural residence, occupation (usually student), social class;
- **Education**: year in secondary school or in tertiary program, religious or secular primary school, religious or secular secondary school, experience of religious education, religious services and chaplaincy at school;
- **Religion/spirituality**: religious/denominational identification (current and at age 12), acceptance of religious/spiritual beliefs, frequency of attendance at services (current and at age 12), attendance of mother, father and close friends, frequency of prayer, involvement in other religious/spiritual practices, responses to ‘Photolanguage’ pictures and to scenarios of spiritual experiences, New Age beliefs and practices: séances, tarot, belief in ghosts, meditation, spirituality type at time of interview, (and at previous stage(s) if possible): as child, teenager, adult;
- **Civic orientation**: knowledge, capacities, attitudes, participation, scope (within personal, local, national/international spheres).

The classification codes were entered initially into a spreadsheet database and from there into SPSS and AnswerTree. Patterns suggested from quantitative analyses using these two programs were tested by bringing them back again to the text of the interview transcripts.

We soon noticed that spirituality seemed to be closely related to the life-stage transitions taking place among our population of interest:

- from childhood/primary school to early teenage;
- from early to late teenage;
- from teenage to ‘emerging adulthood’;

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15 Approximate number of words spoken by interviewee was calculated by subtracting average number of interviewer words from total number of words in each transcript.
16 Family integrity: whether the informant experienced a parental divorce while living at home.
17 Class was imputed from occupations of parents.
18 Assignment of a spirituality type involved assessing the person according to the characteristics of the spirituality types outlined in the following section.
from ‘emerging adulthood’ to young adulthood.

So we tried to attend to what was happening to an informant’s spiritual life before, during and after these key life-shaping transitions. Life-stage became one of the fundamental structures in our analysis.
3. Patterns of Spirituality

Our analysis of the patterns of spirituality revealed in the interviews rests on two basic structures:

- A classification of types of spirituality;
- A set of life-stages.

Classification of Types of Spirituality

The types of spirituality utilised in the analysis flow from our understanding of spirituality as comprising a *worldview* and an *ethos*.

*Worldview*

Theoretically, and in the light of the findings of others’ research, worldviews could be:

- **Traditional**: grounded in the tradition of a world-religion (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism);
- **New Age**: embracing a framework from one or more New Age religions or spiritual paths: (e.g. neo-paganism, goddess worship, Wicca, channelling, Reiki, crystals); or occult or paranormal beliefs and practices: (e.g. spiritualism, belief in ghosts, superstition, astrology); or elements of Eastern or esoteric religious practice detached from the tradition to which they belong: (e.g. Yoga, Tai Chi, TM);
- **Eclectic**: a collage of themes from disparate sources, sometimes including elements from traditional religions – for many authors, this is the paradigmatic ‘post-traditional’ spirituality;
- **Humanistic**: a worldview which affirms human experience and human reason, rather than adopting religious traditions or ‘spiritual’ paths.

In practice, we encountered in our interview data only three varieties of worldview: traditional, humanistic and New Age. Only two instances of New Age and none of eclectic were observed in this small sample. The New Age type will not be discussed in this report because the data supporting it are too sparse to be reliable. The survey, with its much larger sample, may well show examples of all of the types above, and will perhaps require us to formulate new types for variants of spirituality not yet encountered.

We almost despaired of classifying the spirituality of some of our youngest informants, frustrated by the lack of specific information, until we realised that shyness or inarticulateness at interview were not the cause; we could take these informants more directly at their word: they had not reflected much about the issues we were canvassing. In some, worldview and ethos are still only ‘embryonic’ (EMB) – largely implicit and unreflective. This may be because of the subject’s early developmental stage or lack of education, or because of the particular cultural, social or family ambience, or other

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19 Spirituality and the paranormal/occult: according to recent empirical studies, beliefs belonging to these domains (ESP, precognition, psychokinesis, witchcraft, spiritualism, belief in ghosts, superstitiousness) should be distinguished from religious beliefs (MacDonald 2000, p. 187). In factor analysis they load together on a separate factor, distinct from religious components: they have been found to have a positive relation with indices of pathology and with psychological variables typically thought of as reflecting negative aspects of functioning. For example, paranormal beliefs have been found to be related to unusual thought and behaviour patterns including psychotic disorders (e.g. schizophrenia, schizotypy), external locus of control, suggestibility, and temporal lobe signs’ (Macdonald & Friedman 2002, p. 118).

20 In our first progress report this type was called ‘secular’, and in some interim presentations, we tried a further distinction between two varieties of non-religious worldview: ‘humanistic’ and ‘secular’, but found this did not hold up. We have reverted to a single category, but labelled it ‘humanistic’ instead of ‘secular’ because we prefer the connotations of the former term.
factors which have impeded development. Nine of our informants were assigned to this category: all but one were aged 12-14; one was in his late teens but immature.

The classification does not disparage the actual lived spirituality of these young people, about which we know very little, but merely notes that it seems little reflected-on or articulated. But surely, level of religious development is not to be judged by capacity to articulate concepts! Fortunately, several major religious traditions hold that you can live more than you can say.  

**Ethos**

Ethos is understood as embracing the ‘tone, character, quality of life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood’ (Geertz 1973) – as entailing moods and motivations, as including both values and practices.

We found it useful to distinguish three ‘levels’ of ethos, which we coded as high (HI), medium (MED), and low (LO), referring to the extent, or the degree of intensity or commitment, with which the worldview is expressed in values and carried into practice. HI/MED/LO are descriptive terms, not marks of approval or moral evaluations of the content of an ethos: there is no implication that HI is automatically ‘better’. Quest (QST) is a variant of LO, a transitional form during the teenage years, as explained below.

**Traditional spirituality types**

As noted above, we conceive of a ‘spirituality type’ as a combination of a worldview and an ethos. This gives rise to the following four traditional spirituality types observed in our interview sample:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldview</th>
<th>Ethos</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TRAD</td>
<td>HI (23 cases) / MED (5), / LO (8), / QST (13)</td>
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Readers will be familiar enough with traditional worldviews to dispense with any further explanation of them here. So we proceed to outline the criteria used in classifying four levels of ethos in which traditional spiritualities may be expressed:

**TRAD/HI**

*Defined as including all of the following:*

- Identification with a denomination is owned;
- Beliefs: all or most of denomination’s core beliefs endorsed;
- Practices: Attendance which is regular and willing, (not HI if attendance is constrained, reluctant);
- Prayer: private prayer practised regularly (a useful indicator of high commitment is whether the informant engages in religious practices not required by parents or school or church – e.g. regular private prayer or Bible reading, or other ‘devotional practices’).

**TRAD/MED**

*Defined as including all of the following:*

- Identification with the denomination is maintained;

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21 Protestantism’s initial emphasis on salvation solely through faith in the revealed and preached Word, filtered through Enlightenment rationalism’s restriction of knowledge to the product of discursive thought, gave rise to a narrower, more intellectualistic view of faith; but this remains in tension with an older Catholic (especially Eastern) and Orthodox view that pre-conceptual intuition, arising in direct experience, is another source of religious truth. Even within Protestantism, the Pietist, Methodist and Pentecostal streams retain something of this older tradition. In philosophy, post-rationalist epistemologies are regaining interest in, and continuing to explore, what the mediaevals called ‘dark’ or ‘connatural’ knowledge – under such headings as ‘personal’ or ‘tacit’ knowledge (Polanyi 1967a; 1967b).
Beliefs: continued acceptance of most (sometimes all) of the beliefs of the religion/denomination; sometimes lack of acceptance of some core belief(s);
Practices: Attendance less than once a month, but still at least occasional;
Prayer: private prayer or other voluntary devotional practice is only occasional.

TRAD/LO
Defined as including all of the following:
- Identification is weak: acknowledged but not affirmed;
- Beliefs: only a few residual beliefs: e.g. in God or ‘a spiritual power’; but remaining clearly short of rejection of religion, God, spiritual reality;
- Practices: almost none; perhaps a rare attendance or prayer in a crisis.

TRAD/QST
We had to make room for one type of spirituality which did not fit into the HI/MED/LO pattern in the family of traditional spirituality types. TRAD/QST is a transitional form of spirituality in adolescence among those whose spirituality type in childhood was traditional; characterised by questioning or questing, which impacts by significantly reducing or suspending traditional practices, beliefs, and sometimes even identification with the former religious denomination/community. The QST ethos is discussed in more detail, with illustrations, below.

We turn now to a second set of spirituality types – those based on the humanistic worldview, which itself requires some further elaboration to clarify the sense in which we are using it here.

The humanistic worldview
As was stated above, this outlook affirms human experience and human reason, rather than adopting religious traditions or ‘spiritual’ paths.

Although we use the word ‘humanistic’ in a modern sense to refer to a non-religious view of life, we nonetheless define this worldview in somewhat broader terms than modern ‘Secular Humanism’. It is post-Enlightenment, rationalistic, and non-religious, but often quite tolerant of religion and appreciative of its values.

It retains a kinship with the classical humanism of Cicero, Marcus Aurelius and the Stoics, and with Renaissance humanism like that of Erasmus, Vico and Thomas More, and still finds common ground, in the human values it cherishes and promotes, with that older Christian humanism.

Humanism has had a rich and complex intellectual history, linked at many points with the development of another concept fundamental to the development of Western civilisation: ‘liberalism.’ The two are often linked as ‘liberal humanism’.

The ethos of liberal humanism has been so strong in the West, that nearly all strands of Christianity and Judaism have made major concessions to it. In the late modern period, liberalism/humanism is predominantly secularist, yet most Western religions still share classical liberal values. Human freedom and equality and human rights usually find religious endorsement. There is a sense in which ‘we are all liberals now’.

Liberal humanism has tended to be allied with an optimistic view of human progress, derived from the rise of science and the series of scientific and technological revolutions. The late 20th century arrived at a more ambivalent position on the benefits of technology,

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22 The root meaning of ‘liberal’, as used classically in ‘liberal arts’, ‘liberal education’ is: befitting a free person, a citizen of the polis, as distinct from a slave or servant.
and technological ‘progressivism’ is more muted; but ‘cultural progressivism’ seems to have become even more strident in tone.

At first sight, there appear to be some difficulties in formulating a consistent ethos of liberal humanism:

- it seems to include both angry rejection of religion in some, and tolerance of religion in others;
- and to be compatible both with altruistic attitudes and behaviour and a self-serving individualism.

Perhaps we could nonetheless nominate tolerance as a key value, with this one limit point: intolerance must not be tolerated. This emphasis leads some, who view religion as predominantly intolerant, to reject religion tout court. Others take a more nuanced view, affirming the positive values they see in religion.

There seems little doubt, however, that the fundamental value of liberal humanism, on which all others rest, is the infinite worth of the human individual, and the inviolability of personal freedom and autonomy: freedom in cultural, artistic, sexual, political and economic terms; freedom from every kind of restriction, censorship, oppression or discrimination – whether based on race, ethnicity, nationality, social class, religion, gender, sexual preference or age.

We noted in the previous chapter that Luckmann proposed that the effectively dominant themes in the ‘sacred cosmos’ in late modern societies were: personal autonomy, self-development and self-realisation. This takes the central value placed on the individual by liberal secular humanism, and adds the emphasis on personal growth characteristic of a narcissistic, ‘psychologised’, therapeutic society.

Other key values may be listed briefly:

- The sovereignty of reason, freedom of thought, ideas, opinion and expression (often, as opposed to religious faith; usually, as against oppressive myths and illusions; as in Marx and Freud). This is a value exalted by liberal humanism from its origins, when it was closely associated with the rise of science, the emancipation of the human intellect from subservience to the authority of religious dogma, and of the secular realm from submission to the sacred.
- In political terms, egalitarianism is a fundamental theme, opposed to aristocracies based on birth or wealth, the maintenance of economic and political privilege, the entrenchment of vested interests. Various forms (and combinations) of socialism and democracy have been promoted as the systems of government which most respect this equality. Also vindicated are freedom of association and political organisation; freedom of movement; freedom of expression. The enemy is all forms of political control beyond what is minimally necessary for the operation of society, especially authoritarianism, dictatorship, patriarchal rule.
- ‘Human rights’ are accorded a quasi-sacred status, and their range seems continually to expand in modern discourse, far beyond those expressed in the classic charters of emancipation, or traditional treatises on justice.

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23 The meaning of ‘liberal’ in the political and economic spheres becomes very slippery, so often has the word been appropriated by competing groups in the scramble for the high moral ground. Today’s ‘economic rationalists’ style themselves ‘neo-liberals’, and derive their ‘libertarian’ principles from philosopher John Locke, but are classified by their opponents as ‘neo-conservatives’.

24 In former times, for example in the campaign to abolish slavery, human equality was often legitimated by reference to the theme of the equality of all creatures before God as taught in some traditional religions.
‘Social justice’ is a key value, and the basis of much common ground with Christians and Jews, but is sometimes understood and valued in a slightly different way: because it is necessary for the vindication of individual personal autonomy and freedom; in Australia, working-class Catholics and unbelievers were allied for decades last century in a socialist political party, making common cause on the basis of shared human values.

- Spontaneity in affect and behaviour is often, especially in late modern times, valued over adherence to prescribed forms; this can be seen as an extension of the motif of individual freedom.

- Especially in late modernity, a strong trait of liberal humanism is relativism: scepticism about any absolute (non-empirical) truth, or any absolute moral or aesthetic value; these are seen as (differently) ‘true’ for each individual; reducible to matters of preference or taste.\(^2\)

The arch-enemy of ‘liberalism’ is conservatism – not necessarily in the sense of placing a positive value on tradition, or conserving what is best in inherited values, but the imposition of ideas, values or practices in the cultural (intellectual, moral, aesthetic, religious), social or political realm which restricts individual freedom or choice. So for many, conservatism connotes authoritarianism, repression, and if necessary, oppression of opponents or opposing ideas.

Religions and other inherently ‘conserving’ institutions come into conflict with liberal humanism:

- Whenever they place their conception of ‘truth’ above cultural freedom for any individual to hold and express any idea they choose;
- Whenever their conception of the ‘moral good’ places limits on individual freedom of behaviour;
- Whenever their conception of the political, social or economic ‘common good’ leads them to favour restrictions on individuals, and allies them with ‘conservatives’ of whatever ilk who favour the use of cultural, economic, political or military power to impose what they consider essential for the good of society.

In this study, people are classified as having a worldview of HUM if they ‘affirm human experience and human reason, rather than adopting religious traditions or “spiritual” paths’. But because of the special character of the transition from childhood to teenage, when young teenagers are often reacting against a lifestyle ‘imposed’ on them in childhood, trying on a new identity, experimenting with new freedoms, we were cautious about classifying as HUM someone from a TRAD background, who was TRAD/HI when a CHILD; even if they appeared to have renounced many TRAD beliefs and practices, and identification. TRAD/QST often fitted these young people better, for reasons we shall explain in describing that type.

**Humanistic spirituality types**

The humanistic worldview appeared with three different ‘levels’ of ethos, to form the following types of humanistic spirituality:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Worldview</th>
<th>Ethos</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HUM</td>
<td>HI (7 cases), / MED (3), / LO (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

HUM/HI

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\(^2\) This view is described and subjected to a devastating critique in Alasdair MacIntyre’s (1984) *After Virtue.*
Defined as including all of the following:

- The person identifies clearly and strongly as ‘liberal humanist’ – not necessarily using the label, but owning its content;
- Believes in/accepts/endorse nearly all of the liberal humanist worldview;
- Especially if person has adopted an explanation of the world based on science or has some thought-out sceptical position vis-à-vis religion/spirituality;
- Expresses values and motives that are humanistic rather than religious/spiritual;
- Engages (in ways proportionate to age, development and opportunity) in practices expressive of liberal humanism.

For example, a person who:

- Never had a traditional spirituality at a previous stage;
- Does not believe in God;
- Does not identify with a church or other traditional religious organisation or community;
- Does not attend religious services (except in cases where they go out of solidarity with family members who are still traditional – e.g. at Christmas and Easter or when visiting Grandma; or for social reasons such as christenings, weddings, funerals);
- Does accept scientific explanations of the world and of life and can articulate this position;
- Does express humanistic values – esp. individual freedom and autonomy vs. traditional constraints;
- Does engage in activities which promote these values.

HUM/MED
Defined as including all of the following:

- Medium version of above, with some elements missing or weak;
- Rejection of TRAD is not complete;
- HUM identification is uncertain;
- HUM views incomplete, inconsistent or not much articulated;
- HUM values and motives – some but not strong;
- HUM practices – some but not strong.

HUM/LO
Defined as including all of the following:

- Is not EMB – some evidence of reflection; some clear views;
- Is not TRAD/LO because largely rejects TRAD, and was not previously TRAD;
- Is not TRAD/QST because was not previously TRAD/HI and/or is not in teens;
- TRAD has never been strong, but may be still retained in a weak form: perhaps some degree of identification, or even some belief(s);
- TRAD is nonetheless largely rejected; person is not religious/spiritual
  - e.g. has no ‘feel for’ or experience of religion/spirituality
  - perhaps has been raised with neither TRAD nor any alternative
- HUM beliefs, values, motives: accepts some but not all;
- HUM thinking is not clear or articulated;
- There may be some admixture of NEW (superstition, astrology) or an esoteric TRAD (e.g. Buddhism for someone from a Christian environment);
- HUM practices: none or few.
Spirituality at Different Life-stages

At the start of this chapter, we mentioned that our analysis rested on both a classification of spirituality types and a set of life-stages. Having outlined the former, we proceed now to discuss the role of life-stages.

The young people we interviewed were travelling through three different stages of life, which we coded as CHILD, TEEN and ADULT.

Without attempting to discuss here the extensive literature on personal development through these stages, it is important to note two changes which have been shown in recent research to have occurred in Australia over the last half century:

- An earlier onset of puberty: in Australia now, puberty typically begins at 11 in girls and 12-13 in boys, but often earlier; the normal range extends as low as 9 years; 26
- A declining median age at first intercourse: 16 years for both men and women born after 1979. By contrast, for the oldest of the ‘Baby Boomers’, born in the 1940s, the median age was 18 for men and 19 for women (Smith et al. 2003). 27

Among our informants:

CHILD refers to those aged 12 at the time of interview (typically in their first year of secondary school); SPCHILD refers to the spirituality type a person manifests (or describes in recollection) at this stage, which could be any one of the types of spirituality listed above: TRAD/HI, HUM/LO, etc.);

TEEN refers to those whose age at interview was 13-17. Spirituality type at this stage was contained in the variable SPTEEN.

ADULT refers to those whose age at interview was 18-29. Spirituality type at this stage was contained in the variable SPADULT.

The type of spirituality of the informant at one or more of these stages was classified, depending on the subject’s age at the time of the interview (e.g. for a teenager, we tried to determine from the interview data both his or her type of spirituality at the time of interview (SPTEEN), and also type of spirituality when he or she was finishing primary school (SPCHILD).

It was noticed that the transition from one life-stage to the next was often accompanied by a change from one type of spirituality to another; this naturally became a key focus of our interest.

Characteristics of the Main Spirituality Types, with Examples

The framework of analysis of spirituality types, rather skeletal so far, can now be clothed with some examples from real life.

TRAD/HI

26 Children, Youth and Women’s Health Service, Department of Health, South Australia 2005. ‘Puberty is said to be precocious in girls if breasts start to develop before age 8 or periods start before age 9. In boys puberty is considered precocious when there is sexual development before age 9 … Precocious puberty is much more common in girls than boys.’

27 LaTrobe University and the Central Sydney Area Health Service were funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care and the National Health & Medical Research Council to undertake the Australian Study of Health and Relationships. Interviews were completed during 2001-2002 with a representative sample of 10,173 men and 9,134 women aged 16-59 years. Half the men born between 1941 and 1950 had vaginal intercourse by age 18; this declined to 16 for men born between 1981 and 1986. For women the age at first vaginal intercourse declined from 19 to 16. These results may be biased somewhat downwards by non-response from sexual conservatives.
This was by far the most frequently assigned type (23 cases); but no doubt this was largely due to the fact that most of our informants were secondary students, and nearly all of these were attending church-affiliated schools. So the reader is cautioned not to make any inferences about the frequency of this type in the population!

Monique, a highly articulate 17-year-old Catholic Year 12 student in a capital-city Catholic school, is from an ethnic background that strongly reinforces her Catholic identity:

We're really big on family, really big on family.
So for you what gives life its meaning and purpose?
Like I said before, it has to be family. Without family it's nothing. Well, for me, family and religion. We're big on the religion, obviously. And, family. So I don't know, they keep you going.

Her worldview is TRAD (based on a traditional religion), and her ethos is HI – her religious identification is actively owned. Commenting on a picture of a stained glass window, she says:

Well, that one in the sense of like the religious one because I mean we are a Catholic family and we do all the Catholic things, plus more. Like, we go to church on Sundays. Now that it's Lent we're all off meat and fasting until 12 and we do all of that stuff and we have family gatherings and all of that.

Monique embraces the teachings of her faith with conviction:

So what do you believe about God?
God, he did a lot for us. Like, I mean, the fact that he'd die for us. To me it's a very big thing. I mean, you don't just die for people unless you love them and you don't sacrifice as much as he did for nothing
And what do you believe happens after death?
Heaven, hell, purgatory ... I think that like we all go to purgatory ... I reckon you stay there until you've paid off your sins, you've repented for what you've done. I'm big on the purgatory thing.

She attends church every week:

So you were saying earlier you go to church every week?
Yep.
How do you find Mass?
It's relaxing. It's sort of like therapeutic. It's like the only place for that one hour where you can think straight and nothing's going on in your mind except the connection between you and God. That's how I feel.
Yeah, so you don't get distracted?
No.
OK, so would you get a lot out of the homily and that sort of thing?
Yeah.
I know some people say they're hard to follow?
No, they're good. I mean, I understand it and go through them.

She prays regularly, and even reads the Bible (an uncommon practice among Catholic teenagers):

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28 Of course, we would have very much liked to interview an equal number of students at Government schools, but access to these schools for research purposes – especially on a topic such as religion/spirituality – is so difficult as to be impracticable. However, the survey just completed will have reached a representative sample of Government school students in their homes, so the bias of the interview sampling will be corrected by studying those results.
Oh, OK, so it’s sort of like a study Bible?
Yeah, sort of.
How often would you read that?
Oh, every few nights I’ll pick it up.
And is that helpful to you?
Yeah.
How do you think it’s helpful?
Like, it just sort of strengthens the connection.

Renee (TRAD/HI, Pentecostal, 19) finished school and did a year at university, then took a year off to attend a Bible College while working part-time. Her story shows quite a contrasting pattern to that of Monique – the worldviews of both are TRAD, but they belong to different traditions, and Renee’s HI ethos is lived out in quite a different manner. She has just joined a new church, attends regularly both Sunday services and weekday Bible studies, and reads the Bible privately.

Can you tell me the history of your involvement with organised religion?
When I was born my family attended the Assemblies of God so I went there … until I was seven and then we moved churches to a Christian Faith Centre, a Pentecostal church. When I started school I was at a Christian College. So a Christian family, Christian education and Christian church on Sundays and stuff … I have made some choices about it recently. When my parents left the Christian Faith Centre to go to another church … I joined them for a year, and now I’ve just moved, a week ago, to a Church of Christ church. This will be the first time that I have gone to a church of a denomination that wouldn’t be classified as Pentecostal.

Do you go to church very often?
Organised church I go to about once a week, but then we have just started small groups as well which depending on your definition of church could also be that. Then it depends on whether the time I spend with Christian friends is also church, it depends what you define as church.

Do you read the Bible by yourself as well as in a small group like a Bible study?
We have just had the first one for this year, which was organising what we were going to do and how we are going to do it, setting us up for the rest of the year. But generally it is some form of either direct Bible study or what does the Bible say about this? I do read the Bible by myself.

Often?
Through the last year it has petered off where I couldn’t be bothered for a couple of months and I have just started getting back into it, so at the moment, yes I would say often, but that has only been for about the last fortnight.

Her beliefs are in accordance with the teachings of the churches to which she has belonged:

What do you believe about God and Jesus?
God created the world, and for some reason God created man, and man did something that God told him not to and that had a huge effect on everything, and then God sent his son, Jesus, to fix it.

Do you think the miracle stories are true?
I would assume so, I have no reason to suspect that they are not.

In thinking about what matters in life, would you say you draw on the ideas of a particular religion or philosophy?
Yeah, it would probably be Christianity and just by living by that, living by the ideas, rules and concepts presented.

What are the ones that stand out most for you?
Loving God and people and to try and do good and not bad.

Renee has been baptised in the Spirit, and prays in tongues:

For you personally, how would you describe the significance of that? [praying in tongues]
It means that I can pray without knowing what to pray and sometimes that is important.

She has twice been involved in Christian missionary work during summer holidays:

I helped one summer in 2001-2002 with a missionary outreach thing that our church was doing in the inner city. They put on a carnival for the kids that live in the high-rise; they would do that every week at a different high-rise in the city. And this summer I was doing a Scripture Union theatre, just sort of a coffee shop. I suppose you would call it volunteer work – it is all sort of Christian missionary work.

Both of these young women demonstrate the distinctive characteristics of the TRAD/HI type of spirituality: positive identification with their tradition, sincere acceptance of its core beliefs, and a relatively high level of engagement in religious practices which are voluntarily undertaken.

**TRAD/MED**

Only eight of those interviewed were classified as having this spirituality type; three of them were women in their mid- to late-twenties, known to us as Linda, Joanne and Amanda. All three were Catholics, teachers at Catholic schools; their accounts of their spirituality in childhood and teenage years led us to classify them all as TRAD/HI in childhood and TRAD/QST in their teens. The small number of those with a medium level of commitment is almost certainly a result of our having interviewed relatively few people in their mid-twenties or later. This level of ethos is probably very common in this age group.

Religious identification in those with a ‘medium’ ethos remains quite definite. These three identify as Catholic without hesitation. When asked: ‘What are the major influences on your life?’, after mentioning parents and boyfriends, Linda reflects:

Um, what else? I do think that – I’m Catholic … And that does influence my life. It’s sort of in the back of my mind quite a bit saying, oh, I should go to church, I should do this, this is wrong, so that influences my behaviour and my morals on a daily basis, doing I should, do this or I shouldn’t do that … My family is quite religious and we pray and we go to church and light candles if someone is sick, so yeah, we sort of turn to God most times. It’s hard as well, but you do question your faith when you see bad things as well.

Joanne:

*Can you tell me a little bit about your history of organised religion?*
Catholic schools.
*So you were baptised?*
Baptised. I’ve done baptism, reconciliation, communion. Um, confirmation. I went to a Catholic primary school, I went to a Catholic high school, I went to a Catholic uni.

Religious beliefs seem largely intact, although not as salient as they are for the highly committed.

Joanne:

You know, I’ve been through some rotten times, like, you know a few friends dying in Bali and what not and going to the churches and that really sort of affected me, but I don’t think I’ve ever really doubted that God’s there or anything. I can’t think of a specific time when I would have thought – I mean, you always think ‘why’ or ‘how come’, but nothing really like ‘That’s it, I don’t believe any of it’.

Linda:
Has there been a particular time when you’ve doubted God or the church?
Yes.
Can you give an example?
During my teenage years, I definitely questioned. I didn’t want to go to church at all. Um, and then I started to go back a bit sort of in my early twenties and now I sort of go more because I feel like I should.

Amanda:
I think I have my own sort of style of belief. I believe that there is a being superior to ourselves and I believe that God is there watching over us all and has a plan and we’re all part of that plan and I talk to God.

But religious practice, although not abandoned, is at a much lower level than in the committed; church attendance is irregular. Prayer, however, may remain quite frequent:

Joanne:
Have you continued to go to church?
Ah, not weekly, no. Um that sort of stopped when I did move out [of home]. Actually, when I went overseas that pretty much stopped, but I still go Easter and Christmas and whenever mum sort of says: ‘This is happening. Do you want to come?’
So it would have stopped what, about – when you were about … ?
Early. I’d say nineteen, twenty. I was still going to support, like, I didn’t necessarily want to go earlier. Like, when I was nineteen, twenty, I thought it was a bit annoying having to go but mum really enjoyed going with her family so …
So you went?
So we’d sort of go to support mum, but generally now it’s just Easter and Christmas. And you know, funerals and weddings and things like that.

Linda:
Do you pray personally?
Yeah, I say a prayer before I go to bed at night just to thank for everything that I have. It’s a very quick thing. It only takes a few seconds, but I like to sort of acknowledge, be grateful for what I have.

Amanda:
I don’t go to church every Sunday, but you know, I probably go at Christmas and I do pray … I used to go to church with my mum every Sunday when I was younger … Not going to church every week – to me it doesn’t mean that I don’t believe. I don’t think I need to go and sit in a Mass to prove to anyone or to prove to God that I believe. Not that I disagree with going to Mass, but I just don’t think that I have to do that. I have my own relationship with God … Sometimes I have moments where I can just sort of stop and think. I just sort of might look up and say thank you. I can almost feel the presence like that something has been done for me almost, you know. Sometimes in the smallest ways. Like, if you’re anxious about something and then it might happen in a prayer or something like that and it might feel better and I always credit that to an answering of prayers, so yeah.

TRAD/QST
Thirteen of our informants, ranging in age from 13 to 17, were classified as having this spirituality type at the time of interview – it was the commonest type of spirituality amongst teenagers. QST involves a revision of religious/spiritual practices and commitments, sometimes also of beliefs, even of identification. There are many variations: attendance at religious services is nearly always much reduced, and denominational identification muted; but the practice of praying may continue. Basic beliefs may be either universally questioned, or remain largely unchallenged. Some young people in this group present as confused, but still basically committed to their
faith; while others seem close to angry secularist rejection of all religious belief, practice and identification.

This spirituality type has fascinated the members of the research team, as we attempted to find a coherent collective shape in the varied experiences we were reading. Prior to their entry into the QST stage, nearly all of these informants had been TRAD/HI in childhood. The shift usually occurred early in secondary school (in Years 7-9, at age 12-14). A reduced level of commitment is apparent, but labels suggesting permanence or stasis did not fit – some recounted passing through this phase, but later resuming their commitment to traditional religion. There is a sense of transition, of turbulence, of basic beliefs and identity in process. If a person’s childhood worldview had been traditional, we felt caution was needed before reclassifying them in their teens as converts to a secularist outlook.

We can distinguish three aspects of the transition from childhood to adulthood:
- ‘Growing up’ – the universal human experience;
- ‘Modern youth’ – a dimension added in the last two centuries;
- ‘The late modern predicament’ – distinctive elements in contemporary times.

‘Growing up’
The universal human experience of the emergence of the adult member of society, possessing relatively greater independence than the child.

The physiological bases of the transition – the human growth stages of puberty and adolescence, although occurring at an earlier chronological age (for complex reasons rooted in genetic and nutritional changes), seem to account for only a minimum of the phenomena of ‘youth’, since these vary greatly across societies in response to different social structures and cultural norms.

Children internalise the worldview mediated to them by significant others in the primary socialisation process that takes place in early childhood. Such a worldview may include elements of an institutionalised religion such as Christianity. Whether these elements remain in place in later childhood and adulthood will depend on the effectiveness with which they are maintained by parents and by the expanding range of significant others the child encounters.

From ancient times, commentators have remarked on the propensity of young people to take lightly, and to question, the received wisdom of their culture. This apparently universal ‘pushing against the walls’ is readily intelligible when we reflect that assuming adult membership of one’s society involves answering the question ‘What kind of world am I living in?’ and consequently, ‘Who am I?’ Ideally, the formation of adult identity will be in continuity with the identity acquired in the primary socialisation process of early childhood. The worldview whose elements were learned earlier, will be reappropriated in maturer fashion, and grounded more broadly in the structures of the wider society beyond the family. But even in the most stable of societies and cultures, there is still scope for a wide range of individual variation, and for greater or less turbulence, in this complex process.

‘Modern youth’
In the last two centuries a new conception of ‘youth’ as a stage between childhood and adulthood developed in Western industrial societies, which required a long socialisation

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29 In his classic study of the formation of identity in adolescence, Erikson (1971) highlighted the importance of the development of what he called ‘ideology’ – a kind of map, a simplified or summary picture of the world and of one’s place in it, which contributes to identity by locating the self in social space.
process including extensive formal education. Initially centred on young adulthood, ‘youth’ later expanded downwards into the years of secondary school and upwards to the late twenties (Berger & Berger 1972, p. 214).

It is now widely acknowledged in historical, anthropological and social studies that childhood is not a natural phenomenon related to stages of intellectual development or physical growth, neither is the recognition of children by adults contingent exclusively on physical appearance. Although theorists differ in their interpretations, it is largely accepted that childhood is perceived differently at different times in history and within different cultures, and that even within cultures definitions and perceptions can vary. Childhood is therefore recognised within a social context as a dynamic construct (e.g. Mead, Wolfenstein, Ariès, Stone, Jenks, James and Prout) (Canterbury 2005).

While socialisation in most pre-modern societies has been highly integrated and consistent, providing the individual with strong patterns to grow into, socialisation in modern society has been characterised by high degrees of discontinuity and inconsistency. Such a situation is likely to produce personalities … who are quite unsure of themselves. The biographical stage of youth has the purpose of providing time for the individual to … ‘find himself’ … An essential element of the experience of youth in modern society is the instability of values … and indeed, of identity itself. ‘What is really worth doing?’ ‘How should I spend my life?’ ‘Who am I?’ … While there is undoubtedly a universal human quality about these questions, they have received peculiar sharpness and urgency as a result of the modern definition of the situation of youth. Thus the period of youth is characterised very strongly by a search for ‘authentic’ values and identity … Society recognises that this process of self-discovery will involve experimentation of various sorts (Berger & Berger 1972, pp. 220 - 222).

Developmental psychology has seen such questioning of the authority of the culture as an integral part of the process of the emergence of the independent adult. Even in religious circles, it has come to be regarded not only as normal, but as beneficial and even desirable if a mature faith is to emerge. Equally normal is a resistance, at this stage, to parentally prescribed religious practices such as regular attendance at religious services.

‘The late modern predicament’
An early modern way of viewing the transition out of childhood was as a ‘loss of innocence’. However,

In the twenty-first century what it means to be a child in western cultures is shifting. The idealised romantic image of the child as an innocent, that has largely prevailed from the eighteenth century and is symbolised by Joshua Reynolds’ painting ‘The Age of Innocence’, no longer embraces what we know, understand or feel about children (if it ever did). We do not live in an age of innocence and though it may be hard to acknowledge, childhood is not an age of innocence either. When author Jacqueline Wilson was asked whether her books are concerned with the loss of childhood innocence, she observed that society has lost its innocence and that children are simply party to this state of being (Canterbury 2005).

The dominant stream of current theory concerning social change in the late modern period postulates a vastly changed relationship between individual and society. Theories of late modernity posit a radical ‘individualisation’. The achievement of human identity is no longer a given, but a task for which each actor must take sole responsibility (Bauman 2001, p. 46).
‘Individualism’, in Berger and Luckmann’s sociology of the formation of identity, is defined as the possibility of individual choice between discrepant ‘worlds’ and identities. It is a consequence of ‘unsuccessful’ socialisation – i.e. socialisation which does not confer a single clear identity. One of the ways in which this can occur is when there are discrepancies between primary and secondary socialisation – alternative ‘worlds’ and identities appear as subjective options. This opens up the possibility of adopting components of identity with a certain ‘detachment’:

The individual may ... internalise the new reality, but instead of its being his reality, it is a reality to be used for specific purposes ... he retains subjective detachment [in relation to it] ...[In] a society in which discrepant worlds are generally available on a market basis ... there will be an increasingly general consciousness of the relativity of all worlds, including one’s own, which is now subjectively apprehended as ‘a world’ rather than ‘the world’. It follows that one’s own institutionalised conduct may be apprehended as a ‘role’ from which one may detach oneself in one’s own consciousness, and which one may ‘act out’ with manipulative control ... Individuals ‘play at’ being what they are supposed to be. This situation is increasingly typical of industrial society (Berger & Luckmann 1966, pp. 171-173).

Luckmann (1967) extends the above insight into an analysis of the condition of religion in late modern society, showing how, firstly, in a society where social differentiation has given rise to many different versions of the worldview, varying according to people’s different social location, the single ‘official model’ of an institutionalised religion can no longer express the ‘sacred cosmos’, the level of ultimate significance, which fits all these varied forms of the worldview; and secondly, especially under conditions of rapid social change, the ‘official model’, although it is continually adapted by religious professionals, inevitably ‘lags behind’ changes in individuals’ systems of ‘ultimate significance’ (pp. 82-83), and is threatened by the competing secular systems of meaning which operate in people’s non-religious roles.

What the fathers preach but do not practice will be internalised by the sons as a system of rhetoric rather than a system of ultimate significance ... Specifically religious beliefs will be compartmentalised into opinions which will have no direct relation to individuals’ effective priorities and everyday life conduct (p. 89).

In Luckmann’s analysis, it is these structural tensions which shape the late modern predicament of religion:

We cannot naively attribute the decline of Christianity in its traditional forms to the advance of secularist ideologies, atheism, Neopaganism and the like. The contemporary marginality of church religion and its ‘inner secularization’ appear, rather, as one aspect of a complex process in which the long-range consequences of institutional specialisation of religion and the global transformations of the social order play a decisive role (p. 90).

The QST ethos we encountered among our informants manifests many elements of this analysis of the situation of religion/spirituality in late modernity. The patterns of ‘growing up’ and of ‘modern youth’ are still present, but so are other features which go beyond them.

Below are some examples from our interviews of aspects of all three of these patterns:

The transition from primary to secondary education
When students move from primary to secondary school they enter a more complex and varied social milieu, and in all but the strictest conservative schools, they are likely to encounter sceptical peers, either non-believers, ‘questers’ or ex-believers. There are major changes in the style and content of education: they are more likely to have a larger
number of different people teaching them, to study informants more clearly distinct from each other, to cover a wider range of topics in each subject, to be expected to read more widely, to learn to do more independent research, to use computers and the internet:

Rohan (15, Yr. 10, Catholic school)

Would you say that what you believe has changed over the last few years?
I used to believe in God a lot, and Jesus and all that. Now I’m starting to doubt that. Starting to think: ‘oh yeah, he’s probably just …’ … As I grow older, like I learn more about science and evolution and all that, so I’m starting to think that would probably be more accurate.

Pluralism
More information about the variety of religions and their conflicting views; more exposure to religious pluralism, one of whose effects is to undermine the claims of all the competing models to ‘official status’ and to privileged access to the truth:

Bailey (16, Yr. 11, Catholic school)

So what do you think happens after death?
I really don’t know. There’s so many different opinions on it. I don’t know what happens really. Just got to wait.

Rohan (15, Yr. 10, Catholic school)

What would you believe about God?
Well, I believe that there’s some type of God, but I don’t know because there’s always different religions, so which one is true? Just every one sounds like the most, you know that could be true, makes the most sense. But probably more scientific because there’s like actual fact, but then it’s just the way that people say, you know, even if there’s no fact of God, he still exists.

What happens after death, do you think?
I don’t know. There’s just too many possibilities. I just reckon you die and that’s about it.

Negative attitudes towards traditional doctrines and institutions
Rejection of conservative moral teachings, sometimes with strong negative feelings towards these doctrines and also the churches and Christianity:

Michael (22, Youth Voice)

I see Christianity really negatively because of the contest I have with its extreme stance on things like homosexual marriages, abortion, premarital sex. Things that I think are OK, churches that I have seen on TV seem to condemn. So in that sense I totally distance myself from them. I’m proud to say I have no religion, I don’t believe in them, I don’t affiliate with the church. And I yeah, I guess it’s pushed me away.

Justin (17, Year 11, Government school/Youth Voice)

You hear stuff like God says that there shouldn’t be condoms, and I go, ‘bullshit’. I lose a lot of respect for it and I don’t believe it.

Existential challenges
In the contemporary situation, when young people encounter major existential challenges to faith such as the problems of suffering and evil, they find little support for understanding the religious responses to these challenges:

Zoe (19, NEW/LO, Yr. 11, Young Women’s Collective)

Would you say you believed in God?
No.
Do you want to expand on that a little bit?
I don’t know what I believe in. I believe there’s – obviously – I believe that there is some type of after-life. I’m really not quite sure and I know that with the God, there is a reason why things do happen, but after tragically losing two of my very, very close friends, I don’t know what I believe any more. I know there’s reasons for everything happening and just stuff like that, but I still don’t see why these two friends had to go when they went, so I guess it’s my own beliefs at the moment. I know there’s something out there. I believe there is something that, you know, helps you along, but I’m not sure if it’s God or what it is.
You felt like you believed in God a bit more before your friends died?
Yeah.

Stuart (16, No denomination, Yr. 11, Protestant school, Youth Voice)

Also the effect of my uncle dying recently. The circumstances were unbelievable, he got married three weeks before he died, he became a quadriplegic and couldn’t speak. I think if there is a God how can he allow such circumstances to prevail. I mean there are religious arguments against that of course but I don’t believe any of them are sufficient to explain such atrocity.

What do you think happens after death?
I don’t know what I believe. I have wondered but I don’t know, it is a nice thought to believe there is a heaven, you can’t give any arguments for or against it. Hell – I don’t know, I think it is a bit extreme. If there is a God, I don’t see why he would allow such extreme inhumanity to exist in hell. Under Christian circumstances for example if you don’t admit all your sins to a priest then you are going to hell and I think that is a bit harsh. I think a lot of Christians or Catholics themselves don’t believe such things are entirely true. In English we have just studied one of John Donne’s poems and he says, ‘what if I admit all my sins and then do something and die although I was fully religious and followed God as much as I could. It is within human instincts to commit sins and should that instinct make me go to hell for the entire eternal life?’
That is one of the reasons that I don’t believe in God.

Transition to adulthood as a journey or quest

Asking questions does not begin at adolescence, but follows close upon the acquisition of language. Nonetheless, some matters are accepted without question in childhood, either because they are so taken for granted that no questions arise, or so firmly established in the child’s world that there is no desire to question them. Adolescence marks a change from the simple acceptance of childhood to a more active questioning.

In this QST spirituality type, questioning is the dominant note; sometimes it could be characterised as ‘questing’, an honest searching for what is true, for what can be trusted; and an unwillingness to believe in, or commit oneself to, anything which may be untrue or unworthy.

Sometimes this ‘questing’ is active; sometimes a mere disengagement from former beliefs without much concern to seek alternatives – an indefinite postponement of the search. But in some other cases, teenagers showed an awareness that this was not a good time to close off their search: perhaps because they had as yet neither the knowledge nor the life experience to make adequate decisions.

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30 Two members of the research team have the opportunity for daily observation of children’s questions: Andrew’s two children have been born since the project commenced, and Ruth has become a proud new grandmother.
31 Nonetheless, the evidence that we have seen would not support the often-heard generalisation of this experience to all young people: ‘Today’s youth are on a spiritual quest for (a deeper) meaning for their lives.’ Some undoubtedly are; many show no sign of being engaged in such a quest.
Katherine (15, Yr. 10, Protestant school) seems to be one of these. She shows in many of her responses that she is a genuine and honest seeker; her contentment in taking life as it comes and leaving some big decisions until later seems well considered:

Would you say you believed in God or something?
Yeah. I believe in something. Not specifically God, like, I’m still not quite sure about what I believe in. I certainly believe in something higher than that, whether it’s the Christian god or something else, I’m still not quite convinced. I’m still on a journey to finding what my true beliefs are.

Would you believe what’s in the Bible say actually happened, say the miracle stories, the resurrection of Jesus?
I don’t know … That whole bit I find a little bit far-fetched really … I certainly believe that this may have happened and I’m sure one day I will make a decision on what I believe but at the moment it would be a bit idealistic that Jesus just came along and all this wonderful stuff happens.

So what do you think about Jesus? What sort of person was he?
Whether he existed or not, will probably be back, and beliefs and stuff, trying to work out whether he was here, a collaboration of things that happened, I don’t really know. It’s a very big grey area.

What do you personally think happens after we die?
I certainly would believe that there’s an after-life. There’s something there because that really makes no sense to myself. I’d say that … I don’t necessarily believe in the whole heaven and hell situation where there’s a good place and a bad place where we all finish. I think that … I don’t know. I haven’t really decided to go searching as much as some others, simply because I don’t think at this stage of my life it’s most important that I make a decision of what I believe.

Jasmine (15, Yr. 10, Protestant school) had questions about how biblical religion fitted in with science:

What do you believe about God and Jesus?
I guess what it says that he came, he was here and stuff and one day we’ll be with him and all that.

OK, so you don’t have trouble with taking the Bible literally?
Sometimes I do because I’m just like ‘what about the dinosaurs and all the other things?’ I just don’t see sometimes how it all fits in and how people can just pass a book down through all these years and stuff.

Yeah but you definitely believe in God and … ?
Yeah, I guess. I try. [Laughing]

You try. So have there been times when maybe you’ve sort of doubted God or the church?
Yes, I have, you know. It’s still not really clear. I guess one day I will say to myself yes, I do [believe], or no, I don’t; but at the moment I do.

So those sorts of doubts that you’ve had, relate to science and religion and how the two fit together?
Yes.

Justin (17, Year 11, Government school/Youth Voice) found the lack of certainty ‘scary’, and did not seem confident of a later resolution:

Do you believe in a God or force of some kind?
I suppose in a way I sort of believe in a force, when I really think about it I really believe in a force.

So what do you think that would be like?
I don’t really try and comprehend it very much. I think about the present more and go out and do it. I think it is a scary thought. If you don’t believe in any of the religions and try and work out what is out there it is a pretty scary thought.

What do you think about life after death.

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32 Katherine’s spirituality was discussed at length in our first case-study report.
I think that once you are dead you are gone pretty much but I could be wrong. I don’t know what is out there and I don’t think anyone does.

For Anthony (17, Yr. 12, Protestant school), the question of God had less urgency:

*It’s something you explore, you think about, sometimes?*
Ah, not too deeply. I let other situations around me sort of different things, I don’t know, will make my mind up about a certain aspect of it or something ... And I tend to leave it at that, and not give it too much thought, I suppose one day I’ll sit down and prove it.

**The impact of the ‘information society’**
The ‘information explosion’ hits young people at an increasingly earlier age. Only a part of all this new information is mediated through schoolroom experiences; there’s also TV, the magazines and pulp fiction they read, gossip among their peers, the internet:

Alison (15, Spin Cycle)
I read this book *Armageddon* that said God is going to come back and everything, but you have to give up everything you own and your clothes and everything, and he’s coming back in 2017 or something. Whoever doesn’t give up all that stuff, they’re going to burn in hell. And this chip ... this chip is coming out, the microchip, the bar code, is a sign of the devil, when you buy things.

Does knowledge vary inversely with the depth of the information flood? Our teenagers appear to have considerably less detailed and less accurate religious knowledge than the generations before them. Was there more chance of digesting information into understanding when there was less of it? While a vastly increased quantity of information does nothing of itself to enhance knowledge, it certainly increases the resources for intellectual and emotional confusion:

Bailey (16, Yr. 11, Catholic school)
*So you believe in God then?*  
Yeah, I believe there must be some reason why we’re all here.  
*So what do you think God would be like?*  
Oh, I don’t know what he’d be like. Just really good. I don’t know, yeah.  
*What do you believe about Jesus?*  
Um, I don’t really know. I believe he existed and everything, but just some of the Bible stories I think have been exaggerating everything, but I think he was put here for a reason. I don’t know what reason that was, [or whether] he really made much difference, but yeah.

Alison (15, Spin Cycle)
... three different Bibles have three different stories and he’s like going how are you supposed to follow religion like that. It’s just like when you tell a story to someone, they’re going to turn around and exaggerate about the stories, so you tell it to the next person, so one Bible says there was no one there and one Bible says there were two angels there and another says there were a couple of people there.  
*So when it comes to say the Bible, what do you think about it?*  
I don’t know. I’ve had my ups and downs about it. I think there is somebody up there. I don’t know about God, there’s something inside me that says I don’t know, but there’s something inside me that says yes, a hundred percent.

**More autonomy in religious beliefs and practices at a younger age**
In earlier eras in the West, (and still today in traditional societies), young teenagers were more firmly inserted in the family matrix, and under greater parental control. To the extent that cultural ‘breaking out’ occurred, it did so in early adulthood. In varying degrees across societies, families have lost much of their former control over teenagers,
and even younger children. The accelerating rate, and the scope of this loss are features of the late modern period. At the same time, parental Abdication of control is evidence of the declining significance of religion. In some cases, socialisation into a religious worldview in early childhood seems to have been undertaken with sufficient seriousness to be ‘successful’ in engendering a religious identity; in other cases not; but there is frequently a marked discrepancy between the ‘worlds’ available to the child in primary socialisation (in early childhood) and the secondary socialisation taking place at adolescence. Berger and Luckmann have pointed out the consequences of this lack of consistency for the place religion is likely to assume in the person’s life: either a detachable component of one’s identity, relevant only in a few limited roles, or a mere collection of opinions having no influence on behaviour.

Justin (17, Year 11, Government school/Youth Voice)
Did your parents take you to church?
Yeah, we went to church. Didn’t believe in it.
How long did you go for?
Until I was about ten I think …went every week when I was a kid and gave up when I was about twelve.

Some of our informants recall that religious practices were viewed by parents as ‘good for’ the child, but not necessarily for themselves. Sometimes one parent did not participate; or after a time, both parents discontinued attendance at religious services.

Justin (17, Year 11, Government school/Youth Voice)
How come your family stopped going to church?
I think they just all gave up on it really.
About the same time?
Sunday morning we would all go to church, and I don’t know, I think mum and dad decided it had become almost unreal, they just didn’t believe in it.

Religion as an option for each individual
In Australian society and culture today (and more generally in Western societies, especially in Europe, but not in some parts of the USA), religious identification, belief and practice are often seen as ‘optional extras’ in a person’s life, rather than fundamentals of a common culture imposed by family or societal mores, at least on children and younger teenagers. Religion becomes ‘a private matter’.

Hence ‘individualism’ in the sense cited above from Berger and Luckmann – a certain ‘detachment’ from the religious component of one’s identity, and the possibility of choice between different subjective realities (‘worlds’) – was present in a high proportion of those we interviewed.

Instead of enjoying the status of ‘taken-for-granted’ truths which one does not think of questioning, religious beliefs belong more in the realm of opinion than of essential conviction – open questions for each individual to decide for him/herself.

Olivia (18, No denomination, Youth Voice)
My parents had us all christened or whatever it was, I’m not even sure if it was Catholic or Christian, but they said it was mainly just for the rest of their family because it was looked on better for them. They always told us from a very young age that we had a Bible in our house and to take it with a grain of salt and if you believe in it and want to do it by all means, but we are not going to tell you what to believe in.

Stuart (16, No denomination, Yr. 11, Protestant school, Youth Voice)
I was baptised and had the whole opportunity of being religious because my mum thought I should have the opportunity to do whatever I want to be, she didn’t say, ‘No I’m not going to baptise him because I don’t really want him to be religious’. Although my mum wasn’t religious herself I was baptised and left the option of being religious.

In these circumstances, the choice to adopt an opinion favourable or unfavourable to religion, to include or omit religion among one’s ‘lifestyle options’, is subject to a range of influences from the wider cultural environment, the school, the peer group etc. Anecdotal evidence suggests that in some Church secondary schools, student opinion rates religious belief and practice ‘uncool’, and nonconforming students are ridiculed.

A more profound scepticism?
The QST mode appears in some cases to go well beyond the age-old natural propensity for religious conversion, to the more radical scepticism characteristic of the late modern or postmodern era\(^{33}\) shaped by the ‘masters of suspicion’.\(^{34}\) in these cases, assent and commitment are withdrawn, suspended indefinitely. Have these young people ‘lost their faith’?

Here, we need to recall that a worldview to which an individual’s identity is attached, is neither created, modified nor abandoned in a merely intellectual process. Research on religious conversion has long indicated the teenage years as frequently a time of major intensification or change in religious commitment, but this is only the more dramatic fringe of a more widespread phenomenon, which can lead either towards or away from religion.

If a religious worldview was seriously internalised in primary socialisation, it is strongly linked affectively with primary significant others, and any threat to it will provoke an affective crisis. Nonetheless, such major changes on the part of people who were seriously committed do of course take place – not so much by a process of reasoning, but by embracing a new or modified worldview as an entire ‘Gestalt’, putting on a new identity, socially supported by a new ‘reference group’.\(^{35}\)

In the past, ‘loss of faith’ was associated more with the late teens or early twenties, and with the period of first exposure to a wider intellectual and social world at college or university. Now it appears to occur more commonly at an earlier stage, perhaps as early as the beginning of secondary school.

Students at this level can hardly avoid becoming aware that in the Australian cultural environment, the secular rationalist position is widely taken for granted as the conventional wisdom; and the reigning assumption is that the claims of religion have been disproved by science and philosophy, that adherence to religious beliefs, which cannot be ‘proved’, is ‘irrational’ and should embarrass any thinking person.

\(^{33}\) Every age has had its religious sceptics, in the West, the Enlightenment began a process of vulgarisation of scepticism that lasted three centuries; only the depth and universality of scepticism is distinctively ‘postmodern’.

\(^{34}\) A phrase coined by Paul Ricoeur (1970, p. 27) referring to Marx, Freud and Nietzsche, particularly to their critiques of religion.

\(^{35}\) If this seems implausibly irrational, compare it with the very similar way in which people adopt or change a particular package of word-processing software for their computer: most users have very little technical understanding of the way the program works, and choose an entire package on the basis of something practical (but perhaps quite trivial) which it ‘does for them’, or for quite extrinsic reasons such as price! Berger and Luckmann discuss these transformations of subjective reality most illuminatingly from a sociology-of-knowledge perspective under the heading of ‘alternation’ (1966, p.157).
In some of our informants, such a profound change as implied in the phrase ‘loss of faith’ may have occurred. We sensed no aftershocks of the emotional turbulence that would be expected to accompany a ‘de-conversion’; but there may be reasons for suppressing such memories – for example, if one’s religious past was recalled with embarrassment. In most of our informants who had moved away from an apparently observant traditional stance, there seems to be less at stake; the process sounds more like the gradual modification of religious opinions to accommodate new information or to concede territory to advancing doubt. This casts some doubt on the seriousness with which a religious worldview was internalised in the beginning, or indicates that the process of its erosion began at an even earlier age.

‘Loss of faith’? If faith is taken in the strong sense as implying beliefs that form the foundation of one’s view of the world and are incorporated into one’s sense of oneself – one’s identity, and expressed in a range of values and motives and a stable routine of practice – there may have been no faith there to lose.

Rarely, either, do we hear strong sceptical arguments; more often fragments or formulas that have ‘trickled down’ from sceptical intellectuals, and are now posted here and there like flags warning of thin ice.

Victoria (18, 1st Yr Uni, Youth Voice)

Would you say you draw on the ideas of a particular religion or philosophy?

Not really. My father is Anglican and my mother is Catholic and I went to an Anglican school for twelve years … I’m not really religious at all. I was christened Catholic … No, I’m not influenced that much by religion.

Do you pray?

No. I believe but I just don’t believe to the extent that I feel I need to worship.

Do you believe in a God?

Yes. I believe in God and Jesus and the Bible sort of thing.

What do you think about those?

I think they represent some good guidelines for the way society should run and things like that and morals but I think some people take it to the extreme. My grandmother goes to church a lot and as she has gotten older she has become more fanatical about it and she has gotten a bit strange about it actually like preaching to people and imposing her views on people. I don’t like people who force their religion and what they believe onto other people, I think other people should be allowed to make up their own mind. Yeah, some people take it too far. I was watching this documentary on the brain the other day and they were talking about some sorts of degenerative brain diseases with people being more fanatical about religions.

What do you think happens after death?

I don’t know. I would like to believe people go to heaven, I don’t know, I suppose it is the eternal question isn’t it, what happens after death. I don’t believe in hell, everyone goes to heaven.

A transition from TRAD/HI to TRAD/QST would be evaluated very differently according to one’s presuppositions: from a rationalist perspective in psychology/sociology/philosophy, it would be seen as liberation from neurosis, myth, oppression, patriarchy. The religiously committed, on the other hand, might view it as analogous to suspending eating till you are sure that the available food is appropriately non-fattening or free of harmful additives. Or it may simply be the path which most children from traditional backgrounds, growing up in the late modern world, find before their hesitant feet.

Sometimes a suspension of commitment shows signs of becoming, in adulthood, a permanent loss; however this is not always so; four of our interview informants who were TRAD/QST as teenagers moved back to a ‘medium’ level of commitment as adults,
and two to TRAD/HI; we lacked sufficient adults in our interview sample to identify a dominant outcome.

It may well be the case that those who have remained TRAD/HI from childhood into adulthood have not yet been fully exposed to the forces producing ‘alternation’, but likely will experience them later. Several informants in their late teens come to mind, whose religious beliefs and practices were anchored in very strong ethnic family structures. Unlike many of their peers, their family of origin is still their primary reference group. But there are potential future threats to this support structure: entry into a new peer group at university, or finding a partner who does not share both their ethnicity and their religion.

A mature TRAD/HI spirituality in adulthood cannot simply be ‘retained’ from childhood, but must be re-attained through the developmental struggle and in confrontation with adult challenges and real-world alternatives.

Amber (18, Brethren, Yr. 12, Young Women’s Collective), only 18 years of age but already a mother, presents a touching account of having passed through the TRAD/QST stage in her mid-teens, but through the experience of the birth of her daughter, entering upon a new, more mature, commitment to her faith:

I think the meaning or the purpose of life I guess is for me it’s just to sort of have faith in Jesus and just trust him and rely on him totally in my life, and wherever he wants to take me, just go with it and yeah, just sort of glorify God in everything I do or I guess try to, not that that works all the time, but yeah.

So has there been a particular time when you’ve really relied on God to help you make those choices or you feel that what you have done has sort of glorified him or?

Um, I think like the fact that I – when I had my daughter I was sort of going off the way a bit. I’ve always been a Christian but I’ve sort of been straying and that. At that time, I was totally blown away. Like, you wouldn’t even think that God was in my life, but he was, which is, you know. Yeah, when I had a baby I sort of just decided that’s it, time to just fully give myself back to God and I think that he was pleased with that, I hope, but it’s just a struggle every day to sort of be like him I guess.

Her witness prompts us to ask: who provides the clearer example of mature faith36 – Amber or Monique (17, Year 12, Catholic school, TRAD/HI, strong ethnic-religious family background)? But perhaps maturity in faith is not normally to be expected even in the early twenties (Westerhoff 2000), and we have too few older interview informants to provide evidence of the condition of faith in that more settled stage of young adulthood.

**HUM/HI, MED, LO**

Only four of the eleven informants with a humanistic worldview had had a ‘traditional’ outlook at an earlier life-stage. In a few cases, those who took a non-religious view of life were strongly, even angrily, opposed to religious beliefs and institutions, in the style associated with ‘secular humanism’. More often, these non-believers were tolerant of others’ adoption of religious beliefs; and in several cases, acknowledged that the humanistic values they prized were derived from religious sources and/or had been preserved and promoted by traditional religions and religious institutions. Generally,

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36 On the basis of this short excerpt, a reader might question Amber’s maturity, and suggest that an alternative explanation is more plausible: she has ‘strayed’ – begun to be liberated, but has then become an unwed mother; despite this she has apparently received acceptance and support within her very conservative church, so has responded by readopting its beliefs. But when one reads her whole interview, this interpretation seems to sell her short. (An example of how much richer and more satisfying are the data from extended interviews than from survey responses.) Not only do her beliefs seem sincere, but they appear to flow from her experience in a way that supports a more generous view of her personal and religious maturity.
they were less tolerant of New Age or superstitious practices; in their more intellectual approach, these practices lacked all credibility. Most looked to science to provide an alternative to religious explanations; some others were less concerned with theory. A few were also sceptical of the capacity of science to deal with profound questions, and remained open to a sense of mystery in life not adequately dealt with by either religion or science (as they understood them).

Our HUM informants were, with few exceptions, unhesitating in disclaiming belief in God and identification with a traditional religion, and were at pains to distinguish themselves from orthodox believers. Nor did they engage in religious or spiritual practices such as worship or private prayer, Yoga or meditation.

Zoe (19, No denomination, Yr. 11, Young Women’s Collective)

*Do you ever pray?*
No.

*Have you ever been involved in religion in any way like the church or …?*
No.

*OK, so would you say you believed in God?*
No.

Olivia (18, No denomination, Youth Voice)

I don’t know if there is one actual massive force out there that has got everything in mind, I can’t get my head around that.

*So you are not sure if there is a God or not?*
Personally I don’t believe in God, no.

*Have you ever been involved in a church or an organised religion?*
No.

Like most others with this outlook, Olivia, who had just completed Year 12 and was about to begin a business course at university, would prefer a more scientific approach - for example, regarding the afterlife:

*Do you have an idea of what might happen after death?*
I’d really like for there to be something but I don’t know, I can’t see more than it just being lights out. I am very interested in science and the whole workings of the universe and space and the way things are, how life is structured, I find it unbelievable. I like to be able to see some logic in things and evidence mainly.

*So you would rather see a scientific explanation?*
I don’t know, I just find it really hard to believe, I don’t know why. It is a lovely idea and I think it would be great because we have got so little time here as it is. I see it as a way people, especially in the dark ages when there was so little to look forward to in life and there were so many people living on that lower standard of living, it was just another comfort to have that even if life is all that bad we have got something to look forward to in the end. I don’t think it is a good outlook to have on life, to be awaiting this final thing, because you take too much for granted what happens now.

While not a believer herself, Olivia takes a tolerant view of religion. Perhaps because she has ‘dipped into’ several non-Christian religions in reading and practice, she emphasises the common ground between religions, and highlights teachings that affirm human goodness – a kind of ‘religion of humanity’:

*Would you say you would be influenced or draw on the ideas of a particular religion or philosophy?*
They have all basically got the same intrinsic good values to them, you know, if you treat others the way you want to be treated then things are going to work out OK. But I think Buddhism is the one that drew me to it mostly because they don’t preach
it as a religion, they say, ‘we’re not saying that this is the right thing to do, or that this is what you should do, or that if you are going to follow this you have to do it down to every letter’. More so that ‘this is what we think and we have found it a good way and if you can take one good thing out of what we have said and use it in your life or even if has just made you think in a different way then it has done some good’.

So it is not imposing?
That is a big part of it, because that was my problem with other religions apart from all the other contradictions that occur. Just treating people with a basic equality and the whole positive outlook on life and no matter how bad things are or how bad people are that we have all got good in us.
So humanity isn’t all evil?
Yeah, no matter how bad it looks, even the worst people, mass murderers, can be the best family people. We are basically good creatures it is just what influences us, our experiences and so many other different variables can make us what we are.

Stuart (16, No denomination, Yr. 11, Protestant school, Youth Voice) also seeks more scientific explanations, but takes a ‘live and let live’ attitude to other’s belief in religion:

Would you say you draw on the ideas of a particular religion or philosophy?
No … [but] my grandparents, my Nan especially, she goes to church every Sunday like a good Catholic.
So you are open to other people believing whatever they want?
Yeah, and I am not going to deplore anything that other people are going to say.
So you are not sure if there is a God or not but you just don’t care?
My personal opinion is that I don’t think there is a God but if other people say there is I am not going to say to them that there isn’t.

Anna (15, Yr. 11, Catholic school) particularly opposes the idea of a single, dominant, God:

You see, the thing about God is I don’t believe there’s a ‘God’ god. Like, all these religions, there are different gods, but I think the Catholics and the Christians seem to say that there’s one God and it’s only Jesus but they don’t look that there’s Hinduism and Buddhism and they’ve got all their different gods, so I think there’s a god for each person. Like, each person has their own god and what they make it, but I don’t really believe in like Jesus type stuff. I believe there was Jesus, but I don’t believe that he is the almighty God. I believe that each person has a God. So, two people inside like.
OK, and so it’s who they believe in themselves that’s important?
Mm. Like, my friend is a Mormon and I went to the church once and they seem to say well, this is one God, he’s there for us, but there might not be one god. For all we know there could be a different god, and it’s just like – I know everyone goes to church and stuff and they believe in God, but what’s the point? He hasn’t like shown us what he can do yet, like.

Many of this group were christened as infants, and perhaps attended a church in early childhood, but do not consider that they were ever real believers. Anna still identifies herself as Catholic, but in a limited sense:

So have you ever been to church?
I went to church. I went to a Catholic school in like year 2 and stuff. My dad’s a Catholic and when I was born, because I’m a first child, my mum’s grandpa, my mum’s poppa, he didn’t really like the whole religion idea, so the compromise between my mum and my dad was I be Christian.
Right.
And now my sister is Catholic, so yeah.
So do you think of yourself as a Christian or do you think of yourself as a … ?
Well, I don’t really know what a Christian is. I don’t see the difference between Christian and Catholic, so I just say I’m a Catholic because I’ve been brought up in a Catholic family.

Yes.

But we stopped going to church when we moved to Sydney and stuff and now I go to church here [at her Catholic school] – like the big Masses. I wouldn’t say I’m a church freak, like, church, every Sunday, everyone get up and go to church.

No, no.

I believe there’s more to life than praying and worshipping someone else.

Our humanistic informants are particularly sceptical about the truth of Bible stories;

Anna:

*So when was it that you … I mean, you used to go up to about year two. Do you think you started to sort of question that back then?*

No.

*It was sort of later on that your ideas sort of developed?*

Well, after we … after in year 2 we moved to Sydney and I still did like religion and [Christian] living and stuff, but I was in a public school and they had like special little classes and we just went to that to like occasionally to keep up on it all but I don’t think it was until early last year that I actually started to question it all. There’s like the Bible. They say that he walked across water and stuff; at our holiday house, they have this grassy stuff and the water goes over and it looks like you’re walking on water.

Yeah.

And there’s like Moses parting the Red Sea and they found chariots and stuff in a swamp so I don’t know. Maybe I would if they had actual proof. I’m sure they do have proof, but …

Yes. So it’s the miracles that made you wonder how true it all was?

Yes.

When asked if any of the religion studies at her Catholic school are relevant to her, she finds learning about other cultures and religions useful, but does not accept the Bible as a guide for life:

*In terms of sort of justice and ethics and that sort of thing, are there things sometimes that are relevant? To life.*

That you do in religious studies?

Yeah, there is because we’re learning to accept different cultures and religions and stuff but I think it helps to respect them and stuff more. Not so much learning that wow, he saved a blind man. That’s not really relevant to like me, because the Bible is a book, and that’s all it is basically. Like, people use it as a guide for life. It’s not a guide for life. You can’t like let a religion tell you what is life and stuff. It’s your life and you’ve got to live it the way you want to live it.

Katie (14, Yr. 10, Catholic school) believes in some kind of ‘higher power’; like most of the others of this type, she sees Jesus as an enlightened but merely human figure:

*OK, so do you ever pray?*

No. I don’t.

*No. Do you believe in God or a god?*

I believe that there’s a higher power of some sort, but I’m not a religious person.

*OK. What do you think the higher power might be like?*

I think it’s understanding but at the same time I can see both points of view.

Yeah. OK. But you don’t feel the need to sort of try and pray to it or anything like that?

No. It’s going to see the real you, anyway, so …

*OK. So do you ever go to a church or like the local parish or anything like that?*

When we basically go to school, we have to go, but usually, no.
Yeah, OK. So when you have to go for school, how do you find that?
Usually very boring …
OK. So what do you believe about Jesus then?
I don’t really know. I just think that he was a man that people looked up to because he could relate to them and they understood what he meant.
And what do you think happens after death?
Um, I don’t really know because I’ve never had anyone close to me die. So I haven’t had a lot of experience of death, but I guess our soul gets used for other people.
Oh, OK, so like reincarnation?
Yeah, similar, but not our body. Our body goes somewhere and our spirit lives on.

Steven (18, Yr. 12, Catholic school, Youth Voice) is similar:

I went to a Catholic boys school and I never believed in God and anything like that … I used to go by the doctrine of the whole period of life means nothing. You die in the end. So enjoy the time you’ve got … but I guess, I have found so much joy out of helping other people so that’s more my philosophy.
You mentioned to went to a Catholic school, have you, tell me anything else about your contract with any organised or institutional religion?
If I’m kind of pushed I really black out what that stuff represents. I really don’t believe the story of Jesus Christ. Right, lets take Catholic religion, the stuff that they are talking about like goodness, and goodwill towards men and stuff like that, it’s all good stuff, you know.

Lisa (21, Youth voice) retains a residual belief in God; unlike most others in this category, she had a traditional outlook in her childhood and teens:

Would you say you draw on the ideas of a particular religion or philosophy?
Not really. I was educated as a Catholic school but I believe that a child shouldn’t be forced into a religion until they are old enough to choose. I didn’t have the choice to go to a Catholic school, I was put in one, I think each to their own, but I think maybe I’d be more religious if I had had the choice to decide. I believe in God but I don’t follow or practice or a religion.
When you say you believe in God, do you believe in the main Catholic beliefs?
No, not really, because I think some of those beliefs are very anti our current day situation and it is just unreasonable to expect some of those things.

Brett (22, Youth Voice), is not only ‘cool with’ friends who believe, but has a positive appreciation of the ‘good human values’ contained in traditional religions and carried by religious organisations:

I was baptised in the Church of England, or something like that, basically because my parents wanted me to be able to have the choice. A lot of my friends come from a wide variety of religions and I find it interesting to talk to them about how they feel.
When you talk about your values, would you say you have been influenced by a particular religion or philosophy when you decide those sorts of things?
Not a particular religion no. Next year I’m working in a Catholic boys’ school which is so foreign to me it’s not funny, and I have serious ethical and moral worries about going and teaching in a place like that. And the flip side of that is that there could be a kid there just like me who has been sent there because his parents think it’s really good there. I think me being there for that kid would be really important. There is no religious backing to the way I think or the way I do things. . . . At this stage I don’t believe in a higher force or anything like that but I am totally cool with anyone who does, but I can’t convince myself that it is real for me. Unfortunately the more study I do the less I tend to believe that it’s legitimate, but that’s me … I think there is something in Jung and Freud but I don’t think any of them got it right. Catholicism, Muslim religions, Buddhism, I think there is something in all of it. Like this is a Christian organisation and I’m not Christian, but the base values of the organisation, Christian values of honesty, caring, respect and responsibility, I’m cool with that
because I think they are good human values. I guess for me I had this point when I said, ‘I’m not a Christian, what am I doing?’ But I think those sorts of things are the sorts of values we try and push through whatever it is we are doing.

Chris (20, Youth Voice) accepts values, originally Christian, which have become general societal values, but feels no personal need for the beliefs formerly associated with those values:

I don’t think that I have adopted any sort of religious values necessarily except for societal values that are derived from those religious values … To be honest I don’t feel that there is a void in my life that I need to be explained by [religion]. That’s kind of what I see religion as, answering questions for people or filling voids in people’s lives, something like that. Perhaps it’s a little bit cynical but that’s my view of religion and I don’t see it needs to play a role for me.

Fiona (18, Year 12, Youth Voice) was one of our most intellectually gifted informants. While tolerant of dissenting views, she would like to be consistently rational and scientific, and provides a remarkably honest and searching attempt to work out intellectually, and embrace affectively, the implications of living without religious belief. With equal honesty, she wrestles with a sense that science may not (yet) have all the answers either. She confesses embarrassing inconsistencies in her own outlook: she is haunted by a sense of the beauty in religion, and tempted even to believe in astrology because of synchronicities which do not seem attributable to coincidence:

I’ve got these photos, I’ll lay them out, so could you tell me which one says the most about your life and why?
It’s funny actually, that one, [a photo of a stained glass window] … I’m not religious in any way at all; I’m really atheistic but I don’t know, just how it is beautiful … Yeah, it kind of upsets me a bit, religion, in that some of it I just think is so beautiful and the tradition of it and having that community link and sometimes I feel like I am missing out because I don’t have an ethnic background in my family. We don’t have any traditions that have come through, Italian or Vietnamese descent or anything, we are pretty boring Australians that don’t believe in anything. And so a lot of the things I want are not based on tradition they are based on necessity, but I just really want to have a nice safe place and have nice clothes and have a nice group of people, I just want that security. But sometimes I get the urge to have a big quest and figure out what it all means; but I think I am too practical.

Does your family belong to a church or religious group of any kind?
My dad is Church of England and my mum is Catholic but neither of them practise. Apart from going to church at Easter when we were younger, we have had very little religion, a lot of it is based just on technology or morals. I think my mum is a bit into feminism and clinical research stuff but it’s pretty bare bones. So I don’t believe in any religion or practise one and I just don’t really believe in a higher power.

So you don’t believe in a God or a presence or whatever it might be?
It’s kind of hard. Sometimes I just believe astrology, which is terrible, like I read my stars and read things about my birth date because it’s just so spookily accurate about me and I go, ‘there must be something’.

So that would make you more inclined to believe in the force?
I do believe that there are things that aren’t explained at the moment by science but I believe that doesn’t mean there isn’t a scientific explanation – the idea that it’s just genes or chemical reactions that make us who we are. I don’t really think like there is this other thing like a soul in me, like I’m pretty sure it is all coming from me and how I’ve been brought up and just that’s who I am and that it is all physical and explained by science. But I don’t think that means that you can really define it by science; science created it but you still act, like emotions and human thinking and stuff, you can’t really explain how people will act. So no, I don’t think I really do believe in something else directing me. I think a lot of it is all internal. I believe in having your own faith and what you think and that’s fine and I respect my friends so much who believe in a power; but I actually can’t comprehend how they would think
that it is true. I just don’t think organised religion is really beneficial and don’t really believe anything but science. 

*So you are saying that nothing can sort of really guide us and that sort of thing. But what about astrology then?*

I don’t know, I think I’m probably looking for guidance just as much as anyone. I think that it’s probably not true to say I don’t think that anything guides us, I don’t think that there is something directing what happens but I think that people believing that probably does direct them to an extent. So all the time it doesn’t actually matter if it is true or not it. It’s what a person believes and then how they go about acting upon that. Like if you believe that there is a God and then you say, ‘because God thinks that I should act in this way’ and you do, then that’s directing your life and that’s your guidance. But me going, ‘I don’t think there is a God but I think that I should act in this certain way’, then so you are still acting with guidance and the whole society and community and friendship and interactions from people that guides us and that’s really important, and science can’t really do that. So there is something more in that but it is not coming from something else it is just coming from people … I think sometimes that emptiness of belief, the fact that I don’t believe that anything is affecting me and I’m just a random reaction and part of the statistical bell curve, like whatever I do isn’t actually me it is just some random thing, then it is a good feeling because it varies on something pressuring me, I can do whatever I want to.

*Do you think that is how it is?*

I think it is, yeah, I don’t believe that there is anything else, I think it is all down here. I can understand people having a religion and following a faith because they are lost and are searching for that understanding and they want something to guide them. But I don’t know, I think I am happy in that total lack of guidance … The fact that society accepts religion, it is kind of instinctive that you respect people’s religion and their faith – I don’t go around telling my Catholic friends that they are tossers and full of shit because sometimes I may doubt their belief; I don’t have that kind of instinctive derision about it.

Brett (22, Youth Voice), quoted above on another theme, has an original way of expressing his sense that there are more questions/mysteries than answers:

> You said it is interesting to be a part of something bigger than yourself. What did you mean by that?

I like things that don’t have answers and life and the world and all that to me doesn’t have an answer. It has got a lot of possibilities but no definite answers, so hence I like that idea there is something else there. And I’m yet to find any one way that constructs it all, which is why I don’t subscribe to a particular religion.

Jessica (18, Year 12, Youth Voice) is interested in the imaginative dimensions of religion because of her own focus on art and literature:

> What about a particular religion or philosophy? Would you say the ideas of something like that have influenced you?

I don’t really have a religion but I guess I am really interested in ancient times and mythology and stuff, I know that influences my artwork, and I am into fantasy stuff. Books, I guess I am pretty influenced by books, I have a lot of books …

*Do you ever pray?*

No.

*Have you ever been involved in an organised religion, say a church, religious group or something like that?*

No.

*Have you read the Bible?*

I’ve tried reading the Bible. I used to have a baby one, I tried reading it but couldn’t understand it really I guess. I want to read it because it would be interesting to learn about what people’s religions are and different stuff like that but I haven’t got around to it yet.
Do you believe in a God?
No, I don’t think so, I can’t explain it, I just don’t.
You don’t because it is too hard to believe or?
I think maybe just the fact that evolution is more convincing.
So you think there is a scientific explanation for things rather than there being a force?
I think there could be.

A significant number of our non-religious informants displayed a really striking ethical drive: strong social conscience and extensive, generous involvement in individual and group activities for the benefit of others. The ‘Youth Voice’ program drew people with this outlook from all over the country, so we encountered, in our interviews with 19 of the participants in that program, a high concentration of individuals who displayed this admirable characteristic. However, we cannot determine from this limited sample whether the association between the humanistic worldview and the altruistic ethic is causal or coincidental. See the extensive discussion and examples in Chapter 5 below.

Conclusion
In Chapter 1, we highlighted some major themes in current writing about spirituality which influenced our approach to this phase of research, and our expectations about what we would find. We begin this brief survey of our conclusions from this phase of the project by reflecting on those initial orientations.

1) Growing up religious does make a difference
Wuthnow’s emphasis on the significance of ‘growing up religious’ was borne out in our research in two ways: most of our informants were still ‘growing up’, and the developments in their spirituality as they passed through adolescence became the most absorbing focus of our research. The patterns of change in spirituality across these developmental stages were probably our most significant discoveries.

But ‘growing up religious’ also showed its significance in a second sense, the one intended by Wuthnow: that if religion is part of one’s life as one grows up, some of its effects remain even if many beliefs and practices are later abandoned. Among adults and older teenagers, we have pointed out many differences between those who were TRAD/HI in childhood and those who had little religion: differences in later spirituality type, in continuing religious/spiritual beliefs and practices, in attitudes to society and civic participation.

2) Spiritual consumers shopping in the New Age marketplace? Maybe
We did not find, in our sample, as many New Age or eclectic types as we had expected on the basis of the writings of Roof, Wuthnow, Giddens and others. But we hesitate to conclude that this line of thinking is unfounded, or does not apply in Australia. The research supporting the ‘marketplace’ hypothesis has surveyed older informants than our sample. We suspect there are probably more Eclectic and New Age types in older age-groups, especially the late 20s and 30s. Our survey will show whether this is the case.

More of our informants than we initially expected were TRAD, but then 44 of our 71 interviews were with students or teachers in church-affiliated schools, so we should not have been surprised. We anticipate quite a different picture in the general population. We note that despite the high proportion who were TRAD/HI in childhood, most of the teenagers were QST, and it seemed unlikely that they would return to TRAD/HI spirituality in adulthood.

The HUM spirituality types seem to us very significant, despite the modest number found in our interview sample: we expect that we will find a much higher proportion of
them in the general population, and that they will be even more numerous in the future than now, because the structures producing TRAD/HI children are rapidly eroding.

3) ‘Belief without belonging? It’s hardly belief
We certainly found numerous cases of young people from TRAD backgrounds who had ceased to participate in religious group activities, who identified scarcely or not at all with a community of fellow-believers, but who still retained some ‘beliefs’. The ‘institutional’ dimension of religion is notoriously unpopular with youth, and the first item to be jettisoned as they ‘lighten ship’; but we also found abundant evidence to support the sceptical view we expressed in Chapter 1 of the significance of the so-called ‘beliefs’ which remained. We have pointed out in the intervening chapters that in many cases these ‘beliefs’ had little purchase in the person’s life, and fitted better into the category of ‘opinions on religious topics’.

4) Luckmann’s structural explanation of the contemporary situation of religion helps
Our little study was hardly an appropriate test-bed for a grand theory of late modernity! In any case, large-scale theories are ultimately neither comprehensively proved or disproved, but are judged by how useful they are in helping us make sense of our data. We have made use of Luckmann’s perspective at a number of points, and found it helpful in interpreting our findings – especially those which seem to reflect the peculiar situation of religion in the world of late modernity. Its strength lies in its identification of structural changes which tend to marginalise ‘church-oriented religiosity’. We will keep Luckmann’s and other theories under review as we proceed with the analysis of our survey data.

5) Comparing Australian and American teenagers
We have the opportunity to compare and contrast findings from qualitative interviews with teenagers between ‘The Spirit of Generation Y’ (SGY) and Christian Smith’s ‘National Survey of Youth and Religion’ (NSYR) in the USA.

Conveniently, the recently published book reporting the NSYR study, Soul Searching (Smith 2005) includes a chapter summarising the themes emerging from lengthy face-to-face interviews during 2003 with 267 teenagers aged between 13 and 18 in 45 states who had previously completed a survey interview by telephone. A parent or guardian of the teenager had also completed a survey interview.

Our purpose here is not to summarise or review the NSYR interview findings in general, but to compare and contrast findings from the interview phase of the two studies where this serves to illuminate our own conclusions.

a) Teenage religion is conventional rather than conflictual
NSYR: US teens are not in a crisis state as far as identity or religion is concerned; their religiosity is predominantly conventional, very similar to that of their parents, and is not in conflict with that of parents, friends or other adults.

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37 Chapter 4 ‘God, religion, whatever’, pp. 118-171.
38 The general statements in these summaries, which for simplicity we have not hedged about with limiting and qualifying clauses, are not intended to be understood as proclaiming universals true of every interviewee without exception; rather they state general trends, majority positions, to every one of which there are exceptions within the data.
39 The NSYR telephone survey was conducted with persons aged 13-17; by the time of the follow up face-to-face interviews, some of the eldest had turned 18.
40 The NSYR was a heavyweight study funded by a major foundation. The interviews were conducted with a sub-sample of the random national sample used in the survey. Consequently, the results from the large number of very long interviews in the NSYR have a stronger claim than our own Phase One interviews to be considered representative of the population.
SGY: Parents still strong influence; but more signs of tension between TRAD/HI parents and QST children.

b) Religion is seen positively, as good for people, therapeutic
NSYR: US teenagers reflect the strongly positive view of religion which is more general in American culture; religion is good for people, helps them become better persons, and enables them to achieve what they want; Smith labels this a ‘therapeutic’ view of religion.
SGY: Australian culture is more ambivalent towards religion; TRAD/HI teenagers reflect their tradition’s positive view; others are less positive or have mixed feelings; some whose spirituality is TRAD/QST or HUM express sceptical or hostile attitudes; humanistic spirituality is much more evident in the Australian than in the US sample.

c) Lack of religious knowledge
NSYR: Both Christian and Jewish teenagers appeared ‘religiously inarticulate’: surprisingly unfamiliar with the language and basic teachings of their tradition; Smith describes their religious knowledge as meagre, nebulous and frequently fallacious.
SGY: Our shorter interviews were unable to probe so far into informants’ detailed knowledge of their tradition, but transmitted the same impression of vagueness; very few informants clearly expressed any religious teaching or belief.

d) Strongly individualistic and relativistic approach to religion
Individualism and relativism have slightly different meanings, but overlap in practice. Individualism subordinates religion to the judgment and preferences of each person; relativism denies that there are any absolute truths of values: there are ‘no right or wrong answers’; whatever ‘works for’ a particular person is fine for that person and should be accepted by others.

NSYR: Smith describes among his informants a constellation of what he calls ‘politically correct’ attitudes to religion: openness and tolerance to all views; a wariness about any absolute truths or values or positions likely to be contentious; individuals can decide only for selves; one cannot evaluate or judge other persons, or their values or views of the world. He notes that US youth are schooled from kindergarten to tolerate and accept all cultural differences; they report that teachers in public schools avoid discussing religion.
SGY: Religion was seen by our informants as optional – a matter for each individual to decide as seems best; no one should impose their preferred religious views, values or practices on anyone else; parents should not decide for children.

These themes emerge very strongly from both studies, with no notable differences of emphasis; they seem strongly entrenched in both cultures, especially in the youngest age-groups.

It seems ironic that this statement of the limits which should be placed on religion was the strongest and clearest ‘doctrine’ we encountered in our interviews, featuring clear ideas which received broad agreement, expressed in strong norms and rules for behaviour, and backed up by the sanction of strong social disapproval!

Few of the traditional religious organisations would agree with this highly individualistic and relativist position; some of our TRAD/HI members did not mention these limitations, but a number of others appeared to endorse them, at least in part.

The source of this doctrine of religion’s limits is clearly secularist humanism rather than any traditional religion. The supremacy of individual autonomy, tolerance of competing religions to the point of ‘indifferentism’, and relativism are key values of liberal
humanism. Their prominence, even among those who still profess a traditional spirituality, testifies to a degree of success on the part of Humanism in ‘evangelising’ religious believers. Moreover, this seems to be the case not only in Australia, but also apparently among US youth – although there, the source does not appear to be so clearly recognised.

e) Religion’s loss of importance
NSYR: although teenagers give lip service to the notion that religion is important, this is not echoed in their actions; it exists more in the background, is not something one enthuses about. It is possible for a person to be too religious; this is a danger to be avoided.
SGY: We cited evidence of a similar lack of importance of religion even among those who espoused a religion.

f) Little idea of a quest, or of engaging in spirituality rather than religion.
NSYR: Smith was quite emphatic that the teenagers interviewed did not see themselves as on a quest for the meaning of life, were not given to experimenting with spiritualities other than their own, or with New Age or esoteric paths, and could not even comprehend the notion of pursuing a spirituality rather than, or in opposition to, conventional religion. This makes reassuring reading, given our comparable findings.
SGY: The informants in our Pilot Study responded similarly to explicit questions on spirituality. And from our main interviews, we have reported similar findings on New Age and Eclectic spiritualities. However we believe the same caveat should be applied to both the US and Australian studies: the spiritual market may be in full cry amongst older young people.
4. Influences on Youth Spirituality

The second aim of our project is to explore possible influences shaping the forms of spirituality described in the previous chapter. So we turn now to examine the social and cultural factors which may influence spirituality among teenagers and ‘emerging adults’. Overall, immediate contextual factors such as spirituality within the peer network, and that of the family (particularly within some ethnic groups, and particularly that of the mother) appear likely to be the most important influences. But broader cultural factors independent of both family or school may also exert some influence, especially on non-religious spiritualities. It is also important to note that several key developmental stages and transitions seem to be involved in a complex dynamic during the teenage to young adult years.

The Environing Culture and Youth Spirituality

This section considers the ways in which broader socio-cultural factors might be influencing youth spirituality. The current generation of youth and young adults has only ever known a society characterised by the cultural plurality of late modernity, increased anxiety about personal and environmental risk, precarious employment, rampant consumerism, greater individualisation and changing patterns of dependence on parents (Furlong & Cartmel 1997; Harris 2004). It is important, however, to resist facile generalisations about young people (see Smith et al. 2004). While Australian youth are often characterised as individualistic, afraid of commitment, narcissistic and secular-minded, this is not uniformly the case. The aforementioned features of present-day society will influence the spirituality of informants, but not to the same degree, and as we will see below, immediate contextual factors seem more likely to exert the greatest influence on spirituality. Nonetheless, it is important to consider the interrelationship between spirituality and the wider culture within which young people are raised.

As noted above, we consider spirituality to involve both an ethos and a worldview. Given the largely secular character of Australian society, we sought to investigate the level of influence the traditional source of spirituality – organised religion – has on our informants’ worldviews, especially among those we classified as having a humanistic spirituality.

Previous research suggests that in Australia, only 14 per cent of all people in their twenties attend religious services at least once a month compared with 35 per cent of people seventy years of age or older (Hughes 2001). While the implications of this trajectory are obvious (most young Australians will not think of themselves as religious), we are also interested in the impact lessening ‘exposure … to traditional religious networks’ (Hirst 2003, p. 88) has on the formation of a worldview. Hirst (2003, p.87) notes that until fairly recently, ‘there was a higher likelihood people [irrespective of their own religious beliefs] would have some sort of network connection with the Church or church attenders’. Thus, the influence of religion extended well beyond churchgoers themselves. This is certainly not the case in contemporary Australian society, and among young people in particular. Hughes et al. (2000) note that since the 1960s, both children and adults began to drop out of church in much larger proportions than in previous decades.

Predictably, among those we classified as having a ‘traditional’ worldview (TRAD), that is, one grounded in a traditional world religion, coupled with an ethos that was ‘HI’

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41 ‘Influence’ is used in a loose sense; our interview data are not suitable for a rigorous analysis of cause and effect; we report only on associations we have observed between spirituality and other variables, which seem likely to exert some shaping force.
(regular church attendance etc.), organised religion – religious teaching, scripture, family and peer attendance – served as the main influence on their spirituality.

But what about those with humanistic worldviews? Religion was not a major or abiding influence. So what was influencing the spirituality and way of life of these young people? Was it a belief in the infallibility of science and reason, secular philosophies, political creeds? Or is it something less well articulated? Is it, as recent theories of spirituality might suggest, drawn from a range of spiritual, religious and other resources? What about popular culture?

We were certainly interested in the ways in which popular culture – music, TV, movies – influenced young people. We found that rather than exerting any meaningful influence on their spirituality, or their way of life more generally, cultural objects and products, such as music, worked in the other direction, serving mostly as identity markers. This was true across the entire corpus of interviews.

For example, 15-year-old Alison, a participant in Spin Cycle, a juvenile justice diversion programme, was asked to nominate her favourite kind of music. She said:

Mm, hip-hop. I don’t know, pretty much the same thing ...
Why?
... Because they speak the truth about what the world’s really like and yeah, I don’t know, they just say the truth whereas everyone else is singing about love and everything.

16-year-old Isaiah, also a Spin Cycle participant, identified hip-hop, or rap (African-American street music) as speaking the ‘truth’:

I’m more into the rap, hip-hop sort of stuff. I listen to a bit of NWA [Niggers with Attitude], which is an old school hip-hop group that have broken up. A lot of Doctor Dre and shit like that mainly. A lot of rap.
OK, and what is it you like about rap?
Mainly the lyrics, what they have to say, especially Tupac he had a lot to say that actually did relate to this world. Like, it wasn’t just you know, ‘Kill the niggers,’ and all this sort of shit. It was actually real shit to listen to.

As these quotes illustrate, music is more about personal expression, leisure, taste and identity than influence. Other cultural products – movies, magazines – performed the same function.

If popular culture was not influential, what was? The secularity of Australian public culture would suggest that a belief in science might have considerable explanatory power for the young people with whom we spoke. A number did mention that they based their worldview on scientific reasoning and a rejection of religious explanations. The most sophisticated expression of this came from 18-year-old Fiona, who had recently finished year 12 and was participating in Youth Voice, a week-long program devoted to the development of civic consciousness and skills among youth. She said:

I do believe that there are things that aren’t explained at the moment by science but I believe that doesn’t mean there isn’t a scientific explanation, the idea that it’s just genes or chemical reactions that make us who we are. I don’t really think like there is this other thing like a soul in me, like I’m pretty sure it is all coming from me and how I’ve been brought up and just that’s who I am and that it is all physical and explained by science. But I don’t think that means that you can really define it by science, like science created it but you still act, like emotions and human thinking and stuff, you can’t really explain how people will act. So no, I don’t think I really do
believe in something else directing me. I think a lot of it is all internal. I believe in having your own faith and what you think and that’s fine and I respect my friends so much who believe in a power but I actually can’t comprehend how they would think that it is true. I just don’t think organised religion is really beneficial and don’t really believe anything but science.

In like manner, Stuart, a 16-year-old participant in the Youth Voice program noted:

Although I have had the opportunity to be religious I have never really seen such power to my mind. I am kind of a scientific person in a way. I don’t deplore religion at all, I think people’s opinions are fine, they should have their opinions. I don’t believe there isn’t something but I don’t really believe there is a God in a way.

While scientific-type explanations were a theme amongst those who we classified as having a humanistic worldview, these were rarely sophisticated, nor were they as widespread or as all-encompassing as one might expect.

What was apparent from the interviews, however, was the pervasiveness of a type of individualism – a point that requires some explanation. According to English sociologist Anthony Giddens (1991), one of the most notable features of late modernity is the radically different way in which identities are formed. In traditional, premodern societies individual choices were largely prescribed by existing traditions and customs (Gauntlett 2000). In the late modern era, however, social traditions, traditional ways of living and traditional institutions have been disrupted. Individuals are less constrained by their social class or traditional gender patterns, have greater freedom of choice with regards to employment and have far greater physical mobility. Harris (2004, p.4) observes that:

[Individuals] … are required to make choices and create life trajectories for themselves without traditional patterns or support structures to guide them. They must develop individual strategies and take personal responsibility for their success, happiness, and livelihood.

Reporting on his study of the religiousness of American youth, Christian Smith (2005, p.143) makes the claim that, ‘American youth … are nearly without exception profoundly individualistic, instinctively presuming autonomous, individual self-direction to be a universal human norm and life goal’.

Evidence of individualism – as an approach and orientation to life – is strikingly apparent when one reads the interview transcripts. By way of illustration, 21-year-old Lisa (TRAD/LO, no denomination) was interviewed at the Youth Voice conference:

Do you think in terms of your goals that your achievement depends on chance or forces beyond your control or more on your own effort?
I think it is your own effort. You are not going to be handed a job, it’s not luck of the draw, like they are not going to pick a name out of a hat, it will be that you go through an interview process. They will either pick the person who is best qualified or it will be a connection, you know, you have been recommended to the job by someone else in the same area. I think it is your own effort, whether you get to know people or you have got great credentials.

Another Youth Voice participant was Steven, 18-years-old (HUM/HI, no denomination). He said the following in response to one of the evocative pictures he was shown:

The tracks that show possibilities [chose picture of railway tracks]. I’d just think so endless possibilities you know, I guess that’s my life, I plan on doing 1000 things. And so there is all these tracks going off everywhere you know all these great possibilities. Um just because it looks like a real adventure and sometimes I guess I
get a bit bogged down, but most of the time my life is an adventure because that is what I want it to be and it’s exciting, going back on this all the possibilities just so exciting and I guess I am working towards this adventure, ‘cause I am living it.

Here are two younger informants on the same theme:

Gemma (TRAD/QST, Catholic, aged 15, Year 10 in a Catholic school)
No, I don’t give into peer pressure but just like, I don’t know how to explain it. Like, my parents if they do something then I think they’re my parents and I’m supposed to do the opposite to them. You get what I mean?
Oh, OK. Sort of like because they’re older and what not?
Yeah.
You want to just stand out from them?
Yeah, like they’re all going on and my whole family is going on the family trips to the beach or something I would be like no, I don’t want to go, youse can go and then I’d prefer to hang out with my friends and do what they do. Like, say we’re all going to this hang out at someone’s house then I’d prefer to do that and not what my family does.

Adam (TRAD/LO, No denomination, 15, Year 10 in a Protestant school)
Why choose the French horn?
Because not many people play it and I want to be an individual.

Such sentiments were expressed not only by the middle-class, socially engaged and well-educated informants. Zoe was a 19-year-old kindergarten assistant (NEW/LO, no denomination). This is her response on being shown the evocative photo of a girl on a cliff:

OK, I picked this one because this reminded me of when I went to Central Australia, a year 11 camp and it reminded me when I was there all the open spaces and how sort of free it felt, to be able to climb all those rocky hills and also I picked this because that looks like that girl is going for an adventure and I feel that my life is one big adventure, like a roller coaster and I’m along for the ride and take things as they come. Yeah, I just picked it because it looks like something I would probably do because you really don’t know what’s out there. You really have to take one thing at a time, take it as it comes and that’s why I picked that one, because it’s most about me, because that’s the sort of person I am. I’ll take things as they come and life’s one big adventure.

Obviously, the idea that life is an ‘adventure’ and holds infinite possibilities is a sentiment commonly expressed by teens and young adults, moving away from the constraints of school and dependency on their parents. What is important here, however, is the belief that it is the individual who must take responsibility for, and has ownership of, the way his or her life turns out. This was true for even the most marginalised young people with whom we spoke. Nathan was a 17-year-old (EMB, no denomination) involved in Spin Cycle. His answers tended to be brief, but we gained the impression from his interview that it was up to him to make progress in his life:

Do you have goals? In five years time where do you see yourself or what would you like to do?
Finish my apprenticeship, be a fully qualified spray painter and panel beater with enough money to open my own body shop.
Yeah, OK and is that something that you can work towards?
I reckon I could.

The societal emphasis on personal autonomy and self-realisation had led us to expect in advance that many of our informants would have spiritualities that were highly individualised – an eclectic collage of beliefs and practices made up of items drawn from
the ‘spiritual marketplace’ (Roof 1999). As we demonstrated in the previous chapter on spirituality types, this proved not to be the case: there was almost no evidence of informants engaging in an autonomous, self-reflexive spiritual quest, leading to the formation of a coherent, alternative and individualised spirituality.

However, we did find that broader cultural factors – especially the societal emphasis on the individual, and to a lesser degree, secularity – do exert considerable influence on the worldviews of young people, especially those we classified as HUM. Evidence of individualism was also apparent among those with the TRAD spirituality but perhaps not to the same extent; for many of these young people, their will is consciously subsumed to that of a transcendent other. Those who are not influenced by a tradition seem more liable to become the centre of their own world.

The Acquisition of Spirituality

Our interviews show a patterning of spirituality type consistent with the way informants were raised – the religiousness of the family, ethnicity, schooling and past church attendance. In order to understand this process, it is useful to turn to theories and research on the acquisition of religion among children and youth (the most fully realised spiritualities we found were those based on a traditional religion). Summarising this research, Hoge, Johnson and Luidens (1993, p.243) argue that socialisation ‘into a religious tradition occurs when important agents (mainly parents, but also peers and teachers) model and/or reinforce youngsters’ religious attitudes and behaviours’ (see also Erickson 1992).

Research – most of which has been conducted in the US – affirms the importance of the parents, above all other influences. For example, Regnerus et al. (2003, p. 10) note that ‘parents easily constitute the strongest influence’ (see also Myers 1996; Smith 2005); according to Bao et al. (1999) it is the mother who exerts the greatest influence. Roehlkepartain and Benson (1993) suggest that mothers exert the greatest influence on spirituality because women tend to be more spiritually active than men. They note that the greatest influence after mothers are fathers, then church folk, friends and church programs. Similar findings were reported in an Australian study of faith development (Bellamy, Mou & Castle 2004). They noted that 75% of those who became a Christian before the age of 10 rated their parents (most often the mother) as influential in their faith development (Bellamy et al. 2004, p. 4).

Gunnove and Moore (2002), propose a slightly different ordering, arguing that for 17-22 year old American youth: ‘The best predictors of youth religiosity were ethnicity, peers’ church attendance ... residence in the south, gender, religious schooling during childhood, maternal religiosity, church attendance during childhood, the importance mothers placed on childhood religious training.’

The strength of religious commitment is largely contingent on parental influence: according to Hoge et al. (1993, p.242), the religious beliefs of the adolescent are strongest when parents are committed, when these values are transmitted to the children and when the parent-child relationship is healthy.

As noted in the previous section on types of spirituality, we have identified several types of spirituality, one of which, traditional (TRAD), denotes a spirituality grounded in a traditional world religion. Twenty-three informants in the sample were classified as having a traditional worldview, along with an ethos that was ‘HI’ (identifying with a denomination, regular attendance, orthodox beliefs etc.).
Among these teens and young adults, it was readily apparent that ethnicity and/or a religious family background were the most notable influences on their spirituality type. In the previous report, we presented five case studies. One of those was Monique, a 17-year-old, Maronite Catholic with Lebanese parents. During the interview she commented:

…it mean we are a Catholic family and we do all the Catholic things, plus more. Like, we go to church on Sundays. Now that it’s Lent we’re all off meat and fasting until 12 [midday] and we do all of that stuff and we have family gatherings and all of that, but I think that one more, the family picture, the one where the kid is running to the dad. It just reminds me of our family.

Naria’s story was similar. She was a 12-year-old Ethiopian Copt. She recounted a most interesting story, one that highlights her religious enculturation, how it underpins her worldview and how this is reinforced by her mother:

Can you tell me about someone you really admire?  
Like as a friend?  
It may be a friend. It may be someone you read about or someone you see on television?  
Perhaps a hero, heroine or it may be …  
St George.  
St George, right. OK, OK.  
Because he did a miracle.  
So the miracle being what miracle are you thinking of? Can you tell me the story?  
Well, I was about five or six years old. This big bug went in my ear and I started screaming at night and my mum told me – she opened the window for me, because I wanted to vomit. I don’t know if this bug had something to do with it and then I had my hand out and [Inaudible] went on my hand. I looked up and found smoke and a big light and I saw St George [Inaudible].  
Right, right. So it’s a very special experience?  
Yes.  
How do you know it was St George?  
Because I know how St George looks. I saw him.  
Right, OK.  
And my mum saw him too. I started screaming, I was scared and then she came and she said, ‘What happened to you, with St George?’  
Mm and so you were all right after that?  
Yeah. The bug went out and nothing more.

While ethnicity is important, one inevitably sees other factors at work in influencing the traditional spirituality type, including mother’s attendance and even religious instruction at school. 25-year-old Travis was a Catholic school teacher, also with a TRAD/HI spirituality. Below is an excerpt from his interview:

And do you pray regularly?  
Um, yeah, most days, yes.  
Mm. Now you’ve had some involvement then with the Catholic religion?  
Yes, yes. From when I was born.  
Yes, so you’ve grown up in a family that … ?  
Yeah, went to Catholic schools and that’s had a big influence, especially the Brothers.  
I went to 7 to 12 to a Brothers’ school and I’m now teaching in one.  
Your parents went to Mass?  
Mum used to go to Mass when we were younger but then it sort of moved away a bit.  
And yourself, did you go with her?  
Yeah, I used to go all the time. It wasn’t every Sunday but we did go fairly regularly.  
And what about now? Are you going to Mass?
Yeah, I go occasionally. I wouldn’t go every week, but probably once a month, maybe.

Yes.

I sometimes feel a need to go. Not because it’s the right thing to do, but because I want to within myself, to go to Mass, and when I have time to myself to sort of plan a lesson and just reflect. I feel that need to go, yeah, rather than the fact that you should go every Sunday. Some people are forced to go to Mass, especially kids. You know, their parents force them, but I feel as you’re older, you feel that need, that you need to go.

Travis came from an Anglo-Celtic background.

It was also clear from the interviews that maintaining spirituality is not an individual accomplishment. Particularly for those with the traditional type of spirituality, networks must be in place that enable this way of life to be sustained, especially during the mid to late teens. An examination of the transcripts reveals vital ‘network connections’ (Hirst 2003) between TRAD/HI informants and other church attenders, that is, the presence of both church-attending adults and peers in their social networks.

19-year-old Renee, a university student who has a Pentecostal background and attends church on a regular basis, noted:

Organised church I go to about once a week, but then we have just started small groups as well which depending on your definition of church could also be that. Then it depends on whether the time I spend with Christian friends is also church, it depends what you define as church.

In like manner, 15-year-old Damien, a student in a country town, when asked how he came to have a personal relationship with Jesus, said:

Um, well, a year and-a-half ago I was … I was going to youth group almost every week. Yeah, I was doing that sort of thing and I was really starting to pay attention. I used to go and when it came to the readings and all that sort of thing I sort of turned on and I found myself really listening and getting involved … And then after a couple of months they wanted some more young people to start getting into inviting people to go and they asked me if I wanted to be part of that, and I said, yes, I would and then just after that, that’s when I really got hold of it.

The relationship between certain influences and the TRAD-type spirituality is clear. But what about others, those with a humanistic (HUM) spirituality? Some informants we classified as HUM had some religious enculturation or involvement as a child, typically ‘low temperature’ (Bouma 1999) but had subsequently moved away from having a traditional worldview. Others had always maintained a humanistic worldview.

Among the latter group, we found that their parents and important peers had little meaningful religious involvement, either now or in the past. Nonetheless, what their parents believed and practised was still extremely influential. 18-year-old Fiona (HUM/HI, no denomination), the Youth Voice participant who held strong views about science, chose the photograph of a cathedral when shown the series of evocative photos. This is her exchange with the interviewer:

*You were saying this [photo of cathedral] is really beautiful but you don’t understand it?*

Yeah, it kind of upsets me a bit, religion, in that some of it I just think is so beautiful and the tradition of it and having that community link and sometimes I feel like I am missing out because I don’t have an ethnic background in my family. We don’t have any traditions that have come through, Italian or Vietnamese descent or anything, we are pretty boring Australians that don’t believe in anything. And so a lot of the things
I want are not based on tradition they are based on necessity, but I just really want to have a nice safe place and have nice clothes and have a nice group of people, I just want that security. But sometimes I get the urge to have a big quest and figure out what it all means but I think I am too practical.

*Does your family belong to a church or religious group of any kind?*
My dad is Church of England and my mum is Catholic but neither of them practise. Apart from going to church at Easter when we were younger we have had very little religion, a lot of it is based just on technology or morals. I think my mum is a bit into feminism and clinical research stuff but it’s a bit pretty bare bones. So I don’t believe in any religion or practise one and I just don’t really believe in a higher power.

At times, however, those who were raised without a clearly defined worldview had to draw on a wider, more diffuse range of sources in order to answer some existential questions. Katie (HUM/LO, no denomination), a 14-year-old, lived in a metropolitan location and attended a Catholic secondary college. She recounted the following views on what happens after death:

*And what do you think happens after death?*
Um, I don’t really know because I’ve never had anyone close to me die. So I haven’t had a lot of experience of death, but I guess our soul gets used for other people.

*Oh, OK, so like reincarnation?*
Yeah, similar, but not our body. Our body goes somewhere and our spirit lives on.

*Oh, OK. So where do you think it lives on?*
In other people, in our family.

*Oh, OK, yeah. So like your ancestors, I don’t know, great grandparents who have died or something like that, you feel like they’re still around somehow?*
Yeah, as long as we remember a person, I believe that they’re always there like in photographs and things.

*So does your family sort of attend a church or a Mass or not?*
No, we’re not very religious people.

Two informants were classified as having the ‘New Age’ spirituality type (NEW). One of these was 16-year-old Isaiah, a participant in Spin Cycle. When he described his family, the relationship between his background and current spirituality type was manifest:

*Well, being half Samoan ... like, my grandma and my mum, they’re full Samoan, they’re very spiritual and religious and shit so ...* 
*And so your aunt, does she do séances and things like that or is it more her beliefs?*
She’s a witch doctor, a Samoan witch doctor.

*Oh, right. Does she live out here?*
No. When I went overseas to visit my grandmother, she’d come down from Samoa and yeah, she was – my grandmother didn’t really want to teach me all of this stuff, but I just go, ‘Screw it, teach me anyway, I want to know.’

Later in the interview he said:

I know for a fact that I do have telepathic traits in my family. Everyone is in the blood. Like, my grandmother, I’m pretty sure she doesn’t say nothing bad, but I’ve heard my mum talk about it and she can see into the future but sort of like deja vu sort of a way. Like, she’d have a dream and then like the next day something would happen and she goes, that was in my dream last night. It sort of works like that and sometimes I have those dreams. Like, when I got attempted to get baseball batted. I was in Burger King at Highpoint, eating dinner. The night before I had a dream that something would happen at dinner time, and of course I didn’t know where I was going to be at dinner time, but when I got to Burger King I sort of had this like a photoflash in my head and I could see this dude with a baseball bat, but I couldn’t see the face and just a dude with a baseball bat and it looked like it had swung towards my head and that’s when I blacked out and woke up again. And yeah, the
next day, that’s what happened, this bloke tried to attempt a baseball bat at me, and yeah, he got what’s coming to him.

Despite the widespread assumption that the teenage years are a time of great turmoil and conflict – especially with parents – this is not necessarily the case. Smith et al. (2004, p. 7) argue that ‘Sustained teenage rebellion against, conflict with and alienation from parents and traditional social institutions are not inevitable, nor are they the adolescent norm’ (see also Smith 2005). Indeed, it is notable that when asked, ‘who is someone that you admire?’, a considerable number of informants nominated one of their parents.

The following excerpt comes from an interview with 13-year-old Mark (EMB, no denomination):

> Can you tell me about someone you really admire and what it is that you like about them?
> Like a famous person?
> It might be a famous person. It might be someone you know personally.
> I guess my dad.
> Yep, yep. Why do you choose your dad?
> Oh, well, because he’s always encouraging me and giving me new things and he’s like teaching me good stuff.

Even though most teenagers are not categorically rejecting the values of their parents, as will be explained below, we do see considerable evidence of the greater independence that comes with age – something which makes a crucial difference to spirituality. This was particularly the case with those who had some religious enculturation or involvement as a child, but had subsequently moved away from having a traditional worldview.

Changes across the Life Course

It was clear from the interviews that several developmental stages and transitions seem to be involved in a complex dynamic across the teenage to young adult years. One key pattern to emerge was the move from TRAD/HI or TRAD/MED to TRAD/QST between childhood and the early to mid teens. 13 informants – all teenagers – were TRAD/QST at the time of interview, but had been more certain in childhood. In the previous section we noted that the strength of teenage religious commitment is largely contingent on parental influence: the religious beliefs of the adolescent are strongest when parents are committed, when these values are transmitted to the children and when the parent-child relationship is healthy (Hoge et al. 1993:242). Among those who were TRAD/QST, parental church attendance was decidedly mixed, ranging from one or both parents attending weekly, occasionally, yearly or never. There is not enough information, however, to make defensible assertions about the relationship between parental religiosity and a move from HI to QST.

Our interviews do suggest that a move towards QST is at least partially the result of influences beyond immediate socialisation, specifically, the broader culture and changes associated with the life stage, combining with the parental effect. Some of this we discussed in the section on types of spirituality. To recap, in terms of cultural influences, Hoge et al. (1993, p.243) suggest that young people experience ‘cultural broadening’ or ‘cosmopolitanism’, a process of cognitive broadening and cross-cultural learning, that starts in the late teens and continues through the early twenties. In the US research on ‘cultural broadening’, the development of liberalised social attitudes, a degree of religious scepticism and of moral and religious relativity was seen as taking place more at college than in high school. In contemporary Australia, we are seeing these processes at work earlier, starting in high school; in marked contrast to the USA, the ‘hometown environment’, even in rural settings, does not reinforce traditional values, and the
broader national culture, far from supporting religious beliefs and church attendance, is strongly secularist.

With respect to changes associated with the life course, we know that during and up to the early adult years, a person will be subject to a wider range of influences compared to their pre-pubescent years, including a greater emphasis on peer activity and acceptance, increased exposure to a range of ideas and values that are contrary to the ones with which they were raised and less dependence on one’s parents. Ozorak (1989, p.449) notes that as the individual moves through adolescence, she or he develops a ‘growing capacity to reason and question’ and has ‘greater opportunities to share opinions, impressions and experiences with others’.

One might then wonder, what happens to those who move from TRAD/HI or MED in their early teens to TRAD/QST in their mid teens? There is little doubt that this process of independence accelerates and intensifies in the later teen years. American psychologist Jeffery Arnett (2000) proposes the term ‘emerging adulthood’ as an appropriate label for those aged 18-25. Arnett (2000, p.469) argues that emerging adulthood is ‘a distinct period demographically, subjectively and in terms of identity explorations, a time in which young people explore a variety of possible life directions in love, work, and worldviews’.

Our interest lies particularly with changes in a young person’s worldview that often take place during this stage in life. Drawing on the work of William Perry (1970), Arnett suggests that as emerging adults move through their late teens to the early twenties, they examine and consider a variety of worldviews and often commit to a different worldview (Arnett 2000, p. 474). With respect to religion, Arnett (2000, p.474) notes:

... research on emerging adults’ religious beliefs suggests that regardless of educational background, they consider it important during emerging adulthood to re-examine the beliefs they have learned in their families and to form a set of beliefs that is the product of their own independent reflections.

This may partially explain why many who have some involvement in the church during childhood no longer see themselves as religious by the time they reach their early twenties. According to Astley (2000, p.249): ‘In a recent survey of church leavers in England, it was found that nearly 80 per cent of those who left before the age of twenty ... did so in part because of the change in the way they held their faith.’

In our sample, there were a few cases of emerging adults who have moved from spirituality type TRAD (MED or LO) at age 12 to HUM at the time of interview. In these interviews, we see evidence of the ‘declaration of independence’ mostly clearly associated with emerging adults. Michael, a 22-year-old participant at Youth Voice, provides an excellent example of this process:

Just talking a little bit more about your involvement with organised religion, you did indicate that you were baptised.
That was my parents decision, obviously.
Right. And that was in the Uniting Church?
When I was a baby.
Right. Do you mind just talking a little bit about your involvement with organised religion that ...
I never had a huge involvement with it. I guess what it is that turns me off most about it is Christian people who I talk to. You know, people who try and harass you about their faith, and also media, media portrayals of it. But I did when I was younger go to Sunday school. It seems like another world for me now. As an adult, or sort of an adult I would never make that choice now. It was my parents choice to
give me that, um, but I don’t think at that young age it gave me much … my own views on religion … that has come through the media and chatting to people now. Now that I am a free-thinking university student or something like that. So yeah, it was minimal, I didn’t grow up in a religious family, I was just sort of taken along to Sunday school as a bit of a thing but I’ve never really felt religion very strongly in a country like Australia.

So your parents didn’t attend the Uniting church?
They sort of did for a while, while I was at Sunday school.

It is clear that as an emerging adult, Michael is in a position to make his own reasoned and informed choices. In his case, it is a turning away from religion. The same process of childhood religiousness (however lukewarm) to adult secularity was evident in the interview with Lisa, a 21-year-old who was at the Youth Voice conference. She told us:

I was educated at a Catholic school but I believe that a child shouldn’t be forced into a religion until they are old enough to choose. I didn’t have the choice to go to a Catholic school, I was put in one, I think each to their own, but I think maybe I’d be more religious if I had had the choice to decide. I believe in God but I don’t follow or practice a religion.

Arguably, Lisa is applying a retrospective interpretation to her experiences. If, as a child, she were offered the choice to go to a Catholic school, she would probably have followed her parents’ position (her parents may not have been prepared to give her a choice in any case). It is now, as a young adult, that choices can be made and independence asserted.

Adrian, an 18-year-old who has just finished high school, is another who made reference to how his views had changed in his late teenage years and how now, as an emerging adult, he has committed himself to a worldview that is at odds with those of his family:

I was brought up – um, my grandfather was an officer in the Navy … He um – his family, the whole family was brought up as a Liberal background. Very conservative, everything is done traditional. You know, he drives around in a Jaguar sort of thing, very of that, and I was brought up as a Liberal, but when push came to shove I research all the parties and made a decision for the Labor Party, so I got heavily involved in the Labor Party.

As he moved into his late teens, Adrian re-examined his earlier religious enculturation. He had been baptised in the Church of England and had sporadically attended church as a child, but following a high school project, he decided to investigate Buddhism:

So you studied Buddhism?
I touched on it in ancient history in high school and then I did personal studies outside because I found it so fascinating, I wouldn’t count myself as a Buddhist because I don’t believe in reincarnation or anything like that. I thought it was so fascinating that I did it, The Theravada is the other one, and I looked at both of them and I just found it so interesting to sit there and read it. As I said, I don’t believe it as a religion, then again it isn’t meant to be religion is it? So yeah, I was really interested in it but it is not like I would go to a temple and meditate although I did learn how to meditate.

It is in the emerging adult years that such independent reflection and exploration takes place.

The move away from a ‘low temperature’ faith in childhood to a humanistic worldview is not the only pattern we see with emerging adults. Among those who maintain a traditional worldview through the early teenage years and into emerging adulthood we
see a less dramatic shift (say TRAD/QST in the mid teens to TRAD/LO as young adults). Among those who have always been TRAD/HI we also evidence of autonomous reflection and a deepening of faith. 18-year-old Ryan (TRAD/HI) attends Mass once or twice a month. He told us:

I have been a practising Roman Catholic for a while and I use a lot of the basic links of that but I have tried to develop my own values because I don’t necessarily believe some of the ones from the church and stuff like that. I call myself a semi-religious person, I agree with a lot of what they are saying but there are some things that I don’t agree with and so it makes it a bit difficult.

Later in the interview, he said:

Yeah. I’m also a student of science but I do believe that there is an all-seeing power if you would like to call God that, that watches over us and cares for us and is with us all the time. I believe that Jesus is part of this trinity of God – Father, Son and the Holy Spirit – and I do believe they, it, whatever you wish to call it, care for me and do not believe that I am intrinsically evil in any way, and believe judge everybody equally.

Clearly, changes that take place during adolescence and the emerging adult years are a key factor influencing teen and young adult spirituality, irrespective of spirituality type. Any move away from TRAD/HI or MED in childhood is result of this, plus parental effect and broader cultural factors (secularity, individualism). That said, without the presence of church-attending parents, or some other key religious figure or peers in a person’s life, it is highly unlikely that strong religious faith will persist beyond the childhood years.

Conclusion
Our interviews tend to confirm the ‘social learning theory’ mentioned above, which states that young people learn attitudes and behaviour – including spirituality – from what significant others such as parents, teachers and peers, model and reinforce for them (Hoge et al. 1993 p. 243). Broader cultural factors independent of both family or school also exert some influence, especially on TRAD/QST and HUM spirituality types. The survey in phase two of the project will provide further data to test this assertion. Questions in the survey were also designed to provide further information about the transition from childhood to adulthood and the complex changes that take place during this phase of life.

Other possible influences will also be explored in the survey, including gender. It is well established that church attendance of the mother is the most potent influence on attendance of the child. It has also long been a virtually universal finding of sociology of religion that women are more ‘religious’ than men of the same age. Interestingly, some recent surveys indicate that amongst young people in Australia, this differential is disappearing; young women are not significantly more ‘religious’ than young men and on some measures, may be less so. These findings raise interesting questions about the relationship between gender and spirituality that warrant further consideration.
5. Spirituality and Participation in Society

The third aim of our project is to examine the consequences of the forms of spirituality described earlier for the ways in which members of Generation Y participate in society. It seeks to see if there are any factors that promote active and positive citizenship. Active citizenship is acknowledged as a fundamental building block of healthy social, civic and political life in a democracy. What are the ingredients of active citizenship, and which factors might promote or to hinder its development? Are Australian young people active citizens in ways appropriate to their age, or are they as individualistic and self-enclosed as some critics have asserted? Are they likely to become active citizens in a fully adult mode? These are the questions which gave rise to this part of the research project.

Background Theory and Previous Research

Over the past decade social researchers and policy makers, both in Australia and internationally, have been paying increased attention to young people’s ideas about civil society and their civic behaviour (Janoski 1998; Hartley 2001; Weidenfeld 2003).

‘Civic orientation’⁴² is a term that has been used to denote an orientation to the common good, which includes reciprocity, cooperation and trust (Putnam 1995). It involves a sense of social responsibility towards one’s community (whether local, national or global) and a belief that despite individual differences, everyone has something to contribute to the common good (Smart et al. 2000). From a sociological point of view, civic orientation represents an important aspect of ‘social capital’, in that it contributes to the culture of trust and reciprocity that underpins social relationships and networks and facilitates collective action and civic engagement (Winter 2000).

Central to most conceptualisations of active citizenship and civic orientation is the idea of social participation and involvement: doing as opposed to merely observing (Benn 2000; Wilkinson & Bittman 2002). Benn (2000) argues that active citizenship includes ‘the involvement in social networks, in groups, organisations and voluntary associations that connect citizens with the life of their communities’ [emphasis added]. Participation and involvement can include such practices as volunteering, membership in political organisations or even petition-signing. While there is debate about the extent to which volunteering amongst young people is declining (Putnam 1995) or increasing (Wilkinson & Bittman 2002; Weidenfeld 2003), most observers agree that citizenship-related practices are essential for broader social cohesion and the maintenance of democratic institutions.

For example, Smart et al. (2000) argue that civic participation is a prerequisite for successful democratic government, while Hanks (1981) found that adolescent participation in voluntary groups increases political expression in later life. Smith (1999, p. 554) argues that: ‘Low social trust, low participation, and low engagement in civic life threaten the foundations of democratic society.’ The benefits of active participation benefit not only the society but the young people themselves. A large-scale Australian research project (Sanson 2001) found that young people with high levels of civic orientation in adolescence do well at, and value school, tend to be more caring, and enjoy close peer relationships. It was also found that young people who are actively involved in community activities are more confident in social situations and less likely to engage in antisocial behaviour.

Taking a ‘developmental approach’ to understanding the formation of civic orientation and active citizenship (Youniss et al. 1997; Smith 1999), in this part of the project we are

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⁴² The terms ‘civic-mindedness’ and ‘civicness’ are used by other authors to denote the same concept.
particularly interested in the factors which determine and inform a young person’s level of civic orientation, especially those whose influence lasts into adulthood. Adolescence is a crucial phase in the formation of a person’s orientation towards citizenship. Recent research indicates that both family practice and adolescent involvement are decisive factors in the formation of active citizenship identities across the life-course (Youniss & Yates 1997; Crystal & DeBell 2002). Based on her longitudinal analysis of about 25,000 school-aged Americans, Smith (1999, p. 575) concludes that familial and school resources ‘can instil in young people a participatory and involved orientation toward their community that will persist into adulthood’. Furthermore, a cross-national study by Flanagan et al. (1998) found that, ‘Regardless of gender or country, adolescents were more likely to consider public interest an important life goal when their families emphasised an ethic of social responsibility’.

A number of studies of young people have found that a variety of healthy, desirable outcomes across a diversity of areas of personal and public concerns – including civic involvement – are associated with worldviews and values derived from religion (Smith 2003b; Youniss, McLellan, & Yates 1997). To date, however, no Australian research has been conducted which elucidates this relationship.

An Australian study of citizenship among 14-year-olds in 1999 formed the local component of a 28-nation study (Mellor, Kennedy & Greenwood 2002). Among the findings: ‘It appears Australian students do not endorse action by citizens. They are just not brave about, or engaged in, the issues associated with either Conventional or Social Movement Citizenship’ (p. 85). ‘Australian students’ scores are significantly below the International mean on three of the four scales which make up the Civic Engagement dimension’ (p. 88). No information on religion, church participation or spirituality was collected in either the Australian or the international versions, even in countries like the USA; so no such variables occur in the explanatory modelling (Ch. 8).

A recent study based on data from the Longitudinal Studies of Australian Youth (LSAY) found that gender, socio-economic status, home language and size of town were predictors of volunteering by year 9 students (Brown, Lipsig-Mumme & Zajdow, 2003). But again, the study did not take into account the worldview or value system within which volunteering is situated, and which would help to explain the apparently lower ‘civic engagement’ of Australian young people.

Wuthnow (1995) explored the motives, often religious, of those who become involved in activities like visiting the sick, sheltering the homeless and caring for the needy. However, he warns that well-meant activities may have detrimental consequences for the recipients. He provides several examples where intended acts of kindness were offensive to the recipients because of xenophobic or myopic attitudes of a church or local community. The link between intention and outcome may not be straightforward; both must be understood in the relevant social and cultural context.

In a study of 47,000 6th to 12th graders in the United States, Roehlkepartain and Benson (1993) found that there was a gap between belief and action in religious activity as well as in service to others. Young people spend a great deal more time helping friends and members of the local community than being involved in wider social justice issues like helping the sick and poor and promoting justice or peace. Roehlkepartain and Benson (1993, p.78) explain that young people preferred to do volunteer work in areas that did not take them outside their ‘comfort zone’. Our study sought to examine what led young people to move out of their comfort zone and into more emotionally demanding areas of civic participation.
The rest of this chapter reports on the analysis of results, including an analytical framework classifying civic orientation. It is divided into four sections:

(a) The four dimensions of civic orientation and informants’ ratings on them;
(b) Levels of civic orientation across the four dimensions;
(c) The factors associated with levels of civic orientation;
(d) The relationship between civic orientation and religion/spirituality.

Four Dimensions of Civic Orientation
From a study of the research literature on citizenship and civic behaviour, and analysis of data from stage one of our project, we were able to categorise civic orientation into dimensions and typologies.

Previous studies (Mellor, Kennedy & Greenwood 2002; Youniss & Yates 1997) divided civic orientation into broad categories that included attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. Mellor, Kennedy and Greenwood (2002) used five dimensions with several sub-scales while Youniss and Yates (1997) identified three dimensions: knowledge, attitudes, participation. We accepted a modified version of Youniss and Yates (1997) categorisation but added a fourth dimension, which includes skills and capacities. In doing this we recognised that some young people – by virtue of age, background or opportunity – have more skills than others. A Senate Committee (1991, p.7) that examined citizenship in Australian schools also emphasised these four components and defined an active citizen as:

... someone who not only believes in the concept of a democratic society but who is willing and able to translate that belief into action. Active citizenship is a compound of knowledge, skills and attitudes: knowledge about how society works; the skills needed to participate effectively; and a conviction that active participation is the right of all citizens.

We detail below how we understand each of the four dimensions of civic orientation:

1. *Civic knowledge and appreciation*: understanding of basic human rights, social/political structures, and mechanisms for social change, plus an appreciation for social justice, equity, cultural diversity, community engagement, new ideas or experiences and volunteering.
2. *Civic capacities and skills*: a range of skills and personal competencies: a capacity to make autonomous choices and decisions, to exercise personal control, to argue effectively for one’s views without denigrating those of others and to work in a team.
3. *Civic attitudes (to others and the wider society)*: attitudes, actions showing an orientation towards the common good, and a desire to work for the community. We therefore are looking for such things as: caring and respectful attitudes towards others, support for legitimate authority – in constructive tension with a willingness to dissent (in the political and civil arenas), identification and engagement with the neighbourhood, the wider community, religious or civic groups and institutions (schools, parliament, legal system). We also looked for signs of a capacity and willingness to engage in shared discourse, which is tolerant of others’ opinions, and of dissent from one’s own.
4. *Civic participation (individual or collective)*: can and does the person put into practice the attitudes described in the previous section? What are their actions in relationships with family or friends, peers, and in the community? To what extent is the person engaged in volunteering and community service, civic and political activities at local and regional levels?
We analysed the transcripts according to the four dimensions and rated responses on a three-level scale of High, Medium, Low (see Table 1).

### Table 1 Classification of levels within the four civic dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Civic knowledge and appreciation</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>complex understanding of political structures and human rights &amp; appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>some understanding of political structures and human rights &amp; appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>minimal understanding of political structures and human rights &amp; limited appreciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Civic capacities and skills</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>highly articulate, evidence of leadership, active membership of organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>good communication skills, some history of membership of organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>minimal communication skills, limited history of involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Civic attitudes (to others and the wider society)</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>openly stated, part of their frame of reference, consistent view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>partially stated, not central to their frame of reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>minimal evidence of civic attitudes, not part of their frame of reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Civic Participation (individual or collective):</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>recent and consistent involvement in various areas – not ad hoc, at least average of 3 hours per week. Need to demonstrate continuous involvement in community activities including volunteering, over a long period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>some history of active involvement eg at least average of hour a week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>limited history of involvement, eg occasional collecting for charity only, or part of compulsory community service at school.</td>
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68 informants provided enough information about the four dimensions of civic orientation to be able to make some useful observations about them. Examples are given below of young people rated High or Low to demonstrate the extremes of responses for each of the dimensions.

1. **Civic knowledge and appreciation**

In line with previous studies (Mellor, Kennedy & Greenwood 2002), our results indicate that young people generally lack knowledge about how civil society operates. However, about a third of informants were classified as having a High level of civic knowledge and appreciation and demonstrated this in a number of ways. For example, informants discussed the efficacy of linking ethical views to civic attitudes and actions and were cognisant of the need to balance individual rights and community responsibility. Reading the newspaper, watching televisions news, attending camps, seminars and youth clubs were ways in which informants accessed information about civic and social issues and mechanisms for political and social change.

Michael, from Youth Voice (22, HUM/HI), represents the group of young people who had a firm understanding of basic human rights and social/political structures and had thought about the reasons for inequality in society. He showed an appreciation for social justice, equity, cultural diversity, community engagement, new ideas or experiences and volunteering:

> I think it is, I think it’s absolute bullshit when people say you can work really hard and achieve something, I don’t believe that. I think although you can cut your chance
by working harder, I believe I’ve done that at uni and gotten good marks which has helped me get the job I’ve got and helped with interviews skills and stuff was good. I reckon so much of it is up to luck, so much of it is just chance um and I think heaps of that is from minority groups that you subscribe to like socio-economic groups, where you come from, who your parents are, whether you identify as heterosexual or homosexual, whether you’re male or female. I just think all those minority considerations are incredibly influential, um and more than people would like to admit in a country like Australia and I think they can hold you back. So in that respect I think although you can workout to increase your chances um. But the fact that you identify with any kind of minority any society like the Australian society I think can hold you back. Forces beyond your control can stumpt your achievement.

Some informants who rated High showed a lot of appreciation for community and political rights and mechanisms for social change, but were politically naive. Monique, aged 17 (TRAD/HI, Yr. 12, Catholic school), illustrates this point:

Yeah, I think all this fighting and world peace needs to come in and all this fighting needs to stop. It’s destroying the world. I mean, I think if everyone sticks to themselves, like if every religion say for example, minds their own business and lets each other religion go about their own way then they’ll be fine. Obviously everyone thinks their religion is the right religion, but whose to judge that a faith isn’t right for them, and Judaism isn’t right for them or that. You can’t judge that. If they think it’s right for them, then it’s right for them. As long as it works for them, leave us alone.

Do you think there’s a thing that people like us can do?

Oh, you can always do something. I mean, even if it’s something that’s small like signing a petition.

About half of the informants had Low levels of civic knowledge, with younger informants knowing less about the way the democratic system and political structures work and what citizen’s rights and responsibilities might include. Irrespective of age, informants who rated Low appeared disinterested in social and political issues and lacked an appreciation for civil society. Having fun, playing music being with their friends was much more vital to them. 15-year-old Adam (TRAD/LO) is fairly typical of this group; his focus is on friends, family, fun and thrill seeking (snowboarding, dancing and motorbiking) and he is not very socially aware. His lack of civic knowledge was matched by his apathy. Many informants were ill-informed about current issues and provided simplistic solutions – like Alison, a 15-year-old Catholic (TRAD/QST) from Spin Cycle:

I think George Bush is a wanker, and he started that war himself. Now, he’s killing our men and Australia’s in it because when it comes down to Australia having a war, bang got to back out of it, because that’s what George Bush did in the Vietnam war, or not George Bush, the other dude … but they had a warning that that was going to happen, and they just, you know, they had letters every day like you’re going to be bombed … and they just let ‘em go.

Oh, you mean September 11?

Yeah. What they should have done is go through every single one of them and you know, arrest those people because it’s illegal to send, you know, spread some shit like that, so they should go to all those people and you know, bop them off or whatever and then they wouldn’t have to worry about September 11, because they would have known it was coming and just ignored it and then he turns around and goes and starts a war about it because he killed the buggers, so it’s his fault. End of story. It’s George Bush’s fault.

2. Civic capacities and skills

Those classified as having a High level of skills and capacities tended to be well-educated, have good communication and leadership skills, and were reflective and
resourceful. The ability of respondents to discuss complex social and moral issues seemed to be related to age and education.

Michael, aged 22, is a typical example of an informant with a high level of skills; he demonstrated a capacity and willingness to engage in complex ideas and social issues without denigrating opinions that differed from his own. He showed compassion and understanding for those less fortunate than himself:

Michael (HUM/HI, No denomination, Youth Voice Program)
I think [I can make a difference]. I think it’s hard. It’s pretty naive to say that it’s easy to be able to do that and I think it’s about chipping away very, very slowly at what’s around you so you start. You form a belief on those beliefs, you start um, doing something like becoming active in your school, or raising money, questioning things and picking up on policy in your school or community and saying hang on can you explain this please, because I think this is wrong so, um, yeah I don’t think people make a difference and it’s great like in a movie and it’s all triumph and it’s all that celebration attached to that I think it’s a laborious chipping away one step at a time. It’s going to take time if a young person is going to make a difference, because young people, I don’t see them as particularly in powered in society. So it’s a pretty hard sort of thing to make a difference I think. But I certainly believe it can happen. I don’t want to be too pessimistic, I’d like to think I’m trying a little bit to do that in the volunteer work that I do.

Those who we rated as Low on this dimension not only lacked many of the skills noted above but often seemed to be lacking in confidence, were demoralised and in some cases worn down by their responsibilities. For example, the informants from the Young Women’s Collective and Spin Cycle had few financial resources, and/or were dealing with family members who had significant problems (e.g. drug use, psychiatric illness or family violence). Alison, aged 15 (TRAD/QST), a Catholic from Spin Cycle is an another example of this:

Just life in itself is a bit unfair, like isn’t fair … That’s just the way it goes … I can control what I like myself, but I have no control over my life, other people. … I spent too much of my life worrying about other people and hassles in my life, so it’s all about me now, me and my boyfriend and my family. That’s what I believe.

3. Civic attitudes (to others and the wider society)
Many issues were discussed by informants in the interviews: racism, refugees in detention centres, homophobia, women’s rights, environmental issues (water management, river systems, forests, climate change), the Iraq war, the War on Terror, Aboriginal issues, poverty, battery hens, crime, abortion, George W. Bush, Palestine, globalisation, drink driving and the GST. Many informants expressed an appreciation for compassion, fairness, social justice and social inclusion. Those from Youth Voice, like 18-year-old Steven (HUM/HI), tended to express these values more forcefully:

Yeah I mean like, the asylum seekers coming here that’s an issue. Seeking refuge and being stuck in places like that for 3 years. Whatever like, when they’re not breaking the law, the law is if they come into this country and they need refuge then that’s OK. And yet they’re not allowed to just get a job and enjoy themselves.

Those who rated High on this dimension demonstrated socially minded values in a number of ways and also endorsed altruism. They mentioned famous humanitarians whom they admired and who had inspired them. They appeared to have a well-developed value system and a set of principles upon which they conducted their lives.

Some informants could not think of any issues of concern. Those young people who were rated Low often had a large range of personal or family problems and indicated that
they were too tired, self-absorbed or unaware to think about injustices or social issues. For example, 19-year-old Melissa from the Young Women’s Collective was required to take charge of home duties for years while her mother was ill, was bullied and beaten at school and suffered a ‘nervous breakdown’ as a result. She had little energy or motivation to read or find out about social issues. Younger informants, like 14-year-old Katie, who attends a Catholic school (HUM/LO), were not interested in social or political issues, perhaps because of their age:

*Thinking about today's world or your local community, is there a particular issue you feel strongly about?*
*Not really. I don’t watch a lot of news. I don’t know what happens.*
*It doesn’t interest you?*
*No. Most of it’s depressing and if I watch it, I just feel depressed myself.*

Some were judgemental about those experiencing personal difficulties and did not show much empathy towards them:

Anna (15, Catholic school, HUM/MED)

*Can you say in any way what for you gives life meaning and purpose?*

Purpose is just being here. Being alive is just purpose. You have to enjoy life. I saw this show on Sixty Minutes, and it was about the IVF treatment and stuff and these kids wish they weren’t born and stuff and they want to shut down the whole program. The fact is they were born, and they have to appreciate life for what it is like, what it is. And, they are just being ungrateful. Like, everyone has bad days, everyone has good days, but it's just part of life. You've just got to deal with it.

Others were focussed on themselves and had an individualistic attitude to society. For them having fun and focussing on themselves was more important than thinking about other people. Antonio, aged 13 (TRAD/LO), thought the major issue in society was the possibility that someone might steal his bike. This self-absorbed attitude occurred more frequently with younger informants, although a smattering of older informants responded similarly.

4. Civic participation (individual or collective)

Previous studies have used a number of different ways of categorizing civic participation. Roehlkepartain and Benson (1993), in their study of American youth, classified civic involvement according the type of activity. This approach was not appropriate for our study because the informants were involved in a large and varied range of activities. More usefully, Janoski (1998) considers civic participation across four spheres: the state sphere (executive, judicial and legislative), the public sphere (voluntary associations), the market sphere (business, firms and unions) and the private sphere (family, and relationships of love, affection). We felt that the idea of spheres has merit, however, this system seemed more appropriate to our older informants rather than the younger ones (the market sphere was not appropriate most of our informants because of their age). Adapting Janoski’s system, we devised the following four spheres: *personal, local, national and international.*

Some informants, including those from Youth Voice, were engaged in a wide range of civic participation and operated in all four spheres. However, most informants restricted their efforts to one or two spheres. The level of civic participation dropped as the activity was less personal and took them outside their ‘comfort zone’ (Roehlkepartain & Benson 1993). For most, assisting others in activities like sport, debating clubs or horse riding, was a natural progression from what they had already been doing in their own recreational activities and did not take them outside their comfort zone to any great degree. This result supports the finding of Roehlkepartain and Benson (1993); it is quite a big step to become involved in totally new and unfamiliar areas of civic engagement.
**Personal sphere.** Results indicate that most young people do at least something for other people, even if only for close friends or family. Contrary to public perception, many informants were positive about their parents and many admired them. Most willingly helped family members and friends when required, the rest would do so, even if a little reluctantly at times.

Anna (15, HUM/MED, Catholic school)

I don’t know if I have someone that I actually admire, but there are sort of people I look up to like my parents and stuff and like my friends. I don’t know why though. It’s just because they’re always around and stuff and you grow to like things about them and stuff

**Local sphere.** Almost half of the informants related to the wider community at some level - church activities, sporting groups or local organisations. For nine informants, the main focus of their activities directly related to their interest areas in sport (cricket, basketball coaching, horse riding), church group or the arts (music camps).

Connor (16, TRAD/HI, Lutheran)

And another thing I do, the Have a Go Cricket. They [are with] like people aged five to ten years old and our cricket … ran our cricket club and through that the cricket club has to get people to come and make sure everything’s going all right and in return, we get … hopefully the little kids remember our cricket clubs to come and play for us. So we give our time and hopefully they will come to us in the long run.

Travis (25, TRAD/HI, Catholic)

Coaching? Oh, I love it. I’ve got the passion there for the sport and I enjoy the kids. I’m not actually one to worry about winning but actually seeing a team improve. It makes you feel good when a kid learns a new skill and improves.

Other informants moved well outside their original area of interest in order to help people with whom they had no prior association. Young people who were motivated for the most part by social justice or humanitarian concerns were also likely to be engaged at other levels. 22-year-old Michael (HUM/HI) fits this category. Volunteering is part of his identity and how he sees himself as a worthy person:

I do too quite a lot of volunteering sort of the stuff I’m doing on this program. I really enjoy that. I work with people with disabilities, young people, single-parent families and all that sort of stuff. Um … myself I love going bush walking and camping, and getting out in the National Parks and stuff like that. Um … yeah. It’s what I love to do in my spare time.

**National and international sphere.** About a quarter of the informants (including most of those from Youth Voice Program) operated at the national level and were involved consistently in political, environmental or large welfare/sporting/youth organisations. Many others had engaged in this sphere as a one-off activity like signing a petition, but nothing on a regular basis so they were not counted as having a strong involvement in this sphere.

Those respondents who operated at an international level tended to be well educated and focused on issues like globalisation, environmental issues, world poverty, the Iraq war and refugees. About half of those who operated at a national level were involved also at the international level:

Peter (19, TRAD/HI, Catholic, Youth Voice Program)
Yes, there's a lot of issues I think that I feel strongly about. Probably mainly on an international level, things like, poverty, AIDS, malnutrition, like the whole situation in Africa is sort of, you know, appalling in the third world countries, um, like, the aftermath of war. Landmines in Cambodia, and that sort of thing. Like there's so many world issues. You know, genocide, in Bosnia and Serbia, that sort of thing. That's still goes on. So I really yes, I really find myself, you know, quite concerned about those sorts of things. World issues.

International involvement would include not just volunteering, but also letter writing, going on marches plus a whole range of quasi-political activity. All but two members of Youth Voice had an international focus. These two exceptions came from rural areas and were highly involved in local community issues. International interest was most frequent at ages 15-19. Informants who were interested in national and international issues tended to be High on all four civic dimensions. However, there were exceptions. One of the single mothers stands out in the way she contributed to the wider society, even though she had little money and a lot of responsibility she still sponsored a child through an aid organisation. For her this was a huge financial sacrifice.

All spheres. A small number of informants operated at all four levels – they were concerned and helpful to family and friends, involved in their local community and took part in national and international happenings. For example, 19-year-old Peter (TRAD/HI), a liberal Catholic, was involved with family and friends, the local community as well as programs/activities with Greenpeace and a national youth organisation. He actively campaigned on issues around removing landmines, Third World poverty, and environmental sustainability:

Well, I mean, you're given these opportunities like you live in this country, and if you've got the intelligence and the means to go down a certain path and you can live the lifestyle that you want, and then at the same time, you can also have a social conscience. More so, you know, and do things with charity organisations. Or you know, like I mean, I want to like something I would like to do is to go to Africa, and to do some aid work there, and so I don't see why like you know, you can live you life here, you know in Australia and have the things you want and at the same time, you can be helping others as well.

In this section, we have been analysing young people according to how they sit on each of the four dimensions. However, their responses were not consistent across the four dimensions and being High on one did not necessarily mean that they were High on the other three. For example, while some may be High on all dimensions, others may be Low on them all. Alternatively there could be mix, between High, Medium and Low. We observed that while about a third of informants had High levels of civic capabilities and civic attitudes, not all of them transferred this into High levels of civic participation with only a quarter of the informants having High levels and half having Low levels. In the next section we explore overall civic orientation rather than just concentrating on each dimension.

Level of 'Civic Orientation'

In an endeavour to make the results a little easier to comprehend we have developed a typology of ‘civic orientation’, combining the four dimensions outlined above. While no young person may fit perfectly, we found the classification to be useful, although it is a ‘work in progress’. Four broad groups have emerged to date: (a) High civic orientation (b) Medium civic orientation (c), Low civic orientation: apathetic, (d) Low civic orientation: anti-social. Table 2 shows the number of informants in each level of civic orientation.
Table 2: Number of informants in each level of civic orientation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Civic orientation</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low: apathetic</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low: anti-social</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>68</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each level is described and illustrated below.

**High civic orientation**
Those who rated High on three dimensions outlined in the previous section and Medium or High on the fourth dimension were classified as having a High civic orientation. We decided not to require informants to be High on all four dimensions because we recognised that there are periods in their life when young people are less active than they might have previously been. For example, some young people had been community active in the past but were doing less at the time of interview because of work or study commitments. Others, particularly those from Youth Voice were still active at all levels.

An example of one with a High civic orientation is 21-year-old Lisa, whose ethical views drive her behaviour; she wants to have input into alleviating inequality and injustice. Her community participation was driven by idealism. She was rated High on all four dimensions:

I think that it is an injustice to a woman to have to stay in an environment that is degrading and is violent towards her when people think this is the year 2003 and this should not happen. I did study at uni in my first year on domestic violence and it is still the same reasons some women stay there that they did thirty years ago. I think that it is a bit of an injustice that people think, ‘oh well it’s 2000 they can get out’ when there is still not enough support in communities for them to get out. We think we have come a long way when we really haven’t … I feel very strongly about homelessness and drug use because I live in [an area] of Sydney and it is a massive homeless area with heroin addicts in the streets. A thirteen-year-old girl came into work the other day and she had holes in her arms. Plus with the volunteer work for [name removed] I feel strongly about it and I wish there was something that could be done about, it’s a horrible, horrible situation.

Those who rated High on all dimensions tended to have a number of personal and community resources (social capital). They had supportive families, attended schools or organisations that promoted community service and seemed to be coping well with their own lives. They also seemed to have developed a great deal of confidence in tackling new and sometimes scary ventures.

**Medium civic orientation**
This group is mixed, with some rating medium on all dimensions while others rated differently on two or more dimensions. Most informants with a medium civic orientation, scored Medium on 3 of the 4 categories. They demonstrated a fair degree of civic knowledge and appreciation, a number of civic capacities and skills, healthy civic attitudes and engaged in some volunteer work and community service. They would help if asked – and do intermittent volunteering. Ben, aged 18 from Youth Voice, who described himself as an existentialist-agnostic and borderline atheist, is an example of someone in this group: he is politically and socially aware and is skilful but does not demonstrate the same level of civic participation or civic values as those in the first type. He was rated ‘High’ on two dimensions and ‘Medium’ on the other two:
Look, I myself am not [active]. I mean I am well educated but I’m not particularly well informed. I should be more informed and I should do something about it, but I am perhaps a lazy person. I do the work that I need to do to get me through … No, I’m not doing anything to educate a lot of people although I suppose I did organise the Youth Voice program which does bring a lot of awareness to the community.

A few informants had Medium to High levels of civic knowledge, skills and attitudes but little or no civic action. For example, about a quarter of informants had not engaged in any civic participation apart from at a personal level or had participated in a one-off activity e.g. collecting for Red Cross, Clean-up Australia or irregular baby sitting, and this was despite scoring High or Medium on at least one of the other dimensions. These informants may have a grasp of how the social, political, and economic systems work, but little interest in taking steps to serve the community. They may be highly skilled (communicate well, ambitious) but they do not have strong civic-oriented attitudes. They do almost no community service unless it has direct personal benefit, nor do they see civic participation as particularly relevant to them. 15-year-old Anna (HUM/MED) who is attending a Catholic School, exemplifies such an attitude, she was classified as High on knowledge and skills, Medium on attitudes and Low on participation. She watches ABC TV’s Four Corners, regularly reads the newspaper, is politically and socially discerning, but is not engaged in civic action:

*Going a bit wider, thinking of today’s world or our local community, are there any issues that you feel strongly about?*

I’d say the war with Iraq. I reckon that George Bush is just taking it a tad too far. Like, ah, like I think that they are sort of encouraging Iraq to fight back and I think that’s what George Bush wants. I think his father’s influenced him a lot. I think if they just went in there, they didn’t stuff around, they got it over and done with, they got what they want, making minimum destruction and stuff and not killing as many people as they have, then it would have all been over a while ago and stuff. But, going in there and bombing is probably the worst thing they did I’d say. Then there could be other countries that get involved and there could be a big another world war, and that’s the last thing I think the world needs.

*Yeah, yeah. Do you think we can do anything about those sorts of issues?*

Not really, not us, firstly because they’ve had all those parades in Hobart for like no war and stuff, but I don’t see how that impacted, any of it. I don’t think the government is taking much notice or anything. But if they keep putting the war with Iraq first, and it’s like that’s not our war to fight. They haven’t bombed us yet. We have lost a couple in incidents like in Bali and stuff. We could help, but I don’t think it’s the right thing for us to get involved, because it sort of ruined our identity as being a nice country and stuff and now we’re on the target list, which is just making it worse. There are other more important things happening in Australia, like the Murray River and stuff. That needs fixing really soon.

When considering those who have high civic knowledge and attitudes but little civic participation, we are compelled to ask, why they do so little for their community? We explore some possible reasons later in this report. Those in the next group are, like Anna, apathetic about community participation, but they do not have the level of skills or civic knowledge that she demonstrated.

**Low civic orientation: apathetic**

Some informants had Low to Medium levels of civic knowledge and personal capacities/skills and evidenced minimal civic social attitudes. They did only a small amount of volunteer activity or civic participation. Although not antipathetic towards civic duty, they did not see it as relevant to them, or alternatively, had so few personal resources that participation was not an option. Those in this group seemed to have fewer personal and social resources (social capital).
Some informants from the Young Women’s Collective fitted here. Hayley, aged 17 (TRAD/QST), is typical of these young women and rated Low on all dimensions. She had few friends, limited resources and was dealing with a bereavement. She portrayed a sense of hopelessness and generally found life boring and uninteresting:

What about in today’s world or your local community? Would there be a particular issue that you feel strongly about? Something that you get up on your soap box about or discuss with friends or family?
No. I’m not interested in anything.
Do you watch the news or …?
No, not really.

The younger informants also fitted here, primarily because their civic attitudes and knowledge were inchoate. It is impossible to predict on the basis of their responses at ages 12 or 13 how these informants might act and think in the future. For example 12-year-old Richard (EMB, Catholic), who attends a Catholic college, rated Low on all dimensions:

Yes. Thinking about yourself, have you ever experienced something that was unfair?
Um, yeah, like my brother getting something that I never in my life ever get. He got a laptop. He’s got a bit of a not a mental problem, but just finds it hard in maths I think to … he just used his laptop in exams. And I got a remote control car that was about a quarter of the price. I probably got about as much fun out of my remote control as I would have out of the laptop. I didn’t live to regret getting the remote control, but at the time it felt really unfair.

It would be interesting to have a follow up of the informants in this age group to track their civic orientation. As stated earlier, there is at this stage no indication of how they will be in respect to civic orientation in 3-4 years time.

**Low civic orientation: anti-social**
Three young men from Spin Cycle demonstrated anti-social attitudes and behaviour and rated Low on all four dimensions. Their ethos is the antithesis of civic orientation. While they despise authority and the legal system, they did have a number of skills that allowed them to operate outside the law with some impunity. The peer group (or gang) was their major source of identity and underpinned their anti-social worldview. For example, 17-year-old Nathan (EMB, no religious identification) demonstrated leadership skills, which he used for anti-social actions rather than for the common good. When asked when he felt most alive he described a violent act against his father:

Yeah, well, I hit dad on the head the other day.
Oh.
That was cool.
How did that happen?
Just before I got booted out, me and my mum were arguing and she grabbed me, so I grabbed her and then my dad grabbed me by the throat, so I grabbed him by the throat and smacked around his face, and that was cool.
Yeah.
I loved it.
Wow, so I guess … yeah, how did you feel?
I felt alive.
You did?
Yeah, that was sweet.

While there were only three informants we classified this way, further research would be useful to ascertain the reasons for their low civic orientation and for their anti-social attitudes.
In the next section, we explore a number of factors that might explain why some respondents had higher levels of civic orientation than others, particularly with respect to civic participation.

Factors Associated with Civic Orientation

Some socio-cultural factors, like sex of respondent or ethnicity, did not appear to be significantly related to civic orientation; factors such as age and family and peer influence seem more important. We discuss these factors below.

*Age.* Those aged 12-15 also had the lowest levels on all four civic dimensions, as can be seen on the following *AnswerTree* tables. It appears that the younger the informant, the less they knew about social, political and human rights issues. Likewise, for many of our younger informants, their civic attitudes were unformed and their capabilities were limited.

There appears to be a strong relationship between age and level of civic participation with younger informants less socially involved; levels of involvement rise in the late teens and early twenties. Three quarters of informants aged 15 or under could not think of anything that they did for someone else in their community, apart from family and friends. There were few aged 16 or above who responded this way. Younger respondents were also more likely to operate only within the personal or local sphere while young people in their late teens and early twenties were more likely to operate in the national or international sphere.
Figure 1 Civic knowledge and age

Figure 2 Civic capabilities and age
Figure 3 Civic attitudes and age

Figure 4 Civic participation and age
For example, Mark aged 13 (EMB), attends a regional Catholic College and is typical of the younger age group, rating Low on all citizenship dimensions. He lacks maturity but shows potential and glimpses of the person he may become:

Have there been examples of injustice that have struck you at all, anything sort of unjust? I guess the example is Afghanistan and America. Like, America have got it up their nose and they started it all. 
Mm. Sure. Again do you think there’s things we can do in relation to things like that? We can try to share more.

Many of those who were in their early teens were unable to name an issue that they felt strongly about. Kristy, aged 13 (TRAD/HI, Pentecostal), is typical: ‘Um, not really. I can’t think of anything.’

Some, like 12-year-old Tim (TRAD/HI) who attends a Catholic School, were able to articulate an issue that they considered important but they showed a lack of depth in their understanding of it:

I feel really strongly about keeping trees growing, because they’re like historic. They will live longer than any human being today ... and they’re living as well, they’re living like us. When I get older, I want to try and do something about it, though. That’s if there are still trees left standing ... when I get older I want a big block of land and just grow lots and lots of trees all over it.

Those aged 15 and over were much more aware of current affairs and had more highly developed views about them. The reasons for the age differential are likely to be related to a number of factors:

- Younger people have less developed skills;
- There is less opportunity for civic participation due to age restrictions;
- There are parental concerns about safety issues and thus the need for parental supervision.

Community service programs in the schools are not generally available to this age group so their community service is limited to activities outside of school.

Family. Young people’s civic participation appeared to be related to a number of family factors: (a) the respect they had for their parents, (b) parental values and attitudes to civic involvement and (c) the level of the parents’ involvement (parents were role models for involvement).

Almost all respondents who had High civic participation liked and respected their parents and spoke warmly about them. Many young people talked about their parents ‘being there for them’. Others specifically mentioned the closeness of the relationship, ‘My mum and dad have always sort of been close to me’. However, it cannot be concluded that those who were low on participation had poor relationships with their parents, although some of them did. Other factors seemed to come into play here e.g. age, opportunity, peers, spirituality type. Several young people in the High category said that their values were based on what parents had taught them or on how their parents conducted themselves within the family and wider community. Linda (TRAD/MED) aged 25, rated High on civic participation, and acknowledged the part her mother played in setting an example of selflessness:

My mother I most admire. Because she is a very unselfish person. She would have ... my grandmother lives with us and she’s quite elderly and I lose my patience
sometimes and think ‘Oh, my gosh how can she deal with this stuff?’, you know, that
my grandmother comes out with. It’s really difficult, because she’s 82, but she does it
all without complaining on a daily basis and she looks after all of us, and yeah, she’s
given up her life for her kids, basically, given up work, and so I really admire her,
and she never complains.

Sometimes it was a parent who was influential, but in some cases it was a sibling or
other family members. In two instances it was a grandparent who had the most influence
on an informant’s high level of participation:

Lisa (21, HUM/LO)
My grandmother had a great influence on me and I kind of always thought that if I
was like my grandmother I would be a good person and I think I am a lot like my
grandmother. Yeah, so I think probably that family influences are the greatest
impact, my parents and grandmother. She did so much volunteer work, just got in
and did anything.

Stuart (16, HUM/HI)
My grandfather [influenced me]. For the first eleven years of my life I was brought
up by a single mother and my grandfather was always like a dad to me. Even though
he had five children of his own he still made me feel like I was the only person in the
universe and he is really fun. I have got a relationship with my grandfather that is
pretty much unseen between a two generation difference, we make each other cry
with laughter all the time. He is a really genuine guy.

For others, while their parents set an example and had encouraged them to be involved
in the first place, it was not their parents who were responsible for their continued
involvement. As a result of a somewhat coerced early involvement, they made friends
with other young people who were also involved and this peer connection kept them
involved:

Angela (18, TRAD/LO, Lutheran)
I worked in a retirement village for a while and I’ve done work for charities. My
Dad’s in Lions, so I spend a lot of my time at their fund raisers and doing things like
Give a Life and giving money to the polio programs and things like that.
So it was your Dad’s involvement in Lions that got you involved?
Partially and just doing Red Shield, I’ve been involved.
So are you someone where if an opportunity comes up you will generally take it?
Yeah, I haven’t so much recently with school time but when I was younger, but as
Dad’s become a lot more [involved] now I do a lot of things with them and I’m also
in the Young Lions, it’s just a bunch of students between the ages of sixteen and
eighteen or twenty where we all get together once a month and do fund raising or we
put a team into the ‘We Love Life’. We hold events. Things like that just to raise as
much money as we can and then at the end of the year we donate it to a charity or
just a different charity each year.

Our findings support those of earlier studies (Flanagan et al. 1998; Smith 1999), who
found a relationship between young people acknowledging that working for the public
good is an important life goal and their parents/extended family role-modelling this
attitude.

Having a good relationship with parents (rather than whether the parents were
separated/divorced) seemed to be a highly important factor in civic participation. There
were 20 informants (28%) who indicated that their parents had divorced or separated, 3
of whom were classified as High civic participation and 13 as Low. In some cases the
parents’ divorce was acrimonious and the fall-out from this seemed to limit young
people’s ability to become involved in outside activity.
For example, 15-year-old Natasha (TRAD/QST) who was Low on civic participation said, ‘I am torn between my parents … and just I need time for myself’. Whether they had come to terms with the parents’ divorce or separation and had a good relationship with at least one parent or significant family member seemed to have some influence on the level and type of civic involvement. Although we did not have sufficient information in many instances, we still tentatively concluded that civic involvement appeared to decline or not begin when there was a serious family trauma (e.g. death of a parent or relative, serious illness, family conflict). Natasha said that her much-loved aunt and grandmother had died recently. For her, family turmoil was occurring on many fronts at once (divorce of her parents and the death of loved ones).

Peers and mentors. Having friends also involved in civic participation seemed to help informants to keep motivated; what otherwise might have been a chore ended up being a fun time with friends. For example, Ryan and Sarah were Youth Voice participants who found friends to be a key factor in their civic involvement:

Ryan (18, TRAD/HI, Catholic)
My friends are really good because they encourage me to do stuff.

Sarah (18, TRAD/HI, Uniting Church)
I moved a lot during my childhood, five or six times, so friends definitely play a role in what you do. For example, in high school I had two very close friends and we had extremely similar passions, so if anything one did the other two did without the others knowledge. So a program came up and all three of us enrolled and didn’t know until we got there. Probably the confidence knowing that there are other people out there that have the same views as you and will support you. They were a very big influence in the fact that they taught me that no matter which one of us succeeded the most in the program or whatever area, we were happy for them no matter and they were happy for us.

Some young people talked about having a role model (sports person, teacher, pastor, youth leader, older youth) who provided them with opportunities, inspiration and in some instance, ideology. One informant talked about having a mentor, several others mentioned key people who had been influential in their becoming involved in community work.

Jessica (18, HUM/LO, Youth Voice)
Joan, she is my mentor and she came with us to the Youth Voice program. She is probably the most influential person in my life besides my dad. She always puts me in a situation like this to help me achieve and she has always been there and works really hard at the Youth Voice. She does so much for the kids and us and she has done so much for me really.

Schools and chaplains or religious education teachers were seen to be influential in various aspects of civic orientation.

Opportunity. We needed to keep in mind, when asking our informants about their involvement in activities related to social justice, that opportunities for younger students are limited. Anna – who had mentioned her views on refugees and battery hens – grounded us firmly in her reality with this piquant response:

Do you think we can do anything about those sorts of things?
Well, I don’t think I can do anything about refugees and stuff but I think I can do something about chickens.
Access to opportunities for civic participation was an important factor in establishing positive attitudes and to the type and rate of participation. These opportunities came through schools, church and youth groups, family connections and sporting clubs.

Many young people had done community service at their school, particularly at Catholic or Protestant schools and/or church groups and these activities appeared to influence their value system and their attitude to voluntary service. This supports Smith’s (1999) findings that school resources instil in young people a participatory and involved orientation towards the community.

However, there seems to be a significant variation in the type of social or community service programs that were conducted in schools and the age at which youth are encouraged to participate. In schools where community service was an important part of the school’s ethos, the young people tended have positive attitudes to community participation. Some informants claimed that as a result of taking part in a school-based program, they had become involved in other community activities. In addition, the ethos of a school appeared to be an important influence on their commitment to social justice, particularly in schools that had a history of social justice and service. Peter, aged 19 from Youth Voice (TRAD/HI, Catholic) is a good example of this:

I think the Brothers really reminded the school of its history they also were instrumental in the establishment of Christian Service Programs. Um, sort of running programs for Amnesty International and charity collections which you know they sent out the boys from the school to go and collect for the missions and that sort of thing, And organise things like, Missions fun run and the pilgrimage to India, and that sort of thing. They were really very good. I suppose they initiated it and fostered the social conscience of the school.

A number of young people acknowledged the influence that school-based community service had on their later commitment to volunteering:

Linda (25, TRAD/MED, Catholic)
I did a lot of it with school and that’s where it sort of started from, because I was from a Catholic school and then once I left school I missed it so I started with the Red Cross and I worked in a children’s program, visiting children who were disadvantaged. So I used to sort of go out with them or you know sort of visit them at school and do activities and stuff and then I did the tele-cross program, where you called an elderly person every morning so that they can live on their own.

Katherine (15, TRAD/QST, Lutheran)
Like the teacher who was organising the community service suggested we do stuff in class and I brought up the knitting group and made knitting rugs and send them overseas to countries and stuff and have certainly got a bit of knitting done and that feeling of I’m putting something back into this world.

For a few informants, school-based community service was their only social participation, apart from minor one-off activities or baby-sitting. Consider 13-year-old Mark (EMB) who attends a Catholic school and whose only civic participation is through his school and was limited to one event:

Have you ever done any sort of voluntary work, helped out with anything?
Oh, yeah, one Christmas we went down to the place on High Street and cooked for the homeless.
OK. Tell me about it. What happened?
Oh, it was just different to how we lived. Just watching some of the people, how they live, and old family, just a kid, a wife and a husband, and they only had a car.
Organisations outside the school sector also played a critical role in establishing civic participation patterns. A Senate Committee (1991) report on young Australians and citizenship acknowledged the role of youth organisations in promoting citizenship. This view has received wide acceptance since the publication of the report and is reflected in our results. Informants from Youth Voice demonstrated high levels on all dimensions of civic orientation, and demonstrated their willingness and ability to operate in them. This program provided them with the opportunity, skills training and confidence to become involved. It also provided them with opportunities to travel interstate and to meet other like-minded young people. While not to the same degree, youth clubs, sporting and other community groups provided a similar function.

Ben (18, HUM/MED)
This year I was on the task force for the Tasmanian version of the Youth Voice Program, on the organizing committee, and the twelve of us worked particularly hard to have our week in September which was a remarkable success really. I think it is the first year that we have made a profit and I was the treasurer so I was reasonably happy about that. Much help was given by the State Government this year as opposed to last year and hopefully that keeps up. The week was a fantastic success, it always is a hard week. I’ve done this year as task force and last year as a participant in the Tasmanian program and I imagined this again at a national level would be just as much a success and a pleasure to be at.

Organisations like the ones mentioned above appeared to assist informants in moving outside their comfort zone in terms of civic participation. Roehlkepartain and Benson (1993, p.78) claim that service has its greatest impact when it takes people out of their comfort zone, so that they think about and see the world from a different perspective. Several young people talked about how scared and apprehensive they were about some of the challenges of volunteer work prior to commencing it:

Olivia (18, HUM/Hi, Youth Voice)
It was quite scary because there were people there that were not only old but mentally disabled too. There was this one lady and you had to make sure you had your hands in your pockets because she would just walk up to you, wouldn’t even look at you, just grab your hand and wouldn’t let go and just walk around with you all day. That was excellent but really hard to start off with.

Informants who had successfully managed challenges similar to those identified by Olivia, spoke about feeling euphoric and proud of their achievements. An added bonus for many informants was that as well as being challenging, civic participation was also enjoyable. It also opened new horizons and new career options.

Victoria (18, TRAD/QST, Youth Voice)
A friend of mine from school roped me into doing it at the last minute and I remember sitting on the train by myself on the way to Brisbane crying and thinking, I’m spending a week and a half of my holidays doing this nerdy, nerdy, nerdy camp. I called it the nerd convention for the first week before I went and said, ‘I’ve got to go to the nerd convention’. And then I got there and the first day I was miserable because I didn’t get involved in anything and I just sat there and thought this is shit, I want to be at home. Then the second day I thought these people look like they are having so much fun, so I got into it and got really involved and I thought, wow this is really good.

As a result of her civic participation and the contact she made with older adults already in the political sphere, Victoria wants to get involved in politics. Others also spoke about new possibilities and of changing their goals and their career options as a result of
experiences like Victoria’s. Some attributed their community participation directly to their church and youth group involvement.

Those who were TRAD/HI were likely to have done some volunteer activities at least within their own church community. Some also engaged in outreach work in the local community. When community service was organised by the church or youth club as a part of the church’s mission, young people tended to also see it as part of their Christian duty.

Renee (19, Pentecostal, TRAD/HI, Bible College)
Yes, I suppose you would call it voluntary work. I helped one summer with a missionary outreach thing that our church was doing in the inner city. They put on a carnival for the kids that live in the high-rise and they have a show beforehand and they would have rides and food and it was just a big fun carnival. They would do that every week at a different high-rise in the city.

When churches or youth groups organise activities like the one cited by Renee, it provides a safe environment to engage in activities that would be normally outside their comfort zone. It also normalised an activity that may otherwise seem scary or even impossible to do. Doing an activity that was out of one’s comfort zone with friends, while being scary, was also fun and rewarding. Motives for community service are complex and in trying to understand them, cultural and sub-cultural influences also need to be taken into account.

Worldview and motivation. Wuthnow (1995) raised the importance of considering motives in community service and volunteerism. Hartley (2001), in a study of 75 young Australians, found that volunteering is one of the ways young people contribute to society and that while many have a positive attitude to it, others consider it ‘uncool’ to volunteer. She found that some young people considered volunteering ‘uncool’ because it is unpaid, or it is associated with being a ‘goodie-goodie’ or because they felt that it would have a negative effect on their reputation with friends and acquaintances. Others shied away from volunteering due to lack of time because of sport, work or leisure activities. Those who volunteer do so for a variety of reasons, including: to increase skills, help people and/or causes, give something back to society, broaden their experience, to fill in time and to fulfil an obligation through a personal connection.

We can report similar findings. In terms of active participation in sporting or local community organisations, love of sport or activity, enjoying being involved in promoting it and the feeling of obligation to pass on skills to new members were mentioned by informants as reasons for continuing involvement. There was an expectation from the club itself that players or members ‘give back’ to the organisation, as others had done before them. This applied particularly to highly participatory and team activities, like sporting or debating clubs. This expectation led to early involvement, that with time moved to more complex roles in the organisation.

It is simplistic to suggest that young people engage in active participation entirely for altruistic reasons, even those whose service clearly emerged from their value and belief system acknowledged the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards associated with helping others. Many young people who were actively involved in community service and volunteer work claimed that they did it because they enjoyed it and/or saw it as a way of giving something back to a particular organisation, with which they had a lengthy involvement e.g. sporting associations.

Steven (18, HUM/HI, no religious identity, Youth Voice)
I have found so much joy out of helping other people … I love being part of camps, and kids camps, and adult mental disability camps and whatever. You get such a buzz such a great feeling. It gives it back to you from you helping. I probably wouldn’t be part of this if I haven’t done one camp. So I did really know I could get this kind of joy

Travis (25, TRAD/HI, Catholic)
A lot of the people on my team they play because they want to win, but for me it would be for fun, to play with your mates and to do the best you can. And, that’s why I play. It’s more of the social thing rather than being really competitive … Oh, I love it [coaching]. I’ve got the passion there for the sport and I enjoy the kids. I’m not actually one to worry about winning but actually seeing a team improve. It makes you feel good when a kid learns a new skill and improves.

For a few young people, motives appeared to come out of self-interest. Others seemed to have motives that appeared to be contradictory or at least juxtaposed. Justin, aged 17 (TRAD/QST), attends a Catholic school but does not believe Catholic teachings. He is however, well informed about political and social issues and is highly skilled for his age, yet he appears self-absorbed, intolerant of religion and describes current issues in black and white. On the other hand, he has a strong involvement in sporting activities, youth politics and activism. He is concerned about national and international issues and wants to ‘do something to make the world a better place’ but only if it fits in with his long- or short-term goals:

I’m interested in politics but it’s bloody hard work and it’s kind of like you can’t have any money doing it, like you are not going to end up rich unless you are rich before hand … It is not so much religion, I’m sure the religions are all founded in good faith, it’s just people’s interpretations of them, like the crap that is spouted out of the mouths of some people. I think it [going to Mass] leads people to believe that they don’t need to achieve, they’ve got something waiting, they don’t realize that as the end of their life, and I perceive it as being the end of your life.

Some of the values that Justin learned from Catholic teaching remained, e.g. a concern for social justice and truthfulness. Other values like humility, compassion and genuine kindness, appear not to have ‘taken’:

Someone I actually really admire is my mate Jason. Jason has probably had more sex than any 17-year-old I know. He is a little weird but he is always up for a good time, like we say, ‘we’re going to town’ and he goes, ‘yeah, we are going to town’ and it actually happens. I admire him because he is pretty true to his word and he doesn’t pretend that he is not half full of himself, he doesn’t pretend that he is some little angel when he is not, and he actually goes out there and has a good time and gets what he wants most of the time, he is just one of those dudes.

Motives tended to be more complex when informants were involved in several levels of participation in which case a range of reasons were given including values, past experience, family influence, fun, friendships and worldview.

Civic Participation and Religion/Spirituality
The link between civic participation, community service and various measures of religiosity is confirmed in numerous other studies of young people, particularly in the United States (Smith 1999; Youniss & Yates 1999; Smith 2003b). In addition to facilitating high levels of civic involvement, the holding of religious beliefs and values has also been shown to be a protective factor in relation to risk-taking behaviour (Ellison 1989; Bond et al. 2000; Schnittker 2001; Regnerus et al. 2003; Smith 2003b) and in offering a sense of belonging (Abbott-Chapman & Denholm 2001).
While it is clear that, in the USA, religiosity has a positive effect on civic orientation and active citizenship amongst young people and is a predictor of adult civic behaviour, in contemporary Australia only a small proportion of the youth population has anything to do with religion in its traditional, institutionally organised form of ‘church-oriented religiosity’ (Hughes 2004).

In our study religiosity did not appear to be strongly linked with a particular civic orientation. However, among the nineteen respondents who were rated as having *High civic orientation*, six were TRAD/HI (from a pool of 23) and five HUM/HI (from a pool of 7). Steven aged 18, (HUM/HI, no denomination) typifies the desire to have input into the common good, ‘You can make such a difference. That’s what I want to do in my life’.

In addition, we found a connection between informants’ *High civic orientation* and their acceptance of traditional Christian values – but not necessarily the beliefs. However, as detailed in Chapter 3, allegiance to principles of human rights and social justice is central to both Christianity and humanism, so it is not surprising that several young people classified as HUM/HI claimed that the source of their values was Christianity. Brett from Youth Voice exemplifies this type of response:

> Like Youth Voice is a Christian organisation and I’m not Christian, but the base values of Youth Voice, Christian values of honesty, caring, respect and responsibility, I’m cool with that because I think they are good human values. In a lot of ways that’s the token line we give people but I guess for me I had this point when I said, ‘I’m not a Christian, what am I doing?’ But I think those sorts of things and the sort of values we try and push through whatever it is we are doing.

Having a strong and clearly defined value system that has as its base, social concern and responsibility towards others, seems to be a factor in determining who is likely to be heavily involved in civic participation:

Stuart (16, HUM/HI, Youth Voice)

> As a Prefect I represent an organisation called ‘Round Square’. Schools that are members of ‘Round Square’ are involved, and one of those is community service so our school is pretty big on community service. And also the school I went to in UK also really encompasses community service. For example, there were huge floods in a place in Scotland and they had billions of dollars worth of damage and I went for a few days helping people. I am a member of a tennis club and if they need a hand I will go and do whatever for them. I am really open to community service I think it is good. So helping the flood victims – that must have been amazing?

> It was incredible, people just lost their whole house, their whole life. We are talking about people who are under the poverty line and they only just had a house, they didn’t have insurance. A lot of them were a mess and were really thankful that we were there. Yeah, it was pretty incredible and influencing on who I am.

> How do you think it has influenced you?

> I am more aware of the need for helping in certain places and I am more active in things like that. If I see someone who needs a hand I will go and help them. If volunteers have been asked for in certain areas I will probably go and do that because I realize how much of a difference it makes.

Sarah (18, TRAD/QST, Uniting Church, Youth Voice)

> Compassion, justice and things like that, not to the extreme where an eye for an eye, but obviously just the simple ideas of respect, compassion and honesty. For some reason I have a passion for those sorts of philosophies around whether honesty is a good thing in certain circumstances, whether it should always be supreme even if it will hurt the other person. That is probably the main one where I draw most of my references to Catholicism and things like that. I would definitely say that my
religious background is where I draw most of my ideas about how life should be lived and enjoyed and lived to the fullest and things like that.

In contrast, those who rated Low on the four civic dimensions tended to be EMB. In fact, in respect to spirituality types, no-one categorised as EMB had high levels of civic orientation. Their responses were ill-informed and monosyllabic. Lucy (12, EMB), who attends a Protestant school, gave uninformed responses to most of our questions and demonstrated an inchoate thought pattern:

- Thinking about yourself, have you ever personally experienced something unfair?
  - Not really.
- If you think about the wider community, wider world, things that we see on the news, are there any particular things that you feel strongly about?
  - Terrorism and stuff.
- Anything else?
  - Not really.
- How does terrorism worry you?
  - Just like it’s people who lose family and die.
- Do you think that we can do anything about that sort of thing?
  - No not really. We can try and catch the people but that’s about all.
- Have there been any examples of injustice that have struck you at all?
  - Not really.

The spirituality type of the three young men classified as Low civic orientation: anti-social was either EMB or NEW but their values were anti-social. Consider 17-year-old Nathan from Spin Cycle (EMB, no religious identification). His language was more colourful than Lucy’s, but like her, he scored Low on the four civic dimensions. The injustices he saw were related to his own interests and he had received payment for the only ‘volunteer’ work he had done, apart from occasional baby-sitting:

- So do you believe in God?
  - I’ve been crucified, not crucified, Christened and baptised and all that shit, but no, not into any of it.
- Now, just thinking about today’s world or your local community, are there issues you feel strongly about maybe to do with the environment or politics or some sort of social issues?
  - Um, it shits me when people waste water, like, peel potatoes under the tap. It’s just unnecessary … I reckon marijuana should be legal, seeing that it’s you know, harmless I reckon. It just makes you alert. It doesn’t affect your reflexes or anything like [getting] pissed, so it’s not like a drug effect.

While there are indications that there is an association between spirituality type and civic orientation, we anticipate that the survey results will clarify things further.

Conclusion

There are a number of variables that appear to facilitate young people becoming involved in civic participation, but these predictors appear to interact in complex ways. Older informants are more likely to have access to places where they can participate, and have greater skill level and greater knowledge about how civil society operates and their responsibilities within it. However, age alone is not enough; not all older informants were High on civic participation, and other factors also come into play. For example, while those who have an allegiance to a church may well be active in civic participation, it is not their church affiliation that seems to matter, rather, their values – including a worldview with an altruistic component – appears to be more decisive. Respondents who had a clear value system that was directed towards the common good were more likely to be High on all four dimensions of civic orientation.
There is, however, another factor that comes into play – opportunity. In this way young people appear to get a ‘taste’ for participation and enjoy it. The opportunities for participation come through school community service, youth clubs and youth organisations as well as sporting groups. Through this the young people can move out of their comfort zone while participating in a safe environment. Results indicate that schools assist the social development of young people through community service programs and in so doing enable them to enhance their civic values and actions.

We concur with Roehlkepartain and Benson (1993), who argue that churches have a role in stretching young people to move out of their comfort zone and enter into wider social issues (e.g. poverty, peace and justice). We accept however, that other organisations can also fulfil this role for young people.

To recap; opportunity and a favourable ethos interact and assist young people to develop a positive attitude to community service and a willingness to engage further. There is a chicken and egg situation that seems to be occurring here, which comes first? Does participation come about because of well-developed civic attitudes and values, or does participation lead to and increase one’s level of civic orientation? It seems that both are happening. Does this imply that those who are not participating are uninterested? Not necessarily. Some young people are unable to get into the ‘loop’; they do not have enough resources – social supports, contacts and opportunities (social capital) – to invest their time in civic participation, nor the energy to become actively involved in social concerns. Day-to-day living is difficult for some. This result raises some challenges for schools as well as youth groups in the ways in which they provide opportunities for civic engagement.
Appendix I

Project Phase II: National Sample Survey - Initial Information

The second phase of the ‘Spirit of Generation Y’ project commenced in July 2004. This phase consists of a telephone survey of a nationally representative sample of young people aged 13-24, and includes, for comparison purposes, a control sample from the age range 25-59.

The survey questionnaire was prepared during September-December 2004, and quotations obtained from several survey organisations. The contract was awarded to the Social Research Centre, Melbourne. Interviewer training, pilot tests and questionnaire tuning and tracking took place in January, 2005, and the telephone interviews were conducted between February 1 and March 8. A total of 1,619 completed interviews was obtained. The data file was delivered to the research team on May 13, 2005.

The Social Research Centre employed Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) software, which enables ‘tracking’ of questions: the next appropriate question is automatically selected, depending on the answers given to previous questions. The length of survey interviews averaged twenty-five minutes.

A detailed account of the sample design and weighting will be included in our next project report; but we can provide the following initial information:

a) the (weighted) sample is designed to be representative of the national population in age, gender, state of residence, and residence in capital city / rest of state;

b) sample weights were calculated by using detailed information on age, gender and place of residence of the population as reported in the 2001 Australian Census of Population and Housing conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics;

c) the age-groups 13-15 and 16-18 were deliberately ‘oversampled’ to ensure that there was a sufficient number of cases in each group at national level to enable estimates of the characteristics of these groups, and comparisons between the groups, to be calculated with an acceptably low margin of error;\(^\text{43}\)

d) ‘random digit dialling’ technique was employed so that the sample included unlisted as well as listed telephone numbers; mobile telephone numbers were also utilised where these were given by household contacts as the best means of contacting an eligible respondent;

e) the response rate (number of completed interviews as a proportion of eligible contacts) was almost 80%, which is unusually high for this type of survey. The non-responses included 65 cases (approx.) where parental permission to interview a subject under the age of 16 was not given.

The distribution of cases by age-group, gender and state of residence is shown in the following tables (number of cases shown is raw, unweighted):

\(^{43}\) The over-sampling will not bias the reported results; these groups will be ‘weighted back’ to their true proportion of the population.
Age Groups

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(Note: the sample was designed to enable reporting of results by age group at national level. Reporting by age group within States would have required a much larger sample, whose cost would have exceeded the financial resources available to the project.)

The work of analysing the survey data is now commencing, and we look forward to giving an account of the survey findings in our next report.

Phase III of the project, another round of in-depth interviews, is scheduled to commence late in 2005; the project concludes in June, 2006.)
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