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CUTTING GRASS:

the uncertainty of coming of age

in the Post-Fordist Era

Thesis presented to the Department of Sociology, Lakehead University

by

David Mignault

APRIL 2000

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INTRODUCTION

Overview

This thesis is an ethnographic description and analysis of a small group of young, adult males trying to make the transition from employment as a youth into the adult world of work.[1] It argues that to understand how this group experiences and lives out this difficult transition in the current post-Fordist economy requires an understanding of the interrelationships between economic changes, the changing class structure, and masculinity. Further, it demonstrates that concepts such as class must be reworked to account for life-cycle processes if they are to constructively capture the current reality for many youths in our modern times. Moreover, the young males in this study actively construct sets of values and meanings in their experiences, yet their actions may only serve to minimize their intolerable conditions. In other words, the economic realities they face give rise to uncertainty and deprivation, and deprivations engender relative satisfactions. These relative satisfactions are constituted by the young males in this study in the form of games, drink, and sexist banter which briefly reduce the strain of work and economic conditions in the age of falling expectations (Swift, 1995).

Sociologist Ulrich Beck (1999:26) argues:

> The first age of modernity was distinguished by its securities, its certainties, its clear boundaries; the second is distinguished by its insecurities, its uncertainties, its dissolution of boundaries. In this second age of modernity, every field–the economy, society, and politics–is governed by the risk regime.

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[1]The transition from school to work constitutes a significant phase in the maturation of young people. It represents their initiation into the adult world through becoming financially independent. It may also replace a peer group of adolescents with a peer group of adults.

1

The life experiences of young people has indeed changed over the last two decades as we have passed into the second age of modernity. Many of these changes are the direct result of the restructured labour market where young people today are working harder, longer hours, getting paid less, and are unemployed more despite being more educated.

As a result, uncertainty and angst can be unkind guests to young people today as they feel the effects of the post-Fordist economy. Unemployment, inappropriate jobs, and low wages are what many young people in Canada face as they emerge from their education to enter the contemporary economy. Most had held high expectations for interesting, rewarding careers when they entered post-secondary education. However, many youths, especially those from low- and middle-income families, have incurred large debts in pursuit of their degrees and dreams. Moreover, there are no guarantees that when they graduate they will obtain a "good job." Youth today experience a set of risks which were largely unknown to their parents.

The experiences of some youths documented in this thesis relate to the difficulties faced by many university and college graduates and students who are seeking legitimate employment. Their stories also reflect their coming to grips with today's difficult economic conditions. For social, economic, and political forces are deconstructing the so-called Canadian welfare state and destabilizing the process of youths coming of age in Canada.

The plight of large numbers of youths (social status describing a period in life in which a person is still semi-dependent, usually upon his/her family for some form of material support) in Canada has become a major public issue. "It has galvanized everybody," Cabinet Minister Sergio Marchi described the day after his party won the 1997 federal election. "It has galvanized their parents, their grandparents, their uncles, their aunts" (*Globe and Mail*, June 4, 1997:A-1). Marchi was referring to youth unemployment and job prospects, the seemingly hottest election issue that

year. Other major issues–free trade, the environment, the Canadian military crisis–were not momentous in the campaign and many people, it seems, were anxious about the conditions of young people coming of age and searching for work in the post-Fordist labour market.

At election time in 1997, the unemployment rate for youths aged 15-24 was 16.7%, compared to 9.6% for the workforce as a whole. Over 400,000 young people in the country were actively looking for work (*Globe and Mail*, June 4, 1997:A-1). The real issue, though, was not unemployment on its own but also the kind of work that was available to young graduates and students still in post-secondary education. Many of the jobs were low paying, part-time, or temporary and did not match the middle-class aspirations or education of many young people.

Thomas (1928:572) wrote, "If men [sic] define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." His point was rather simple; humans act in a world they help to define, and their realities are their definitions of these situations. Thus, a negative view of the future, whether valid or not, has a powerful impact on the present. People who believe that conditions in the future are going to be worse are likely to search for individual solutions that will ensure they and those close to them are the exceptions (Beck, 1992). They are less likely to have faith in social solutions that seek to improve conditions for everyone. This can lead a group of young people to work in a black market job in order for them to "improve their lot" on their own. In this thesis, I will provide a guide through the uncertain terrain some youths are encountering as they come of age in the current environment.

A long list of factors–namely, the post-Fordist economy which incorporates new technology, new global competition, new employer practices–are altering the prospects of youths and their process of gaining employment in Canada. Furthermore, rising post-secondary tuition costs, gender, class backgrounds, regional backgrounds, ethnicity, and varying aptitudes and abilities are important

variables. To point to a single factor as a grounds for hope may seem comforting to some, but it is ill-conceived.

In our ambiguous socio-economic times, public opinion about youths' prospects is profoundly dim. A 1995 poll commissioned by *Macleans* and the CBC found "alarming levels of pessimism" over employment prospects and the future quality of life. Many of those polled believed that the lives of the next generation would be more deprived than the lives of people then in their "prime" (*Macleans*, December 25, 1995:24). Furthermore, an Angus Reid Poll in 1996 concluded that while in 1989, 65% of 18-34 year olds believed they would eventually be "better off" financially than their parents, in 1995 only 29% of 18-34 year olds held this belief.

Aim Of The Work

In this thesis, I will examine a group of young, white, university and/or college-educated males who, during the spring and summer months, come together daily to labour in the outdoors for a black market landscaping outfit. This labour forms a core structure around which these men's lives ebb and flow. This landscaping company serves many functions for the crew. To begin with, it enables these men to earn the money that–while limited–is necessary for the maintenance of human life in our society. Furthermore, this job serves as the context for formal/informal communication and allows for leisure and play to be pursued both during and after work. In other words, it enables the maintenance of human identity.

This thesis is an ethnographic study of a specific work environment and its relationship to broader class and gender identities. Data was collected through observing and interviewing participants. My entry into this milieu was through working alongside the crew in the region of Kingston, Ontario from April to August, 1998. A number of different themes emerged in the course

of my research. These themes are centred around the economic constraints of the post-Fordist era, the situation of young men within this economic context, and how the crew's masculine social lives are actively reconstructed through their work and play experiences. It is often said that we are witnessing the coming of age of a youth cohort today that, for the first time in generations, will not attain a higher standard of living than their parents. Labour market conditions have deteriorated for youths, particularly for males, with the result that a much higher proportion are now, or soon will be, part of the "non-standard" workforce.

Youth is a process of social establishment through which people progress from the dependency of childhood to the independence of adulthood. Coming of age involves moving away from the family of origin after having concluded the prepatory stage of schooling and acquiring the means for autonomous living. In Canada this is no longer an orderly sequence of events.

This thesis is essentially about the difficulties of coming of age and provides insight into the experiences of youth trying to achieve adulthood. While the term "youth" is popularly used to refer to people aged 16-25, it is adopted in this thesis as a social status. Youth describes a period of life in which a person is still semi-dependent, usually on his/her family, for material support. While youths are important actors in their own right, their lives are strongly mediated by others. Youth are invariably marginalized within wider society and have little, if any, input in public policy debates which directly impact their lives. The term "youth" focusses on the liminal positioning of youth in which the boundaries defining youth are those of exclusion. This period of exclusion can vary in length from one individual to another and from one generation to another; contingent upon social and economic conditions.

The shift from youth to adulthood has many dimensions and involves key milestones—leaving school, leaving the family home, establishing a livelihood, constructing an independent

household, and cohabitation. Not all need to be achieved for adult status, yet reaching adulthood means, at least, having the potential to achieve them. This thesis will detail the experiences of those hoping to achieve some key milestones while struggling in a changing economic environment.

Mapping The Terrain

Post-Fordist era. Capitalism—a system of economic and social life centred on wage labour and on private ownership of the means of production by a small number of people who derive their profits from the labour of people in lower social classes—is an increasingly unstable system of production and distribution. This instability lies behind Marx's famous dictum: "All that is solid melts into air" (Berman, 1982A:15). Uncertainty and the need for flexibility define our modern lives. We live in a world without guarantees and foundations. Indeed, doubt is a central feature in the lives of the crew that forms the subject of my thesis. This doubt is based upon the depressed economic environment which has characterized much of the 1980s and the 1990s. A state of flux exists among college and university students and graduates who cannot find the good jobs they were promised when they enrolled in post-secondary education. Today, young workers are not only paid and employed less, they are also becoming less well-represented in all job categories except low-level service sector jobs. As a matter of fact, it is in the subordinate service occupations that their cheap labour is in most demand.

The consequences are ominous, according to Miles Corak:

> Labour market conditions have deteriorated for the young, particularly men, with the result that a much higher proportion are now part of the 'contingent' work-force. Their earnings capacity seems to have permanently deteriorated during the 1980s, raising the risk that they and their children will fall into a state of low income (Statistics Canada, *Labour Markets*, Cert. #89-553-XPB).

By the summer of 1998, the time this ethnographic study took place, there were more than 430,000 Canadian youths actively seeking work, and the youth labour-participant rate was the lowest in 25 years. By January 1999, the official unemployment rate among youths in Canada stood at 15.8 per cent (see fig. 1). Moreover, the youth employment rate has fallen more than 11 percentage points in the last decade, and 50 per cent of youth with jobs were employed part-time, compared with only 21 per cent in 1989 (*Canadian Economic Observer*, 1997). In addition, fewer students have been able to obtain summer jobs. Both the employment rates and participation rates began a dramatic decline in 1989. The proportion of youths with no declared work experience stood at 9.7 per cent in 1989, 15.8 per cent in 1993, and 19.9 per cent in 1996. By December 1997, it reached almost 25 per cent (*Statistics Canada*, 1998). These trends are having dramatic effects upon youth experiences.

Swift (1995:4) argues that many Canadian workers have suffered a permanent crisis because of the current labour market. He points out that trends over the last twenty years indicate a relative and absolute decline of jobs in the productive sector and a rise of employment in the service sector. In the past forty years nine out of every ten jobs created in Canada have been in services. Between 1980 and 1994, the percentage of all jobs accounted for in the service sector rose from 66 to 74 (*Statistics Canada*, 1996). Palmer (1992) emphasizes that the implications of this service-based economy are great. Low wages, low security, temporary employment, and part-time hours characterize more and more jobs. The changes in working life for numerous people correspond with other changes in life such as leisure, culture, and self-identity. The important thing to stress here is the need to consider the changes together.

Flexible work has become more common in Canada, especially among the young (aged 15-24) and students (Krahn, 1995:40). The rates of part-time and temporary work, self-employment

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and multiple job holdings increased between 1989 and 1994, most visibly in service industries. Rates of non-standard work have increased mostly for young workers whose labour force participation rates have fallen (p. 41). In the present economic context–as stable, secure, full-time jobs vanish–flexible work strategies (part-time, casual, contract jobs, etc.) are being promoted from a number of different directions. Growth in non-standard employment is clearly part of the transition to a service-dominated economy. Since service industries account for over 70% of all employment, they also contain the majority of non-standard jobs. This thesis will examine a job in this non-standard sector and will look at workers' active responses to this labour. A clear picture emerges: jobs available to the young are increasingly unskilled, poorly paid, subordinate, dead-end jobs with little chance for advancement.

These jobs are also the most common type available to youths after they graduate from college or university. Over two-thirds of the new jobs created in the Canadian labour force are in sales and service, suggesting a long-term trend that many young people will be confronted with throughout their working lives.

Social analysts such as Milne (1988), Clarke (1990), and Kumar (1995) argue that the post-Fordist economy is characterized by a number of distinguishing traits which are applicable to the labour market young people encounter today. To begin with, there has been a growth in so-called "niche" markets at the expense of some mass markets. Products for these markets require shorter production runs and smaller, more productive and efficient production systems. These more flexible production systems are made possible and profitable by burgeoning technologies which, in turn, require workers to have more diverse skills and education, and more responsibilities. Furthermore, it is argued that production must be controlled through a more flexible system thus requiring huge, rigid bureaucracies to change and adapt. Unions are no longer seen as rational and

adequate in this system. The end result of post-Fordism sees workers becoming more differentiated and people requiring more diffuse commodities, lifestyles, and cultural outlets. The centralized welfare state can no longer meet the needs of the differentiated worker, thus more flexible institutions are required (Clarke, 1990:74). In sum, greater differentiation in the work place is reflected in greater differentiation in society as a whole. This leads to more diverse demands and still greater differentiation in the work place. The working experiences of the crew will be analyzed within the post-Fordist economy.

One needs only to walk around suburban, middle-class, or well-off working class neighbourhoods in the summer to see a growing number of landscapers, roofers, and driveway sealers invading their environment. The blossoming tertiary sector is neither high paying nor high status. This thesis deals with a growing occupation in the service sector in Ontario—personal service (Kingston Economic Development Corporation, 1997). The crew members I worked with in this sector of the economy were disillusioned with their job options; even though seven of them were in or had graduated from university and the other was in his second year of nursing at the local community college. Through job constraints, soaring tuition hikes, and their own agency, the crew found themselves located in an "underground" landscaping business which, although seasonal and low-paying, gave them some control and some ephemeral pleasure. That is, it allowed them, in a world with few options, to work with friends and to have some choice over their work conditions.

The stereotypical image of a sweaty, hard-muscled, brawny, masculine landscaper becomes real in the everyday experiences of the crew. The intense and exhausting work conditions of landscaping help to reinforce a rugged masculinity in the crew's identity. These conditions present a challenge to their constructed "manhood." Competition, pride, and physical challenges are dynamic components of their masculinity. This masculinity is not the expression of an essential

male nature. Rather, it is socially constructed and reconstructed in the course of day-to-day action and discourse. Heterosexuality and masculinity are not neutral here; they are social accomplishments of a political nature which the crew draw out and implement.

This thesis will also investigate the class makeup of the crew. For sociologists who studied the patterns of inequality in the early phases of capitalist development, the notion of class was a fairly uncomplicated one. However, with the further development and sophistication of capitalism, the picture has changed and the political aspects of various economic undertakings have become salient. To analyze class and class inequality, then, we must first agree on a definition of class that; (a) is applicable to the modern era of capitalism in Canada, (b) takes into account the complexity of contemporary occupational specializations, and (c) goes beyond the purely economic to embrace the political dimension of class identity and action.

Contemporary Conditions

The dominant view that Canada's poor refuse to work and to save their resources because of what Lewis (1969) termed a culture of poverty fails to take into account the types of work open in today's market; it also fails to take into account the heterogeneity of the people who are classified as shirkers and the undeserving. In his book *Tally's Corner*, Liebow (1967), an ethnographer who studied the black street-corner men of Washington, DC, describes the conditions shaping the work patterns of the unskilled, black male. The street-corner men are full of contempt for the menial work they are streamed into, but this is not a result of any special tradition acquired from their "culture of poverty." Historically, the dregs of the job market have been left for minorities: jobs whose conditions and prospects are the mark of failure; jobs that are demeaned and ridiculed by the rest of the labour force and that pay minimum wage; jobs that are boring and monotonous like floor

polishing; dirty as in garbage collecting; or backbreaking as in furniture moving. Liebow (1967) argues that the duller, dirtier, and more exhausting the work, the less likely extra diligence and effort will be rewarded by anything but more gut-wrenching work. These jobs are basically dead-end jobs with no optimistic future in sight. The rest of society (contradicting Premier Harris' professed values concerning the dignity of work, i.e., workfare) holds the job of janitor or dishwasher in low esteem. In the end so does the "street-corner man," reflecting Merton's (1958) thesis about the self-fulfilling prophecy.

Because of structural constraints such as the post-Fordist economy, the group with whom I worked (white males; aged 20-27; from a "traditional middle class" background, see Appendix) have temporarily ventured into the under-class and lived experiences that Liebow (1967) argued were common for minorities in the sixties. The work the crew engaged in has all the earmarks of this work: it is demeaned by the general public; included monotonous, dull work, as in cutting 25 lawns a day with a push mower; dirty, as in shovelling manure into gardens; and back breaking, as in hauling 80 pound patio stones throughout a yard .

Gone, it would seem, is the smooth trajectory that once comprised coming of age for middle-class, highly educated youths. Past stories of the office holder in the public services and the manager in industry who made their job their vocation, seem to be foreign folktales to many youths today. In the Fordist era, the uncertainty of coming of age was proclaimed to be alleviated by secure employment and insurance against the market, ill health, and old age; humans were looked upon as being in control. The course of life for the middle- and upper-class was a trajectory which rose steadily from birth, through school, and learning on the job—only falling after retirement when one ceased to be a contributing employee. As we near the third millennium, the course of coming of age has come to be seen as more reflexive and less predetermined than it was in the Fordist era. This

has been encouraged by the nature of employment in the post-Fordist economy. As markets have become more competitive and efficient, so organizations have downsized their work forces. The stories of the crew related in this thesis, indicate that youths trying to achieve adulthood are responsible for their own career paths and are expected to be autonomous–masculine–not to look to the government or employers for "insurance."

Methods

Ethnographic research. This thesis is an attempt to meet the need for recording and interpreting working life on the workers' grounds and in their terms in the post-Fordist era. The data reported and analyzed was collected through participant observation. My aim was to gain a clear, firsthand picture of young men's working lives, rather than to test a specific hypothesis.

I studied the everyday lives of eight, white men who ranged in age from 20-27 and with whom I worked for five months during the spring and summer of 1998. The subjects worked for a black market landscaping firm. I have been friends with the majority of the crew for at least the last four years and have worked with this landscaping company for the past eight springs and summers. This familiarity with the individuals and the work environment meant I encountered few difficulties gaining entry into this subcultural world.

My ethnographic description is supplemented with descriptive statistical data on labour market trends, secondary material on post-Fordism, and comparative historical and ethnographic case studies. I have also drawn heavily upon my experiences as a university student and graduate, on my past history as what the crew considered a hard-working, manual labourer and "one of the boys."

Participant observation was carried on virtually continuously over five months. Because I was working six days a week with a group of young males whom I was friends with, initiating participant observation was quite easy. The main body of my data comprises a record of the day-by-day routines of the crew as we engaged in rigorous labour and "games." Frequently, however, associations which began at work led me out of the "labour" milieu and into ball-hockey arenas, post-game parking lot banter, poolrooms, bars, and private houses.

The majority of my ethnographic research was collected through recording detailed descriptions of conversations and experiences throughout the days and months of the spring and summer. While I was working and playing with the crew, I carried around a folder and a pen which were kept in the work truck during work hours. Because I have been working at this job for many years I have become the "crew chief," and this requires me to record a daily log of the day's events. Thus recording my observations of the "work experiences" became a "natural" progression and was incorporated quite easily into part of the normal daily routine. For the post-work activities, I toted a knapsack with pen and pad to record nightly activities.

The conversations and events which I participated in and recorded seemed to be natural and true to life. Through working with these men before, I feel that the atmosphere was not altered by me openly recording our travails and leisure activities. Through my ethnographic research, I was trying to understand the ways in which these young men were building their cognitive orientations to life–the ways in which they as social beings acquired knowledge and values about themselves and their social world.

Sociologists disagree upon which of the two generalized research methods–quantitative or qualitative–should be utilized by the social sciences. Following Durkheim's lead, many sociologists would prefer to apply quantitative "natural science" methods to their social data. Counting and

measuring observable behaviour, the use of scientific jargon, claims of value neutrality, and concentration on a limited number of isolated variables are all hallmarks of the quantitative approach. Insofar as it allows different researchers, even those with opposing points of view, to agree on what they see and to draw the same conclusions, quantitative researchers like the mythical image a natural science laboratory evokes. Most quantitative sociologists, however, never observe actual behaviour. Survey researchers, for example, take only verbal reports of that behaviour from their respondents. Experimenters do observe the behaviour of their subjects but it is laboratory behaviour, not real-life behaviour.

In contrast, Weber (1950) argues that the social sciences should not copy the research methods and experimental designs of the natural sciences. Because human behaviour is unique, governed as it is by subjective meanings and motivations and not by an objective reality, that is external to the actor, its study requires unique methods. Humans freely make choices based on these meanings and are not bound by the "laws of nature." Actors can change their perceptions of reality as they interact with others, can experience more than one reality at a time, and can reinterpret the past to fit their needs. It is these subjective perceptions, however, that can help determine their behaviour. Moreover, where a chemist might predict what would happen when vinegar is added to baking soda, sociologists need to understand human behaviour; to understand, for example, what happens to young males when they are exposed to a post-Fordist economy. Because humans give meanings to their behaviours and because they engage in meaningful behaviour, sociologists must understand the explanations of behaviour from the actor's point of view. According to Geertz (1983:16) the principal goal in studying culture is to attempt to come to terms with the diversity of the ways human beings construct their lives in the act of leading them.

To get at the meanings that were constructed by the crew, I attempted to understand their behaviour by watching it, engaging in it, and by asking the crew to define some of it. Thus, this thesis is based on qualitative methods of information collection. It takes the form of an ethnographic study of a specific work environment where material was gathered by means of participant observation.

Ethno means "people" or "folk," while graphy refers to describing something. Thus, ethnography means describing a culture and understanding a way of life from the "native" point of view. Ethnography assumes that people make inferences; that is, go beyond what is explicitly seen or said to what is meant or implied. People display their culture (what people think, ponder, believe) through behaviour (e.g., speech, actions) in specific social contexts. Displays of behaviour do not give meaning; rather, meaning is inferred or someone decodes meaning. Moving from what is heard or observed to what is actually meant is at the centre of ethnography.

Cultural knowledge includes both explicit knowledge--what we know and talk about, and tacit knowledge--what we rarely acknowledge. For example, explicit knowledge is knowledge of a social event, a "night out." Most people can describe what this can entail. Tacit knowledge includes the unspoken cultural norm for the proper distance to stand from others when talking or the proper dress for going to a pub. People are generally unaware that they utilize these norms. They feel unease or discomfort when these norms are violated, but it is difficult to pinpoint the source of discomfort. Ethnographers describe the explicit and tacit cultural knowledge that members use. Their detailed descriptions and careful analysis take apart what is described and map it back together.

Geertz (1973:10) says a critical part of ethnography is thick description; a rich, detailed description of specifics (as opposed to summary, standardization, generalization, or variables). A thick description of an eight-hour work day may go on for several pages. It captures the sense of

what occurred and the drama of events thereby permitting multiple interpretations. It places events in a context so that the reader of an ethnographic report can infer cultural meaning.

Ethnography allows the researcher to interpret a specialized, highly detailed analysis of micro-situations (e.g., transcripts of short conversations and daily observations). Furthermore, it is important to remember that social meaning is dynamic and not fixed. Meaning is constantly being created and recreated in an ongoing process. Social interaction is a process of reality construction based upon tacit rules.

Reiter (1996:76) insists that workers are people with hearts and minds and that we must explore how they feel about the work they do "from the inside." Rather than deciding in advance what the important themes and questions are, involvement in the situation allows researchers to see what is important. In other methods of research, such as surveys and questionnaires, findings are limited to confirming or disproving previously decided hypotheses. Reducing experience to measurable, operationalized variables as is necessary with more positivistic approaches often oversimplifies and distorts findings.

My emphasis is upon how the crew formulated their reality. According to anthropological studies by Dolgin, Kemnitzer, and Schneider (1977:5), the concern of ethnographers should be, "not whether or not the views a people hold are accurate in any scientific sense of the term....In social action, that which is thought to be real is treated as real." Thus, in this thesis I will treat the stated "real" values and beliefs of the crew as being real in their consequences.

"The Crew" Defined

The "crew" in this study are eight, young, white, university or college-educated males who work as landscapers for an underground company, self-operated by a 30-year-old male called Snake.

All the crew–John, Rick, Kyle, Billy, Karl, Bruno, Joe and Filthy[2]–work as landscapers to earn money to subsidize their higher-education costs. The crew all live with their parent(s) during summer months and are situated in what Wright (1985) terms a "contradictory class location."

Each member's parent(s), who help to subsidize some of their room and board for the summer months, are located in jobs which many people would categorize as "middle class" (e.g., teacher, human resource manager, social worker). Yet the crew (who pay for their education and room and board for eight months of the year) are working in a low-level job which is seen as "working class" (Wright, 1976). Moreover, the crew stand in contradictory or confused relations to the larger class structures which presume that middle-class children will become middle- or upper-class adults (Cote & Allahar, 1998). In other words, the actions of the crew are seen to be idiosyncratic and reflect the unclear class position they occupy in society. The ambiguity of this situation is revealed in some of the issues examined in this thesis. Of particular interest is how the ambiguous class position influences the crew's class interests. Are the crew's interests the same as their parents? Can we identify what their interests are?

The dominant ideology of neo-liberalism in Canada convinces citizens they live in a middle-class society with few transitory disruptions (Beach & Slotsve, 1996). The illusion of young people's smooth "mobility" is shown to be problematic. This illusion is integral to the discussion of class and to the common confusion between class, occupation, and age. The crew's stories are an eloquent testimony about an unequal social order that is not capable of handling the human "by-products" of capitalism. During the Fordist boom it seemed that hard work, individual initiative, and higher education were key ingredients to a successful transition to adult middle-class status. The

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[2]Pseudonyms have been used to ensure confidentiality.

crew's uncertain circumstances indicate that striving for success on its own is anything but conducive to success in today's society. They illustrate how young men experience the transition of coming of age in our changing and uncertain times. The motivation for writing this thesis was to look at the difficulties youths face coming of age, venturing into the labour market, and trying to achieve adult status. Furthermore, I wish to outline how youths cope with these uncertainties and the practices they adopt to temporarily make their situations bearable.

Setting

The crew labour in the region of Kingston, Ontario. Kingston is a quaint city of 120,000 situated halfway between Toronto and Montreal on the eastern tip of Lake Ontario where the St. Lawrence River begins. It is also located on Highway 401 and has regularly-scheduled passenger and freight airplane, train, and bus service to centres throughout Canada and the US. Businesses located in Kingston have access to over 130 million consumers within one day's drive (*Greater Kingston Business Directory*, 1997). A border location with New York State, combined with the NAFTA Agreement, facilitates the region's access to the large US/Canada/Mexico markets. About 90% of surveyed local businesses in 1997 have less than 50 employees and are operated by entrepreneurs serving both local and distant markets (*Kingston Business Directory*, 1997). Kingston is home to many emerging post-Fordist technology-based companies including biotechnology and information technology. The city is also home to a growing number of head and regional offices. During the past 20 years, Kingston has experienced high unemployment and slow economic growth (Swift, 1995). In addition to the current cyclical downturn in Kingston's economy, the city is also experiencing, like the rest of Canada, structural changes in its economy. These changes include: a long-term shift in employment from the goods sector toward the service sector and high-tech

industries; demographic change—over one-third of Kingstonians are over 50 years of age; and a rise in non-standard employment concentrated in retail and financial planning services.

Conclusion

What follows is a study of how a small group of white men experience coming of age in our contemporary post-Fordist economy. I address a series of questions designed to bring out the complex interplay between class, masculinity, and the life-cycle process within our contemporary economic conditions. It will be shown that the experiences of a small group of young males in a particular place and time are inextricably tied to the social and economic structures in which they are embedded.

In contrast to the widespread concern over racial and gender inequalities during the 1980s and 1990s, little attention has been given to intergenerational inequalities. Even among those most affected—young people—there seems to be a lack of widespread concern in understanding what lies behind growing inequalities among the different age groups. I even encountered a curious form of denial among some of the sociology professors at Lakehead University who are supposed to be attuned to contemporary social issues. The problem seems to be that many people still prefer individualistic rather than structural explanations of inequalities. This thesis suggests that the economic and social circumstances of young people have continued to become more uncertain in the 1990s. It also suggests that you cannot easily predict how youths will live, eat, or work based upon traditional class categories and the positions of their parent(s) within these.

We tend to think of "flexi-work" or non-standard work as something performed by the marginalized, such as the poor, ethnic minorities, and women. Yet flexi-workers are to be found in all social categories, even among young males with high qualifications and middle-class

backgrounds. Beck (1999:26) argues that poverty can become "a normal experience and often not just a temporary one, even in the middle of society". As a result, endemic uncertainty may characterize the lives of youths even in the apparently "stable middle" of society. This thesis will illustrate and analyze how young males experience and live the transition between adolescence and adulthood in an age of uncertainty. Moreover, it will show youths have devised new ways of coping with the transformations relating to the post-Fordist economy. They have prolonged their schooling, worked in the hidden economy, and stayed in the family home for longer periods. What follows will provide us with a better grasp of how young people invent their own history, but do so under circumstances not of their own choosing.

Plan Of The Work

This introduction has set out something of the social and intellectual background against which this thesis was conceived and subsequently carried out. As a consequence of change with respect to the first, and deficiencies with respect to the second, there remain important gaps in understanding the process of the transition from youth to adulthood in our contemporary society. In certain respects discussed above, the account which follows is intended to remedy in some small way those shortcomings. The following chapters will itemize the major themes which are crucial to this thesis: the contemporary post-Fordist economy; concepts of class, gender, and age; and, finally, the impact of these themes upon the political positions adopted by the crew in this thesis.

Perhaps the most important thing this thesis can say in this respect is to point to the degree to which the issue of youth under/unemployment has become virtually depoliticized among youths. The crew do have ideas of why unemployment happens and many of these ideas are harshly critical of the present Ontario Conservative government. The ethnography does not, however, come across

any evidence of strong youth resistance to this. The crew could and did offer solutions to the youth under/unemployment problem. What they did not do was advocate even mild political activity let alone anything radical or revolutionary. This did not surprise them; what they claimed they wanted was jobs and stability, not a new kind of society.

The following chapters will outline the agency impact (or lack of it) of youths trying to obtain adult status. Youths' experiences are complex and fragmentary, structured by economic constraints, class location, and gender not to mention other factors like locality and educational background. All these factors will be outlined in this thesis as they contribute to the compartmentalization of the experiences of becoming an adult and obtaining employment. Moreover, as the post-Fordist economy makes the labour market more "competitive" many youths fight against each other for jobs and fail to mobilize politically. On the other hand, many people are not overly concerned with youth under/unemployment as youths like the crew, appear to be getting by. They are taking the strain and refusing to abandon their future. They are doing the best they can to cope. This thesis will detail how some youths manage through games and leisure pursuits because they feel there is nothing else they can do. They are not in a position to solve the socio-economic and political problems they engender, other than in the most immediate way. This is the best they can hope for and it is all some of them want. What will be shown in the coming chapters is that the present economic conditions are not favourable to youths today but not many youths are actually starving and the majority are not taking to the streets either in hunger marches or political riots.

CHAPTER ONE

THE POST-FORDIST ECONOMY: LABOUR MARKET PROBLEMS

> *We don't have faith in social solutions that improve conditions for everyone; we must do things that are harsh and unfair in the belief that we can win over our shit realities, realities that see me graduating with a BA two years ago, but forced into going back to get a degree in physio in the belief that I can get a good job. In the meantime, I'll work here.*
>
> Joe

Introduction

It is the dawn of the 21st century and young Canadians are an envious, penny-pinching, uncertain group. Real incomes among young workers are dwindling, tempers are high, and resentment has almost become a way of life. Today's youths are coming of age during the "erosion of the middle class." Experts note that disparities among income groups in Canada have been growing throughout the 1990s (Picot, 1997:65). A few, high-earning individuals have a greater share of the nation's wealth. Middle- and lower-incomes of Canadians are gradually slipping. "There is every reason to be concerned" warns Queen's University economist, Charles Beach (*Macleans*, February 15, 1999:23). For the past twenty years, successive waves of young people are earning less in real terms than the cohort before them—and they are not catching up as they grow older (*Perspectives on Labour & Income*, Spring 1997). The shape of tomorrow's economy is already vaguely visible through today's darkened glass.

In this chapter I present a brief overview to the analysis of post-Fordism and its effects on young workers within this economy. This introduction provides a critical framework for understanding the issues that will be discussed, linking them to more fundamental human questions. It offers a perspective that is often divorced from discussions of economics. Moreover, I discuss

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how the post-Fordist economy relates to my ethnographic research of a landscaping occupation. This chapter helps to tell the story of what kind of economy is being made in Canada. The discussion on the economy helps set the stage: the transformation our society is undergoing is not just about economics, it is about value--what we value and how we respond to it. This offers us a way of assessing the story as it unfolds. Furthermore, it allows us to see how young people are reacting to the world that is being created.

The social transformation of the last few decades has led to the emergence of serious questions about work in many cities in the industrialized world. The tensions result from the varying combined impact of post-Fordist economic accumulation and the increasingly important role of services (Esping-Andersen, 1994), the decline in stable employment, and the decline in real wages. The intervention of differently-structured welfare states (hampered by fiscal and financial difficulties and by increasing opposition to state expenditure from politically organized groups of taxpayers) ·appears unable to respond to the increasing pressure generated by post-Fordist problems, in particular the rise of youth underemployment.

Debate on the nature of the contemporary work culture helps us examine the functions and meanings of class, gender, age, and leisure activities. Work and leisure are areas of contemporary life where the interrelationships between and meanings of subject categories such as class, gender and age are experienced and reproduced.

From Fordism To Post-Fordism

Fordism is named after Henry Ford who spawned the development of the modern mass-production system through his automobile assembly line, a pattern which prevailed in the years of the long post-1945 boom. Theorists like Gramsci (1971) and Braverman (1974) touted Taylorism

as the form of production characteristic of this era. Fordism is based on the technological efficiency of planned production arising from the separation of contemplation and labour, and on the economic efficiency of large-scale factories. Through the mass production of homogeneous products, the adoption of standardized work routines, and a market of products governed by Keynesian macro-economic policies, Fordism grew throughout the post-war years. Clarke (1990) argues that Fordism reached its peak and began to decline in the 1970s in North America especially after the oil crisis of 1973, the subsequent decline of the automobile industry in North America, and the rise of Japanese "flexi-work" practices. During the 1970s, western society saw stagnating demands for mass products and increased import competition and, thus, organizations sought concessions from workers. Collective bargaining agreements and cost-of-living adjustments were replaced with union busting and organizational migration to cheaper labour markets (Palmer, 1992).

When Fordism broke down—under the pressure of institutional rigidities, social demands, and limits to the industrial paradigm—advanced western capitalist nations entered a "crisis" period at the end of which, it is argued, post-Fordism emerged (Harvey, 1989; Murray, 1989). Post-Fordism describes a restructuring of capitalism that has taken place during the last thirty years of the second millennium. Elements of post-Fordism include flexible production, life-style consumption, and the privatization of the functions of the welfare state.

At the decline of the Fordist era, workers became resistant to the stultifying efficiencies of the rational labour process and consumption was unable or unwilling to keep up with the capabilities of the mass production system (Amin, 1994). The nature of demand was forever changing; niche markets for speciality goods were growing faster than mass markets for standardized mass products. The flexible specialization of the post-Fordist industrial paradigm has become the answer to the problems of the Fordist era.

In the 1970s, Fordist forms of economic organization entered a period of crisis and the attempt to resolve this crisis gave rise to new economic arrangements and processes. This new arrangement, post-Fordism, is characterized by the following: technological change (which led to job losses and jobs becoming unequally distributed along the lines of class, gender, and race); product reorganization—intensified product output, commodification of service products, replacement of existing labour with cheaper, younger labour, and flexible labour (temporary, part-time, non-standard); short-run batch-type production in small firms; and partial privatization of the welfare system (Murray, 1988). These conditions generated the need for a corresponding image of self-motivated individuals who are willing to educate/train themselves and be self-reliant and take initiative. Thus, the emphasis on self-reliance and the critique of dependence on state welfare in political initiatives such as the common sense revolution in Ontario can be seen as the ideological accompaniment to these economic changes.

Fragmentation and rationalization in the labour process and uniformity in consumption are the central tenants of Fordism; eclectic labour duties and flexibility and the fragmentation of markets characterize post-Fordism. Menzies (1996) describes how the development of flexible manufacturing systems capable of producing several types of a familiar product are now being marketed. No longer is there only one option; choice and variety reign supreme in consumption.

Aglietta (1979) claims that social relations within production have also been transformed. This era is epitomized by the decline of unions which were built up under Fordism and enabled some workers to make a living wage. Krahn (1992) describes how multi-skilling and batch production require a new management strategy in relation to labour, replacing Taylorism with so-called human-relations and neo-human, relations-based techniques. It is argued that managers are implementing these new techniques of communication and control to destroy unions altogether, which enable

companies to lower their labour costs. Furthermore, the spatial organization of post-Fordist industries operates on a decentralizing rather than centralizing logic. Piore and Sabel (1984) depict the growth of new industrial regions like the Third Italy and Silicon Valley (based on the needs of flexi-specialist firms enabling them to be part of a dense, close-knit network of similar firms) which assists them to subcontract out many duties.

Harvey (1989:240) refers to a "time-space compression" process as characterizing our times: "because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by speed-up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inwards upon us." He provides a historical-regional analysis of different epochs. With each period, space is organized in such a way as to best facilitate growth of production, the reproduction of labour power, and the maximization of profit. Harvey explains that time and space are re-organized to overcome crisis and to allow for a new period of accumulation. In particular, he investigates Marx's thesis of the annihilation of time and space and tries to demonstrate how Marx's thesis explains the complex shift from Fordism to the flexible accumulation of post-Fordism. Post-Fordism represents a new spatial fix and, more significantly, new ways in which time and space are represented.

Harvey (1989:284-85) suggests that in the 1970s and 1980s time-space compression had intensified and this had a disruptive and frustrating impact upon all aspects of social, economic, and cultural life. This compression has led to fast turnover times in production, an increased pace of change and ephemerality of fashion, shorter life spans of products, relationships and work, and social contracts. The heightened significance of this short-termism has caused a decline of a "waiting culture" and constitutes a greater importance of image advertising and rapidly changing media images to social life. The extraordinary proliferation of the new technology of information and

communication which transcend space instantaneously at the speed of nanoseconds has been a marketing dream for capitalists.

Firms respond to the time-space compression with shorter production runs, flexible specialization and the restructuring of Fordist types of organization. Flexible specialization involves short production runs often subcontracted out among small and "lean" firms. These firms concentrate in densely networked industrial districts with a cheap labour supply in order to obtain the best contracts and deals. Firms are typically small with a few highly skilled workers and low levels of unionization (Murray, 1988).

The other route in response to the quick pace and market fragmentation involves the restructuring of the already existing Fordist forms of organization (see for example, Hamper, 1991; Krahn, 1993; Swift, 1995). These "old" Fordist firms begin to develop more flexible means of technology which enable them to produce a wider range of products at a quicker pace. To operate this technology and to move between different types of machines, workers become multi-skilled (Krahn, 1993). To further enhance flexibility at the point of production employers introduce, at least in appearance, greater job autonomy for workers. New forms of worker participation like work production teams become popular among management. Thus, employers are able to utilize and control workers' detailed and informally-developed knowledge of production and to build a new commitment to the firm among them.

Implications

The transition from a Fordist to a post-Fordist economy combined with deteriorating conditions for workers in the 1980s and 1990s. Many workers became unemployed, underemployed, or were relegated to work in low paying service jobs. The post-Fordist methods were analogous to

a decision about where to locate a nuclear waste site; many people would inevitably lose, but their sacrifice was viewed as necessary for the broader interests of society as a functional whole. The losers were the marginalized, those most likely to be laid off in a down turn or to take "bad jobs," and particularly the young making the transition from school to work (Cote & Allahar, 1994).

A new pattern in the transition from school to work emerged in the 1980s and 1990s. The period of leaving school and entering the workforce was becoming more prolonged and the route more circuitous. The traditional Fordist-era sequence of completing school and moving into continuous employment gave way to a different post-Fordist situation in which education was prolonged and youths were required to work while still in school. There was no single or even predominant mass pattern of labour-force entry for either high school or university graduates (see Statistics Canada, Labour Force, update: *Youths and the Labour Market*, 1997). These diverse combinations of education and work distinguished graduates in the 1980s and 1990s from those in the Fordist decades, when there had tended to be a clear point of passage from school to work. Today this transition is neither smooth nor predictable. Young people's lives are filled with uncertainty and risk (Beck, 1992; Cote & Allahar, 1995). In the current post-Fordist environment, youths' prospects are seen as decidedly negative (*Macleans*, December 25, 1995).

Over 80% of employed young people, both student and non-student, have jobs in the service sector which accounted for almost all new jobs created in the 1980s and 1990s. Large numbers of young people remain trapped in the low-paying, low-status jobs of the secondary labour market while working in the summer or after graduating. These youths take up jobs as landscapers, sales clerks, food and beverage servers, cashiers, tellers and stock clerks–the positions that are widely referred to as "McJobs."

Krahn and Lowe (1990) have observed that a degree or diploma is required to open up further career options for most young people. Since many university graduates are employed in consumer services, high school graduates are not even next in line for higher-status service jobs. Many youths with only a high school education are trapped in lower-level jobs in consumer service industries if not unemployed. Social class and gender differences still persist, despite generally rising education levels, and are predicted to continue even if the average level of education in society increases. This is due to "a contradiction arising out of rapid growth of low skill jobs and rising educational attainment" (Krahn & Lowe, 1990:43).

A high incidence of unemployment and involuntary part-time employment, difficulty gaining entry to career jobs after graduating, low incomes and the collapse of the welfare state are the dominating realities that many youths encounter as they come of age in the post-Fordist era. The one central task for most members of our society is to establish an independent and fulfilling livelihood. Most adult Canadians rely upon the labour market completely for their livelihoods, at least until they are approaching "retirement age." Coming of age can vary with changes in the economy, especially in the labour market, changes in attitudes to gender roles, work, and leisure; and changes to the social and economic policies of the state. My focus is on the experiences of eight young men who form "the crew" and who are coming of age now.

Studies On Work In The Post-Fordist Era

In the competitive struggle for survival and profit, capitalist firms are continually engaged in upgrading their technology and controlling the labour process in order to allow for growth and profit. This creates real "structures" within and upon which intentional action takes place. If we look at the structures of the post-Fordist economy, we are left with a very pessimistic image of the future

for today's youths. Over one-third of employed Canadians are now engaged in non-standard work. These people are in jobs that are not permanent and full-time; they include part-time and temporary workers, multiple job holders and the self-employed. Part-time work in the work force has risen from 11% in 1976 to 18% in 1996. A part-time worker is considered to be one who works less than 30 hours a week. However, someone who holds two part-time jobs that total 30 hours or more a week is considered to be a full-time worker. When all multiple job holders are counted, 23% of all jobs are part-time. Furthermore, temporary work is growing most rapidly in the public sector where social services and government employment now account for 38% of all temporary workers. Much of this trend has been attributed to the growing reliance on work that is contracted out to the increasing numbers of the self-employed (Statistics Canada, *Canadian Social Trends*, Autumn, 1995).

The trend of self-employment is also a relevant structural factor pertaining to this thesis. The landscaping company was run by a "self-employed" individual. Nearly 1.25 million Canadians are now self-employed (i.e., working independently as professionals, business owners, operators, artists and other trades people). Nearly half of them are employers who have one or more people working for them (*Statistics Canada*, 1995). The self-employed work much longer hours–particularly those who are also employers–than do other workers, up to 47 hours a week compared with the 37 hours averaged by other workers. The self-employed workforce is predominantly male, with men comprising three-quarters of employers and two-thirds of independent workers. One in four of the self-employed who are employers and 18% of the independent workers have university degrees, compared with only 15% of other workers. From 1992 to 1996, total jobs increased by 11.2%. The increase in self-employment was 26%.

A recent study by Statistics Canada (*Perspectives on Labour and Income*, Spring 1997), reports that over the period 1986-96, self-employed persons without "paid" help[3] grew by 60%, those with paid help, a mere 16.2%. It seems likely also that a large proportion of self-employed persons end up as victims of bankruptcy (there were 1,073 businesses and 6,792 consumers in January 1997 alone). Thus, contrary to what Harris says, these trends in "new jobs" are not signs of strength in the post-Fordist economy but rather indicators of weakness.

Moreover, economic structuring has effectively created a two-tier economy in Canada. Several factors are involved. Job loss in the 1980s was concentrated in the middle pay scales. Job growth was concentrated at the very bottom and in the upper-middle levels of the wage distribution. The resulting polarization of wage levels cannot be explained solely by the rise in part-time employment, nor by the deindustrialization of the economy as jobs have shifted to the service sector (Betcherman & Morisette, 1994). The primary factor is the low wages offered to young workers. Hourly rates of pay for workers aged 16-24 fell regardless of which occupation they worked at, the region of the country in which they lived, or the level of education they had completed.

The striking feature of the post-Fordist period has been the "casualization" of the labour market. In the 1980s it was characterized by the rapid increase in part-time employment. Between 1991 and 1995 contract, temporary, and seasonal work rose from 5 per cent to 12 per cent of the labour market. Almost a third of workers in these jobs work on an irregular basis. Furthermore, non-permanent jobs were, by far, the norm of all paid workers under 25 (Statistics Canada, *"Survey of Work Arrangements,"* 1995). More interestingly, recent studies show that rapid growth of non-permanent types of employment does not significantly determine wage polarization (Grenon &

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[3]Many self-employed individuals hire people "under the table" to work in the black market (see Grenon & Chun, 1997:25).

Chun, 1997:25). To determine wage inequality we must also view the segmentation of the labour market between generations of workers.

Young males' hourly rates of pay have been most sharply and consistently eroded over the last 15 years (Morisette, 1995:38; see chart). More troublesome, this is not "just a phase" that young people go through. Because we are talking about indexed real wages, this is not about pay rates but rather the relative values of different types of workers. For some reason, young workers are worth less in the labour market today than they were in 1981. In short, the restructuring of the labour market has coincided with the trend in which the paid labour of younger workers has been devalued in both absolute and relative terms (Morisette, 1995:38). The 1990s have done little to reverse these trends despite an upswing in the business cycle.

Underground Economy

The relative number of good jobs in our society is diminishing. Many people will work in marginalized jobs for low wages–happy to earn something–in order to get by. Furthermore, workers may be recruited into "deviant" occupations because legitimate economic opportunities are blocked. Some observers note that youths are more likely to be in "deviant" occupations because better jobs are taken by older workers (Krahn & Lowe, 1990). Some jobs are considered "deviant" because they lie outside the system of government and job regulation. In other words, some jobs are located in the shadow or underground economy. The landscaping job the crew worked on was located in this milieu. In the underground economy, jobs are not necessarily illegal, but they are irregular because the income is not reported, there is no official monitoring of health, safety or working conditions, and other institutional regulations of work are missing. What is common to the underground economy is that it is not accountable to government authorities nor subject to economic measurement

(Henry, 1978:463). Thus, the employer (Snake, in my thesis) pays no taxes and the workers may be officially "unemployed."

The underground economy, sometimes referred to as the black economy because of its association with black markets, has been described as a source of innovation and vitality in the industrialized world (Portes & Sassen-Koob, 1987). The underground economy, with its many small vital firms, is flexible and adapts itself quickly to the post-Fordist market conditions while evading government regulation. Because of its subterranean nature, no one knows for sure the size of Canada's underground economy, but it is estimated at 15 to 20% of the regular economy (*Macleans*, August 9, 1993). Ken Black (1991:11) explains that the extent and costs of the underground economy are so huge that they distort the official statistics of Canada's GNP, and Revenue Canada loses millions a year in taxes.

Yet, contrary to popular belief, the underground economy is not essentially involved in illegal activities. In the case of the crew whom I worked with and studied, they were involved in an occupation that evades normal regulation but the goods and services produced were not illegal. Many people are involved in activities on a daily basis that are considered "underground"; we consider common such practices as the paying and taking of large tips, private gambling bets, and gifts. In this context, we can see that the underground economy is not all about illegal drugs and prostitution. Pennar and Farrell (1993) explain:

> The underground economy; it has a sinister ring—suggestive of dope deals struck in alleys and wads of dollar bills hastily exchanged. The underground economy is this, but it is a lot more–and usually a lot more innocent. If you pay the plumber with a cheque made out to "cash," if you purchase a pair of sunglasses from a street vendor, or a kitchen gadget at a yard sale, if you so much as hand a neighbour's kid a $20 bill (or if you accept it) to mow the lawn or to babysit, you are participating in the underground economy.

Conclusion

Those who employ the concept of post-Fordism to understand recent economic changes are not claiming a revolution has taken place or that a new economic order has emerged. They focus on the major changes in the makeup of industrial organizations, the nature of work, and the use and applications of new technology. New lifestyles develop out of this matrix as such things as culture, leisure and education adapt or succumb to the pressures and opportunities generated by these changes. Labour unions have lost much of their bargaining power. The ideal of lifetime—or even secure, standard employment—seems to be vanishing, as the new flatter organizations look to a "flexible" workforce containing part-timers with little benefits and low pay. Skills quickly become obsolete and new ones must be learned if one wants to survive. Furthermore, the education system is under pressure to transform itself to respond to the demands of big business.

All these factors allow us to see that change has and is taking place in our society. There can be both pros and cons to these developments, but these developments must be critically analyzed. Post-Fordism, whatever one's view of its efficacy as a concept, allows us to see changes well beyond the economic starting point. The deterministic views that only focus on such things as flexible specialization lose this point. Flexible specialization may be the dynamic centre of these changes or it may be itself the effect of wider changes. In either case it cannot be considered alone. The economic changes that have been documented above interact with other changes in culture, leisure, politics, gender and family life. It is important to see how the macro changes documented in this chapter are connected with real life experiences. Through this we can analyze the "tools" which young people use in order to understand the processes shaping the labour market as they are received and acted upon; yet, are not restructured by the youths themselves. Moreover, the conceptual

questions raised here merge with strategic concerns generated from the structure of work, class, gender and age inequalities which must be addressed openly and not underground.

CHAPTER TWO

CHANGING PATTERNS:
CLASS, GENDER AND THE LIFE CYCLE

Examining the transition between adolescence and adulthood in an age of uncertainty forces one to reflect upon themes of larger significance: the post-Fordist economy, class relations, gender roles, and the life cycle process. For example, it is important to understand the class concept in this thesis for two reasons: the crew's class location helps us to describe the crew; and second, this location is interesting because it is very hard to categorize their location since it seems to oscillate between the middle and the working class. How the crew's lived reality is experienced is crucial to our understanding the crew's uncertain and important struggles. Moreover, through analyzing the structure/agency debate in sociology, I will examine how this uncertainty and ambiguity is handled in behavioural and/or cultural terms. The ways in which young people perceive the conditions of their existence are limited by the structures in which their ideas are expressed. Work and leisure activities carried out by youths (which will be analyzed through my ethnographic data in Chapters Three and Four) may seem self-controlling and autonomous, yet, many youths' lives are filled with uncertainty and their actions only help them cope with constraining structures.

The Debates About Class

As Marxist sociologists Westergaard and Resler explain, it is "the concentration of power and property in a very small section of the population on which the whole ramified structure of class inequality turns" (1976:29). The key here is the concept of class, the importance of which was demonstrated by Marx. Yet there are discrepancies within Marxist thought concerning class. The dispute revolves around those who see class as a category–a class in itself–designating particular

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places in relation to economic production (see Erick Olin Wright) and, in contrast, those who see class as a social force–a class for itself–which makes history (see E.P. Thompson, 1985).

The class structure differentiates society's members into social groups with competing interests. History is propelled by the struggles between classes. The debate revolves around the question of whether that struggle is the product of exogenous structures and forces. Marx also believes in human agency, arguing that the conditions which govern social relationships within a mode of production can be changed by human activity once humans consciously acknowledge the historical and "unnatural" account of this production.

Near the end of *The Eighteenth Brumaire* (1972:124), Marx comes closest to a definition of class:

> In so far as millions of families live under economic conditions of existence that separate their mode of life, their interests and their culture from those of the other classes, and put them in hostile opposition to the latter, they form a class.

Marx goes on to specify that shared conditions are not sufficient. The identity of their interests must also lead to active representation of these class interests against those of other classes. According to Marx, there are therefore three conditions for the existence of a class: 1) a group with shared interests; 2) the recognition of these interests and of their "hostile opposition" to those of other classes; and 3) political representation of these interests. These elements we now commonly identify as class structure, class consciousness, and class action. In a letter to a prospective publisher, Marx claims no credit for the discovery of the existence of classes but proposes that his contribution lies in arguing for the relationship of classes to "historical phases in the development of production" and

the impending consequences of the class struggle, the transitory dictatorship of the proletariat and the ensuing classless society (1972:139).

Limitations With The Classic Marxist Definition Of Class

Four factors remain obscure or insufficiently outlined in Marxist analysis: changes which have occurred in capitalist societies since Marx's life; other profound social effects of capitalism; the effects of specific circumstances of a given society on class; and the actual actions and aspirations of particular groups/cohorts within that society.

When reviewing class, Marxists can become easily uncertain and confused by the demarcation of class—what factors constitute differing social classes? Marx's chapter specifically on class in *Capital III* "breaks off" and literally leaves us wondering (1974:886). Weber's (1968) work in *Economy and Society* can be seen as a response to the Marxian myopia about class distinctions. According to Weber: "the typical chance for a supply of goods, external living conditions and personal life experiences in so far as this chance is determined by the amount and kind of power, or lack of such, to dispose of goods or skills for the sake of income in a given economic order" (1961:181).

Thus for Weber the "kind of chance" in the market is the decisive moment which presents a common condition for the individual's fate (p. 182). Marxists may get very confused over the class boundary question: where is the line to be drawn between different social classes? Moreover, class can be conceived of in terms of closure. This is a process in which collectivities seek to maximize rewards by restricting access to rewards and opportunities to a limited circle of eligibles. Access is thus closed to others. In fairness to Marx it should be noted that he too talked, if only briefly, about mobility and closure. For Marx wrote, "the lower strata of the middle class...sink gradually into the

proletariat..." (1848:62). Interestingly, Marx also analyzed the amount of social mobility in America. In 1852 Marx wrote that "though classes already exist, they have not yet become fixed, but constantly change and interchange their elements in constant flux" (1972:18-19). But Marx's comments were only fleeting, and our discussion here is more enhanced through incorporating some of Weber's ideas.

Weber commented that social groups may form in order to exclude others from getting at what they control. Others in turn, being excluded, may attempt to usurp the "power positions." This analysis puts the spotlight on action. In particular, Weber's interest in social closure and mobility can also be expanded upon from his references to "the number of classes between which an interchange of individuals on a personal basis or in the course of generations is readily possible and typically observable" (1964:424). Furthermore, Weber suggests that "it is always important in studying occupational structure to know the system of social stratification, including the distribution of opportunity in the different classes and the types of education which are available for the various types of occupation requiring specialized training" (1964:251). This will become relevant in my discussion of the post-Fordist economy, and the jobs available to the crew, who all have post-secondary educations. However, it must be noted that Weber's account of class is incomplete and his analysis of class boundaries is as blurred as Marx's. It is no clearer exactly where the boundaries between groups that share "common life chances" should be drawn. For example, who should be lumped together–those who earn between $20,000-$40,000 yearly or those who earn $30,000-$50,000, and does status, ethnicity, and age play a role? Although class can be conceived of in terms of closure, all definitions of class will have problems contextualizing tight boundaries.

Class Existence

Marx and Weber conceptualized class in economic terms and claimed the main class categories in "modern capitalism" involved the distinction between the ownership and the non-ownership of property for exchange and differentiated a variety of other classes. Their views on class overlap in important ways, yet there is also ambiguity both inside and outside their fuzzy margins. Here sociological debate and research can grow. For Marx emphasized that capitalism is not only an economic system; one may speak of a capitalist society. Capitalism has a pervasive effect, creeping into every sphere of life, reducing everything to commodities. In other words, cultural and ideological structures can also be subsumed into this system including, for example, sexist ideas about and expressions involving women or patterns and styles of consumption.

Class, throughout history, has been constantly changing. It is by no means an undifferentiated mass. This fragmented, constantly shifting reality is registered in the ways working-class people often declare themselves as anything but working class. But this does not mean class cannot be located or that it does not exist. Even today, as class lines blur, especially for youths in class positions that potentially change through the life course, and more and more people in the post-Fordist economy earn their living in ways that do not lead to clear-cut self-identification, there is still an understanding of who is a worker and who is not.

Historically, only those adults economically active on a full-time basis are included in class analysis. This implies that the unemployed/underemployed youths and so on are not part of the class structure. High levels of unemployment/underemployment and non-standardized work strengthen the argument that everyone should be included in class analysis. Some still say class doesn't matter. I feel it is beginning to matter more and more. Rarely are identities constructed that entirely and categorically repudiate the material moorings of a class place. "Professionals" are experiencing the

erosion of their authority and the routinization of their work; jobs in the old Fordist strongholds of traditional blue-collar labour are disappearing, but those jobs created in fast-food outlets and telemarketing offices are no less alienating. In all the most Marxian and Weberian ways, workers remain workers, whatever the contemporary process of economic restructuring.

This thesis was born out of the contradictory class lives of the crew members with whom I worked and studied. The crew felt they were able to see all aspects of our class-based society through their work and leisure experiences. The crew not only attended acclaimed universities and worked on "upper-class property" but they worked alongside cleaners and ex-convicts, and they mingled at night with cab drivers and prison guards. The crew was a social grouping rooted in productive relations. This thesis will proceed to outline and explore the meaning of those relations as they are lived out both on and beyond the job, expressed in politics as well as in pub life and sports. In the absence of sustained waves of class consciousness, this is what labouring life is mostly about. The crew, like other youths today, face many obstacles and challenges that demand attention if they wish to overcome their uncertain present and their self-proclaimed bleak futures. I will begin with mapping out the structural and organizational experience of workers because, simply put, in the current assault on labour, the objective destruction of the economic, institutional and political lives of workers is most prevalent in our post-Fordist era (1973-present). The cultural fragmentations of workers and the inadequacies and possibilities of the cultural experience of class are situated in such debilitating developments.

Updating Class: Wright's Model

At the core of Marxian class analysis is the belief that class is a fundamental determinant of social change. Yet this belief is somewhat myopic and leads some theorists to accept a simple

polarized vision of the class structure of capitalism. In other words, the class concept remains somewhat simple and cannot account for micro-deviations like those of the crew in my study, who find themselves working in a marginalized job yet have a university education and their parents are considered lower middle-class. Thus, if class analysis is to advance it is essential it develop "micro foundations," or an understanding of the ways macro-structural contexts constrain micro-level processes and the ways micro-level choices of actors can affect structural arrangements.

Erik Olin Wright was dissatisfied with Marx's concept of social class because he realized not everyone fits neatly into the fixed categories of capitalist and worker. For example, Wright (1989:325-26) states:

> For certain categories of people in contemporary capitalism location in the class structure is entirely constituted by mediated relations. To say that children in a working class family are "in the working class" is to make a claim about the ways in which their class interests are shaped by their mediated relations (through their families) to the system of production, rather than by their direct location. Mediated class relations also loom large in understanding the class interests of housewives not in the paid labour force, the unemployed, pensioners, and students.

Wright proposes we should regard some people as members of more than one class, as having what he termed contradictory, mediated or temporal class locations. By this, Wright argues that a person's position in the class structure can generate contradictory interests and blurred conceptions. For example, the crew members in this study work in a working-class job, yet their parents are middle class. Their class location and their sense of their own class position cannot be grasped if we focus only on their location in relations of production. The class location of youth cannot adequately be determined simply by looking at the relational properties of the parents' positions or the youth's job itself at a fixed point in time (Wright, 1989:331). Moreover, Wright argues that the objective

interests of those who are in some class locations are "contradictory"; in some ways they are opposed to capital and in line with workers, in other ways they are in line with the interests of capital and opposed to the interests of the working class. Thus, some class locations have fairly straightforward interests attached to them, but other class locations are more complicated. The class locations that make up the middle class are particularly complicated.

The issue for the young crew in this study is how class location, given by place in the relations of production, is "mediated" by class location derived from their relation to their parents. It raises problems inherent in defining class only in terms of place in relations of production. Since an individual's subjective understanding of their "interests" is the product of the totality of the social relations in which they are embedded (not only their place in the relations of production), their definition and understanding of their experience (and what they want and how to achieve it, etc.) is going to be marked both by their experience of production and their experience of other social relations.

Wright (1978) believes sociologists can no longer apply Marx's description of classes to our contemporary society without modifications. Wright has constructed a revised system of social classes which is more appropriate to this study. He suggests three major classes: the bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and the petty bourgeoisie. Wright also outlines three minor classes: manager, supervisors, and foremen; small employers; and semi-autonomous wage earners. The minor classes are situated halfway between the major classes. Managers, supervisors, and foreman all fall between the bourgeois and the proletariat. Small employers fall between the bourgeois and the petty bourgeois. Semi-autonomous wage earners fall between the petty bourgeois and the proletariat (Wright, 1978:23).

Wright uses "means of production" and "labour power" to define his major and minor classes. He breaks the means of production into two separate characteristics. The first is control over major investments in the means of production. This covers decisions to invest in one product rather than in another product. The second is control over physical production. This covers decisions about how food is to be packaged, how cars are to be put together on the assembly line, and how gears are to be installed on bicycles. These decisions do not cover major investments but how they are to be carried out. Besides these two characteristics dealing with the means of production, Wright also uses the characteristic of labour-power to define class. He suggests that control over the labour of others is important for knowing in which class an individual should be placed.

The way in which these three characteristics are used in defining the three major and three minor classes oscillate. The bourgeoisie and the proletariat are still characterized in completely opposite ways. The bourgeoisie control major investments, physical production, and the labour of others. The proletariat completely lacks these three kinds of controls. The petty bourgeoisie controls its own investments and physical production, since it is self-employed, but it lacks control over the labour of others since it does not typically hire members of the proletariat for a wage.

Turning to the minor classes, we see that managers, supervisors, and foremen have partial control over major investments. Top managers participate with the bourgeoisie in major decisions about types of investments the corporations will make. But supervisors and foremen, located further down in the organizational hierarchy, usually do not participate in such decisions. On the other hand, managers, supervisors, and foremen at all levels of the corporation have some immediate control delegated to them by the bourgeoisie over physical production and the labour of others.

Small employers, the second minor class, are similar to the bourgeoisie in that they control major investments, physical production, and the labour of others. They are different from the bourgeoisie in that their companies are usually small and they hire fewer labourers. The third minor class is semi-autonomous wage earners. These people have not completely lost autonomy over their work environments. They do not control the investments of the companies which employ them, but they do have partial control over physical production and the labour of others. Many workers often control their immediate tasks yet they have little control over the major operations of the company.

In examining class locations, we can see the problems that arise when we try to fit young workers into neat categories. The crew in my study had parents who worked in technical and lower management positions which brought them a decent middle-class living (Wright, 1989)–albeit one threatened by taxes and downsizing–and they enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle (see Appendix). On the other hand, the crew members themselves worked at an unskilled, low-paying, temporary and seasonal job in a proletarian class location (Wright, 1989). With low and undependable incomes, and low-prestige work, the crew lived from pay cheque to pay cheque, but also had low subsidies granted to them by the government (i.e., OSAP) and through their parents providing them with free or low rent for four months of the year. Most of the crew are in debt and experience high stress and uncertainty. It is upon these terms that we can see that class locations are blurred.

The socio-historic changes that have occurred over the last twenty years have affected the experiences and life expectancies of young people (Beck, 1992; Swift, 1995; Cote & Allahar, 1997). Moreover, young people's class biographies have come to be seen as more transitional over the last two decades as the youth labour market and educational structures have shifted in accordance with the shift to the "service economy" (Krahn & Lowe, 1993). The shift to a post-Fordist economy in Canada marked a radical change in the demand for youth labour and their subsequent educational

attainment. During the Fordist era there was a demand for relatively unqualified school leavers in large industry; since the mid-1980s patterns of labour demand have changed significantly and opportunities for young workers are increasingly located in low paying service jobs. The demand for flexible specialization in the post-Fordist economy and the increase in part-time, low paying, contract employment has brought about uncertainty among many youths. As John Myles explains, this transition means,

> ...later career starts for young people, delayed family formation, and generally postponed adulthood. For the economy it means we are not fully involving the next generation of workers, either socially, politically, or economically, in finding our way through the current transition (in Krahn & Lowe, 1993:130).

To recognize the versatility and oscillating characteristics of class categories is not to downplay the effects of class, but rather to underline the dangers of assuming that middle-class youths will become middle-class adults with good jobs or that class is a static concept. Thus, class is still relevant in our post-Fordist society, but other concepts like gender and age also play a role in helping to shape lived experiences.

Implications

The struggles of the crew coming of age and trying to attain self-proclaimed "adult middle-class status" outline the clashes of values and interests through the unequal distribution of wealth, privilege and power in our post-Fordist economy. Our society is based upon what Marx and Weber both proclaimed to be social divisions generated by the market; these divisions are having an adverse effect on many youths. Class is still a significant form of social division but age must also be factored in. Our preoccupation with class analysis should not leave out age. Class divisions can

integrate age divisions in the sense that youths face the plight of under/unemployment and this is an aspect of class, referring to the way the work required to produce goods and services is organized and allocated. Youths can also be seen as a large "minority" of people who are semi-dependent for sustenance through their families or state benefits (i.e., student loans), and excluded from good employment opportunities.

Youths today are expected to be flexible and autonomous, allowing them to become productive adults in the post-Fordist economy. Yet given the experience of the economy in the last twenty years, the reversion to an ideology of competitive individualism is not an answer to our socio-economic problems. The neo-liberal wave endorsed by the Ontario conservatives and their policies is clearly hurting social solidarity. We need to reverse growing rates of poverty and inequality, especially among youths. It is very difficult to come of age in an environment which prolongs adolescence and creates mostly non-standard employment. Youths in Ontario are living in a society marked by sharp class divisions based largely on the polarization of the labour market (Morissette, Myles & Picot, 1994). Youth's family class positions are still important but this is becoming decreasingly so. Sure, there will always be families who can invest in their children and provide them with the necessities to achieve the neo-liberal landscape. But in a society marked by growing inequality, there will be even more families who are unable to make these investments, whose children are faced with today's risks: low incomes, bad jobs, high student loans/debts and other uncertainties.

Class plays a pertinent role in my analysis of youths coming of age in the post-Fordist economy. Many young people are experiencing a downward mobile transition from their parents' class origin. Joey proclaimed a popular belief among the crew that "we will never obtain the good jobs that some of our parents have or had—hell, some of our parents can't keep their good jobs, and

they have all those years of experience which employers desire." In addition to the class and gender divisions which I have examined (and the all too common ethnic/race divisions which are widespread but not touched upon in this thesis), our society is also based upon age divisions. As has been argued in previous chapters, youths' coming of age process is being delayed and a "sizeable number of young people will not be able to work their way out of poverty now or in the future" (Cote & Allahar, 1998:122). Youths from lower class origins, young women, recent immigrants and members of certain marginalized ethnic groups have long been relegated to the low-income jobs in our society, but now it is increasingly clear this marginalization applies to young, white, middle class males as well (p. 123). Nothing should be taken for granted. Thus, it is argued that although class inequality is the most fundamental form of inequality in our society (and is increasingly so) it is not the only form, as the stratification of youths clearly shows.

A 1993 Statistics Canada report indicated that "in the face of downward wage pressures from globalization, older workers are better able to immunize themselves from growing wage competition as a result of seniority rules, firm-specific training and other institutional barriers that favour job incumbents over new labour market entrants" (as cited in Cote & Allahar, 1994:130). Youths' wages have dropped within all educational levels and all occupational categories (Betcherman & Morissette, 1994). It cannot be argued that higher education is not rewarding in the labour market, but it is obvious many highly educated youths, like the crew who have non-technical degrees, perform tasks that have little to do with their schooling and pay very little–making it extremely hard for graduates to pay off their student loans.

In the 1990s almost 50% of college graduates and over 40% of youths with BAs are underemployed, performing tasks that do not require their advanced credentials (Nobert, McDowell & Goulet, 1992). Because of this, many members of the crew have gone back to pursue further

degrees in order to become more competitive and "skillful" than other youths. The crew struggle to gain acceptance in the "adult" world of jobs and good income, and they follow the trend of other youths in which as many as 50% of college and university graduates have re-enrolled in further education (Cote & Allahar, 1978:136). The quest for further education and the drain of money to obtain these degrees force the crew and other youths to prolong their adolescence and push them into further debt and uncertainty.

I would argue that youth inequality allows us to see that old strict class categories are no longer as relevant as Marx stated. The central problem perhaps is that Marx allowed the idea of class (along with its negation and transcendence) to become a key belief in his system. His followers have adhered, often through a blinded obsession, to the class category at the expense of other equally important explanatory categories like age and masculinity. While Marxist analysis of class is important, especially with the growing polarization of wealth in our society (Morissette, Myles & Picot, 1993), it nevertheless has blinded them to other important historical and human realities.

To begin with, the history of society has not always been propelled by class struggles. There are many examples of class cooperation—activities which cross class boundaries. In Marx's own time, for instance, improvement in factory workers' conditions in England was brought about by a coalition of Tory and radical forces. Today, voting patterns often defy all popular expectations with working class votes being cast for conservative politicians.

Marx cannot be blamed for failing to foresee the future, but later developments do decrease the credibility of his insistence that class explains most social phenomena. He failed to see that classes are not always equally important (in different societies) and that they are seldom homogeneous or cohesive.

The Life Course

The uncertainty of youths as they are coming of age has been documented by Marlis Buchman (1989) on the basis of her studies on the life conditions and experiences of youths between the 1960s and the 1980s. In her analysis, the Fordist era is shown to be characterized by high standardization, even institutionalization, of the life course due to state regulation in conjunction with economic rationalization. This order, however, has fragmented during the post-Fordist era, as stages of the life course, like the economy, have de-standardized and biographical perspectives have emerged more clearly.

Buchman argues that "over the last two decades, high standardized life trajectories have been 'shattered' by structural and cultural developments in all major social institutions" (1989:188). Explaining the "transformation" of the life course regime, Buchman contends that highly transient, fluid and uncertain youth identities are emerging (1989:187).

The issue here is that changes in the structure of the economy appear to be so profound and far-reaching in their consequences for youths, that they will generate increasingly serious dislocations and problems for youths coming of age (Buchman, 1989). The ethnographic data and analysis in this thesis describes the character of these changes as well as provides an overview of the various directions of research and theory about youth and the transition to adulthood that will help in understanding these changes.

To begin with, youth under/unemployment is a central concern as it appears to be endemic: youth has increasingly become a stage of "redundancy" (Cote & Allahar, 1997; Krahn & Lowe, 1993). The need for youths in the labour force has sharply declined as has the post-Fordist economy in accepting new cohorts reaching "adulthood." Even for youths with degrees in post-secondary education there is a troublesome discrepancy between aspirations inculcated with advanced

schooling and what they achieve in terms of status and economic remuneration (Cote & Allahar, 1997). Youths today live in an obscure zone between adolescence and adulthood in which traditional notions of work and school are continually being re-defined (Betcherman & Morissette, 1994).

Youth As A Stage Of Life

In post-World War II industrialized countries there emerged a "new" stage of youth falling between adolescence and adulthood. Attention to what was termed "new" was brought out through the "youth revolt" in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Kenneth Keniston (1970) advanced the notion that societal changes brought a new stage of life following what had been conceived as adolescence. This new stage is even more predominant today if we factor in Keniston's trends to look for in the emergence of youth: prolongation of formal education, increased educational demands by a highly industrialized and technological society, and growing uncertainty of life roles. Those who could be identified as "youth" were a minority in the 1970s (Yankelovich, 1974). Yet today a growing number of post-adolescents are characterized by the fact that "they have not settled the questions whose answers once defined adulthood: questions of relationships to the existing society, questions of vocation, questions of social role and lifestyle" (Keniston, 1970:634). What we are witnessing today is the emergence of the prolonged stage of youth which blurs many "fixed" categories of young people's lives.

Moreover, the movement from school to work is the core component of the transition of youth to adulthood. In fact, the one central task in coming of age for almost all members of our capitalist society is to establish an independent livelihood. Most adult Canadians rely upon the

labour market completely for their livelihoods, at least until they approach "retirement age." To be

denied a place in the labour market is to risk becoming socially marginalized.

Paradox And Instability

As youths come of age, they face a high incidence of under/unemployment, difficulty gaining

entry to career jobs in the years following departure from the education system, low incomes, and

an assault by the government on the social safety net (Cote & Allahar, 1994). Today, youths are

confronted with a complex set of decisions which have major consequences on their lives. The

world may have appeared as "their oyster" in their adolescence, but they now realize they are

paradoxically, firmly bound by the necessity to make good choices in finding their way into the

labour market.

The crew members grew up in the midst of what Ricky calls, "instability and indifference."

The crew explained how different uncertainties came to characterize their lives. For instance, five

of the crew member's parents had divorced and all of them stated they were "latch-key kids," which

was "a source of instability and stress." The recessions of 1981 and 1991 led the crew to become

"more sanguine to the promise of endless prosperity in our society." Joe reveals how governmental

parties were a source of uncertainty and not stability:

> I still remember watching the CBC in grade 8, as a dishevelled John
> Turner meekly defended his actions around a series of blatant party
> nepotism which was left to him by Trudeau. Big Chin Mulrooney
> confidently fired 'you had a choice, sir.' Yet again in 1993,
> Campbell on CBC was just as dishevelled about Mulrooney
> patronage appointments. Who the hell can we trust?

Furthermore, the crew watched the Gulf War on TV; they were concerned with a nuclear threat, risky love (i.e., AIDS and STDs), and environmental problems like the Exxon Valdez oil spill, acid rain and ozone holes.

An Angus Reid Poll found that 60% of youths have little or no confidence in structures such as parliament (*Canada/US Religion and Politics Survey*, 1996:49), while the *Bibby Report* found that only 18% of youths have faith in their provincial leader (1995:113). Moreover, youths make up the largest life-cycle group to be ambivalent and to tune-out from governmental politics and "issues altogether"; they are "irrelevant around hot topics" and feel less government is better (Angus Reid, 1997).

Youths respond to the "demand limited" economy by staying in school longer. The Angus Reid Poll found 42% of youths chose "No Job" as their prime reason for staying in school. In 1994, 21,000 MAs were granted–that is a 45% increase from 1984. The number of degrees granted per 100,000, 20-29 year olds, rose an astonishing 25% from 1990 to 1994 alone (Statistics Canada, *"Education in Canada"*, 1996:158). Yet the glut of eager and educated youths has met a brick wall when trying to obtain good jobs. Many of the crew members have obtained a BA yet they are continuing their studies and work as landscapers because they feel there is little else open to them in the labour market.

Youth uncertainty is perpetuated not only by bitter feelings generated by underemployment but also by rising tuition costs of post-secondary education and by the fact that Mom and Dad's income stagnated in the last twenty years and so they are not able to help out as much with their children's education costs. The average loan to students rose by 55% from 1984 to 1995, trailing increases in tuition fees over that same period by 20% (*Education Quarterly Review*, 4(2), Summer

1997:16). Human Resource Development Canada states that the average debt of students obtaining a three-year degree would be $25,000 in 1998-1999.

Once considered a "ticket to ride" in the Fordist years, post-secondary education has become a necessary, yet insufficient condition to obtain a good job. This is part of the instability youths face as they come of age. Unstable environments invade youths' consciousness as they live under a blur of political uncertainty and a political system unable to cope with their distress. Youths search for stability in their transition to adulthood, yet this quest is often prolonged and enduring. A major problem which youths suffer in modern society is the problem of irrelevance. As less labour is necessary in the post-Fordist economy and as more youths stay in school longer, many youths feel they have lost their "functions" in society—waiting for approval into adulthood. While it is evident deep structured changes have created a world of insecurity for youths, this fact alone does not allow us to fully understand or explain how youth experience and react to this situation. To understand how youths deal with uncertainty in behavioural and/or cultural terms we must try to understand the relationship between cultures and purposeful human action.

Masculinity

All the crew members are males who celebrate their "masculine" identities through work and leisure. Gender stratification—males' and females' unequal access to power, prestige and property on the basis of sex—is evident in the crew members' lives and experiences. Gender stratification is significant because it cuts across all aspects of social life. No matter what our social class or age we are labelled male or female. The images and expectations attached to these labels not only help to guide our behaviour, but also serve as the basis of power relations (Connell, 1995:42). Gender is a social not a biological characteristic. Gender, which varies across time and space, is what a group

considers "proper" for its males and females. Whereas sex refers to biological characteristics, gender refers to socially-defined roles, expectations and behaviours. You learn your gender as you are socialized into specific behaviour and attitudes. The sociological significance of gender is that it serves as a sorting device by which society controls its members. Gender can determine the nature of people's access to such things as power, prestige and property. Like social class, gender is a structural feature of society.

The crew's masculinity is constructed and played out in their work experiences. They find themselves underemployed and in a marginalized job. Their lack of control over their work and the economy is combatted through constructed controlling and "over exaggerated" masculinity. Connell in *Masculinity* (1995:93-94) states:

> The conditions in the capitalist workplace certainly affect the construction of masculinity for the men employed. But capitalist economies do not guarantee employment. In the wake of the economic downturn in the 1970s, it was estimated that thirty million people were out of work in the OECD countries. Unemployment or underemployment is chronic in less developed economies. Large numbers of youth are now growing up without any expectation of the stable employment around which familiar models of working-class masculinity were organized. Instead they face intermittent employment and economic marginality in the long term, and often severe deprivation in the short term.

The crew's experiences in the economy are quite similar to Connell's analysis, as the crew's "project of masculinity" is developed in a marginal class situation where the claim to power that is central in developing masculinities is constantly negated by economic weakness. The guys in the crew may be strong and determined but they cannot obtain a good job that will pay them an "independent adult" wage. One way of their resolving this contradiction is through a sensational display, which grabs hold of the marginality and stigma and turns them to account. At the individual

level, this gets played out by the crew members who are constantly concerned with strength and credibility. At a group level, the "collective practice of masculinity becomes a performance too" (Connell, 1995:116). The crew orchestrate their own masculinity continually rehearsing and refining it with each other. This performance is an active response to their situation but it does little to improve their economic situation.

Interpretations Of Masculinity

The crew members exercise skill, action and creativity in leisure pursuits just as they do at work. Leisure activities supply meanings and beliefs for work, yet these activities can be best understood in relation to work itself. Workers are generally seen as objects who function to carry out roles and values cast upon them by employers and the labour process. Workers in this sense only respond to the dictates of the labour market. The labour market is active but the workers are merely adaptive, being part of a structured system and coping with the consequences of the subjective choices of employers. I believe these characterizations miss the mark even for workers in such routinized marginal jobs like at Burger King. These depictions omit several essentials.

Work is a selective process, experienced differently by men and women. It is also part of a wider social existence which complicates time, class, place, age, ethnicity and gender. Routinization and standardization can be the product of work practices; yet workers can also actively form their own categories and practices within the labour process.

Through divisions of labour and sex selectivity work often creates social groupings in which women and men are present in radically unequal numbers. The crew members in this thesis are all males. Only once (for two months) in the eight year history of the landscaping company was there a female worker. The bias that landscaping is a masculine job requiring strength, stamina and

common sense skill characterizes this stereotypical occupation. Same-sex bonds become extremely important to the crew. The heightened homosociability is sometimes explained by the crew as an unwanted consequence, while in other instances the crew championed their masculine conquests of teamwork and perseverance, discipline and common sense knowledge, competition and pride and the danger and triumph of overcoming odds.

The crew's work setting is a place where they are the focus and master of the domain, where social relations are organized on their terms and where they are not an anomaly. This domain expresses and reproduces gender divisions. Their masculine identities are formed and expressed through the exclusion of women in much of their labour and leisure activities and in their jokes and stereotypes regarding women and homosexuals. When one of the members is not "pulling his weight" or cannot lift certain materials on his own, he is ridiculed as being a "skirt" or "having a vagina." Likewise, when one of the boys does not want to "drink hard" (consume large quantities of alcohol) after a ball hockey game he is labelled "faggot" or "pussy."

The dangerous and harsh conditions of the crew's outdoor labour practices apparently reinforce a rugged masculinity. As one crew member cutting a large tree with a chain saw explained,

> The danger of being twenty feet up in the air with a chain saw could breed fear in the hearts of many, yet I get off on the challenge and the emotion. It takes a real man to get up there and do this with no safety harness. Sure it seems stupid but it gives you a rush like bungee jumping or being in a fight.

How this danger comes to be equated with masculine pride is wrapped up in the stereotypes and gender divisions in which the crew members have been socialized and told to accept all their lives. Pride, competition and honour are viewed as the pinnacles of their male identities. The crew place

a high value on being able to "push the body to extremes" and overcome structured constraints in the face of exhaustion and heat.

The stereotype of the male bread-winner is changing in contemporary times as females struggle to gain equality and access. Yet the crew members still believe their work is rough and requires constructed masculine attributes. The crew frequently watch male-dominated sports and champion misogynists on TV like Don Cherry. They feel that most females cannot handle the strenuous working conditions their landscape work dictates. One of the crew members stated, "Let's be honest, no normal skirt could handle the harsh conditions that we have to overcome." They have seen historically that outdoor work has been dominated by males. The crew's work is dirty, disagreeable and risky, and many people in our society shun such occupations. Nevertheless, the crew members learned to cope with these strains through developing standards to meet the challenge of proving their manliness. The strains of the job are seen as a test and symbol of their masculinity. "Discontent with work is turned away from a political discontent and confused in its logic by a huge detour into the symbolic" (Willis, 1979:196).

The crew members are uncertain about their future, and their identities are threatened by unemployment and by the unappealing prospects of jobs that are opened to them. Yet they see themselves as enduring in jobs that many people, especially females, could not cope with or perform, and they champion their endurance and determination. The men are working with and preserving a male culture that mirrors Stan Gray's (1987:225) analysis of male shopfloor culture:

> In the plant they could revel in the rough and tumble of a masculine
> world of physical harshness of constant swearing and rough
> behaviour, of half serious fighting and competition with each other
> and more serious fighting with the boss. It was eight hours full of
> filth and dirt and grease and grime and sweat—manual labour and a

manly atmosphere. They could be vulgar and obscene, talk about
football and car repairs, and let their hair down. Boys could be boys.

The crew members search for control and identity in their lives and this is, in part, expressed through their image of rugged masculinity. Competition, pride and the challenge of danger are all recognized by them as belonging in their jobs and the masculine domain. The crew also like to express their control over women in leisure activities. For example, a member is ridiculed if he does not set the rules and regulations with his girlfriend. The pull of the male clique is supposed to override all other relationships and girlfriends are only looked upon as secondary or in supporting roles. The crew members are friends and this bond is thought to hold primacy over everything else. When one of the crew members went to his girlfriend's cousin's wedding instead of accompanying the crew on their annual camping trip, he was chastized and castigated by the crew. The girlfriend should not interfere with the crew's work or leisure schedule. Adjustments should be made, not by the crew but by the secondary or supporting cast.

The construction of females as being a lesser other is clearly evident through the crew's work practices. Females are looked upon as not having the strength, endurance or common sense needed to perform landscaping duties. The dominant ideology concerning gender is not based as much on skill but upon the aforementioned physical attributes. Thus, instead of actively resisting against their exploitive work conditions, the crew actively live out hegemonic cultural phenomena—a strong bias for the masculine in opposition to the feminine. In other words, the crew's neo-liberal habitus blurs their potential resilience and the tools they work with are the ones most accessible but also ineffectual, which can generate future complications for the crew but which will help to sustain the dominant neo-liberal ideology of the state.

To resist the powerful economic forces that are transforming life for young people today, the crew adapt old, rigid, masculine attributes that have become popular amongst burgeoning neo-liberal ideologies. The popular "hand-up instead of hand-out" slogan prophesied by the Harris Common Sense Revolution and the popular "how to succeed" infomercials which bombard late-night TV have helped to give rise to a masculine ethos that deflate young people's anxieties away from the economic system itself while helping them adjust to the emerging post-Fordist order. To succeed in today's uncertain economic climate, young people must not become "slackers" but instead gain constructed "masculine" character: diligence, virtue, and perseverance encompassing all the old stereotypes of "manliness."

The crew members see their work as a proof of virility in many ways, and it cannot be discounted as an important factor in motivating labour on lawns and gardens. Through working in hard and strenuous conditions, the crew place a value on physical strength and courage. It is looked upon as essential that all crew members be relatively strong and motivated in order to endure the strains of their everyday work. These attributes are not left on the lawns; the crew members bring these attitudes with them to other activities like ball hockey and cards.

Structure/Agency

Economic, political and social changes are complicating the process of achieving adult class status in Canadian society. Changes in the labour market and the breakdown of the welfare state have helped to create a degree of uncertainty in the minds of many youths (Krahn & Lowe, 1990). These disruptions do affect other people who are at different stages in their life cycles. The parents of many youths have been affected by such things as downsizing and layoffs in their jobs, divorce, and/or the decline of welfare state entitlements. Some have been forced into temporary, part-time

work or early retirement often at drastically reduced levels of income. Youths are not the only people facing angst in our society. Yet it seems that in the process of coming of age, many youths are dealing with these political, social and economic changes simultaneously.

Youths do have a degree of personal choice while coming of age, yet these choices are constrained by the structures of our society. For example, gender is still a powerful conditioner for occupational choice. In theory women may freely aspire to be landscapers and construction workers, and some do, but in practice few women choose these jobs because of the struggle to be accepted as an equal in a male-dominated environment (Gaskell, 1992). Social-class background also plays a big role in shaping a young person's perception of what is desirable and possible. Much evidence exists showing youths from low-income families are less likely to complete high school and are more likely to be streamed into terminal programs if they do. Race, region and other factors cut across gender and class to form both the desires and opportunities available to youths in transition.

The underlying issue at stake here is that of the relationship which exists between social action and social structure. Mills (1959) once stated, "by the fact of his [sic] living (every individual) contributes, however minutely, to the shaping of this society and to the course of its history, even as he [sic] is made by society and by its historical push and shove." Yet some people, including many youths today, feel hopelessly trapped by forces beyond their control, especially if they are un/underemployed or have little material wealth. On the other hand, some people feel their choices mean something; they act decisively and believe they are in control of their circumstances and the direction of their lives. This is not just a philosophical issue. Practical platforms for action depend in part upon how certain problems are conceptualized. When youth under/unemployment is seen as a public issue rather than as a personal trouble the way in which it is tackled will tend to alter.

The explanation of any sociological question thus has to focus on the social relations composing the object of study rather than any elements in isolation. As Elias (1991:33) puts it,

> Even the nature and form of his/her solitude, even what he/she feels
> to be their 'inner life,' is stamped by the history of their
> relationship—by the structure of the human network in which, as one
> of its nodal points, he/she develops and lives as an individual.

This can help us to dispel the myth held by many in our society of the higher degree of personal freedom of choice available to the young generation today. All aspects of life demand choices; nothing is to be taken for granted. This is the modern Horatio Alger myth—you can be whoever you want to be. Yet the dark side of this personal freedom is access to the labour market and coming of age takes young people through a landscape of risks and uncertainties created by institutions, practices, beliefs and the specific historical circumstances of the day.

Furthermore, many older people condemn today's youth as unmotivated and apathetic "slackers". Youth appear to have no goals, no cultural pride, no political ideology, and no discernable ambitions. Yet today's youth were born into a society where traditional templates have proven themselves quaint at best. Having no transitional guarantees into adulthood, many youths choose by default to experience life as play. Youth's work experiences are constrained by being stuck where they are frustrated—bike messengers, pizza drivers, working at Wal-Mart or as yard workers in the low-wage/low-benefit post-Fordist economy. It is this structured economic environment where much of the doubt, distress, and endangered dreams of youth exist.

Structuralism

It is here that the influence of structuralism will be examined. Structuralist approaches identify different structural "levels," and "explain" the more readily observable or measurable social structures and actions as the outcome of deeper underlying, generative structures–much like grammar having the capacity to generate sentences. Structuralism, especially within Marxist circles, examines the possibility of "facts" existing and whether or not history is a possible undertaking. The debate builds upon three direct assumptions. The first of these is the *materialist assumption*: reality is independent of thought itself, even though thought and subjectivity play an important role in interpreting it; the second is the *rationalist assumption*: only an approach that marries logic and history can help us understand society; and the third is the *political assumption*: we want to understand but also transform social structures and the actions within them.

Structuralism has been recognized as innovative and valuable in its emphasis on the importance of underlying generative structures, including those which structure the unconscious. It emphasizes the "etic" at the expense of the "emic," thus providing a strongly rule-determined account of language and social action (Levi-Strauss, 1969). However, these very achievements are open to criticism. As will be discussed further, structuralism reinstates the division between action and structure that in part many sociologists have tried to transcend. To begin with, structuralism may seem to be very static and over-deterministic in its explanations; and secondly, it may understate the creativity of individuals and the degree of autonomy partially open to the self.

Levi-Strauss (1969) has proclaimed that his study of structures is compatible with historical materialism because he is merely completing a "superstructural" investigation. As some critics have noted, the obvious difficulty with this claim is that it leaves unclear the epistemological status of the structures which Levi-Strauss claims to have discovered (Bauman, 1973:60ff). Is the discovered

structure merely a theoretical representation to be revised and altered as empirical evidence dictates? Here, all explanation would be a type of structure through imposing order on facts. What has to be distinguished are the two steps: that of discerning a systematic or structured phenomenon; and that of attempting to define and make more precise the nature of the object under study. The central problem of structuralist thought is it continually vacillates between proclaiming the complementarity of historical and structural analysis and asserting their opposition. In other words, structuralism refuses to close the circle from the concrete to the abstract by returning to the concrete. Imposing on social analysis an essentially linguistic concept of structure leads to an imaginary study, and recalls to one's mind Durkheim's (1964:17) critique:

> It is because the imaginary offers the mind no resistance that the
> mind, conscious of no restraint, gives itself up to boundless ambitions
> and believes it is possible to construct, or rather reconstruct, the world
> by whim of its own strengths and at the whims of its own desires.

It is not beneficial or even possible to return to the fatuous position of accepting only the immediate data of the senses. Structure may be viewed as something more than merely an arrangement of primary data, as in a statistical table showing the distribution of observed facts from a chosen aspect. Structural Marxists seem to advocate that structures are realities but are not directly visible and so not directly observable. Marx struggled with this dilemma where capital in capitalist society appears as both real and abstract, both a categorical and a real force. The solution of Marx, that of moving from concrete to abstract to concrete, is opposed to the solution offered by Levi-Strauss in which the movement is from the abstract to the concrete to the abstract. The movement to the "concrete" is largely *pro forma* in his work and it has secured its seemingly impressive coherence at the high cost of a complete immunity to uncertainty and surprise.

Louis Althusser championed Marxism as a science unblemished by humanism and subjectivism, calling it "theoretical antihumanism." Rigour, science and objectivity were the bones of Althusser's Marx. The publication of Marx's earlier manuscripts, which stirred interest in the less familiar "immature" Marx of alienation, needs and emotion, found no one less receptive than Althusser.

In considering the relationship between agency and structure, Althusser (1977) tries to understand how social formations reproduce themselves. Moreover, he wishes to explain why actions produce a self-sustaining system.

It should be remembered that the relations of production are located in the base of society (economic activity constitutes society's base) and consist of the way people are socially oriented to the productive process: whether they are owners, labourers, or members of some other class. To reproduce the relations of production, therefore, means to keep people in their positions as owners, wage labourers, and so on. The socio-economic and political system can, because of its power, reproduce these relations of production through direct decree. Companies can lay off employees or only hire contract workers. People within this system who wish to climb ahead must work through the socio-economic institutions of society as well as try to change the state itself. Thus, the majority of people who get ahead are those with power and resources while others in society stagnate and fall behind.

Examining Levi-Strauss (1969) and Althusser (1971) enables us to recognize that the restructured post-Fordist economy has very relevant implications for youths today. Youths can be seen existing in society as bricoleurs:

> ...the elements which the bricoleur collects and uses are
> preconstrained like the constitutive units of myth, the possible

combinations of which are restricted by the fact that they are drawn from the language where they already possess a sense which sets a limit on their freedom of manoeuvre" (Levi-Strauss, 1966:19).

In other words, young people do have many barriers up against them. They live and act upon these barriers with limited tools which may prove ineffective to beneficial change for themselves. Moreover, for Levi-Strauss and Althusser, structures are patterns or rules (usually unconscious) which govern behaviour, thought, etc. For example, the concept of the bricoleur highlights human limitations. Levi-Strauss juxtaposes the bricoleur with an engineer–the latter can actually devise his own tools whereas the former is stuck with whatever is in his toolbox. The debate is also about purposive action and whether humans have full control of their situations or are they bricoleurs struggling to get by–constrained by their structured conditions and limited by their active questions and knowledge.

The "social fabric" of many youths is under stress. Through coming of age, youths are involved in a variable process in which adulthood is reached. The shape and direction this process takes is not static nor fully-structured but is influenced by an unstable journey that youths travel along–a continuum of unequally distributed risks and opportunities. Coming of age is not as straightforward as folk images or "myths" would suggest. The actions of youths can be seen in their work and leisure pursuits, their schooling and their cultural practices. It is wrong to underestimate the structures which youths face today. Yet it is equally detrimental to mask at least their potential for cultural agency.

Humanists

To English "humanist" E.P. Thompson, Althusserian structuralism could be summed up in a few words: "the category has attained to a primacy over its material referent; the conceptual structure hangs above and dominates social being" (1978:205). Structuralism was the theoretical articulation of excess; through denying agency to the superstructural realm it reified the economic base which was seen as a static model rather than as relations of change and transformation. Conscious human activity was devalued. Against a Marxism of the Althusserian, structuralist stripe, Thompson declared an "unrelenting intellectual war" (1978:384).

Thompson employs a very basic notion of culture when describing a group's action when he urges that the very notion of humans as opposed to animals is coincident with culture; to propose the investigation of humans apart from their culture is to propose an unreal abstraction. This search for the "human character" is to be found in Marx's *Capital* where Marx states: "...what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality" (Marx, 1977:198).

Yet in culture rests the paradox of the structure/agency debate. On the one hand, culture persists and antedates the participation of particular people in it: indeed, culture can be said to shape the reflexive outlooks and imaginations of the people participating in it. On the other hand, however, everything is always changing: cultural understandings have to be reviewed and remade continually and in the remaking they change. Thus, culture arises in and is changed in interaction as people put forth the meanings and ideas in which they believe. It involves conflict and negotiation where actors compete.

This generic concept of culture is an indispensable part of social theory. There is always the problem of hypostasising the concept of "human nature" in a way that denies historical change, and

conservatives seek to show that inequalities between classes stem from the basic facts of "human nature," which guarantees that capitalism will always exist. But no Marxist strategy committed to human emancipation can avoid a commitment to some concept of the human.

Thompson's work is central to the concerns of some theorists for the incorporation of cultural agency into social theory. Thompson argues with Althusser and other structuralists who treat culture "roles" as an objective reality confronting the individual. Thompson does not view a role as a set of expectations that tell the individual what to do. The fact is roles are fluid, vague, contradictory and should be seen as a general guideline. Humans shape their own roles to an extent to meet their own goals. Cultural roles are thus social objects we learn in interaction with others and alter according to our definition of the situation. Thus, Thompson argues that how we make our roles, in the end, is through a continuous negotiation process, rather than passively entering into a role and doing what structures dictate (1978).

Structure Versus Agency

The dilemma we are faced with is to determine the relationship between human agency and the social structures which confine potential human action. The important factor to remember when analyzing structure and agency is the degree to which human action realizes a desirable end. In other words, it is one thing to walk away from a job you do not enjoy but it is something else altogether to achieve a critical mass of change which can fundamentally alter the dynamics present in the capitalist system. Agency is not about coping, it is about doing and changing. Growing inequality between youth and adults in Canada should provoke strong emotional reactions: frustration, anger, rage. But the prevailing structural wisdom admires the success of economic winners and views the

rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer as a "natural" phenomenon, perhaps unfortunate but necessary.

We are at the end of an era of rising expectations for all Canadians. We have a generation of young people who believe they have no stake in either the economic or social fabric of our nation. Moreover, job insecurity is everywhere. The casualization of work in Canada makes the whole future uncertain for youth.

> [It] prevents all rational anticipation, a loss of basic believe and hope in the future that one needs in order to rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions, even the most intolerable (Bourdieu, 1997:82).

There is an awareness all around us of people doing the same work for less or worrying about how much more work they have to do to hang on to their low-paying jobs. A large reserve army of labour, which increasingly is well-educated, helps to scare all those working into believing they are readily replaceable.

This trend can lead the under/unemployed workers as:

> ...having suffered a blow to their capacity to project themselves into the future, which is the preconditioning for all so-called rational conducts, starting with economic calculation, or in a quite different realm, political organization, are scarcely capable of being mobilized (Bourdieu, 1997:83).

In other words, in a world rife with insecurity and as competition gets more intense today's youth find it difficult to combat their present conditions.

There is plenty of anecdotal evidence to the effect that some young people are handsomely rewarded for their education and drive while others with similar education cannot seem to keep their

financial footing regardless of their efforts. With more of the population well-educated there is a sense the economy has become less a neutral arbiter of human activity and more a giant lottery. Youth view their destiny as being captive to forces beyond their control. A solid education and the proper work ethic give one an edge but no guarantees. Young people are bearing the brunt of the post-Fordist economic realities. A sense of unfairness and demoralization has grown. In order to conceive of change (a reasoned ambition to transform the present by reference to a projected future), one needs some grasp of present structures in society. Moreover, "security is needed to conceive the ambition of changing the present with an eye to the future" (Bourdieu, 1998:83). Collective youth insecurity common to the post-Fordist epoch is the origin of the demoralization and loss of militancy which has been observed among the crew in this thesis. Those who deplore under/unemployed youth today as being "lazy" or lacking drive should not omit to relate under/unemployment to the economic and social conditions which favour or demand it.

Moreover, when analyzing social issues it is imperative to understand the fundamental and dynamic unity of the economic and social realms. Humanists aim to make explicit the truth of the primary experience of the social world. Against the static constructions of theory, humanists prefer the reconstruction of inner apprehensions of reality. Culture, in all such interpretations, is the realm of freedom. We cannot reject the importance or value of the humanist approach.

Moreover, Bourdieu sees the humanist approach of thinkers like Thompson as aiming to make explicit the truth of the primary experience of the social world. Against the static constructions of theory, the humanists prefer the reconstruction of inner apprehensions of reality. Class, for example, cannot be constructed as a "thing-in-itself," as this would reduce living humans to static objects. Humanists are concerned with negotiated interactions. Bourdieu notes that subjectivism uses a defense of "primary experience" to attach science and logic. Yet Bourdieu does not reject the

importance of all such approaches. What needs to be underlined is that humanists fail to see that interactions between individuals owe their form to the "objective structures which have produced the dispositions of the interacting agents and which allot them their relative positions in the interaction and elsewhere" (1977:81). Bourdieu argues that while humanist approaches seem to bestow explanations, what they usually give us are "complicitous description," which, in grasping at face value the common sense of the participants, merely perpetuate self-serving notions of the mundane. Bourdieu accepts that sociology's fundamental aim is to explain why social inequalities continue to exist and reproduce themselves without conscious recognition by society's members. Thus, it follows that he rejects a social science that basis itself on phenomenology, or on common sense classifications of social groups or social problems, because these can only reinforce and perpetuate the very domination he regards as problematic.

The above discussion is relevant to this thesis as Bourdieu raises the issue that the transition from youth to adult is not a determined negotiated outcome between youths and the choices they make but the imposition of arbitrary meanings through the economic social structure. The structure/agency debate can help us examine why youths support a system which oppresses them. The answer seems to be that not only are the ruling ideas those of the adult ruling class, but these ideas themselves reinforce the rule of that class by concealing their basis in the realities of economic and political power. The tendency of structures is to reproduce themselves by producing agents endowed with a system of predispositions which is capable of engendering practices adapted to the structures thereby contributing to the reproduction of structures. Youth resistance is limited in this sense because of inequalities in the means of interpretation and expression. Youth have to create semi-useful objects out of materials which are to a large extent distributed by the ruling class. The range of possible alternative meanings is, therefore, constrained (Williams, 1980:108-114).

Conclusion

What follows in the next two chapters is a description of the crew's experiences at work and at leisure. It is recognized that the crew members are active, but their actions are limited and structured by the post-Fordist economy and the dominant neo-liberal ideology that has been stamped into their existence. Moreover, these events and processes do not signify the crew's acceptance of the imperatives and restraints of the post-Fordist capitalist production. Their thoughts and aspirations are directed towards good jobs offering autonomy, challenge and opportunity to learn and advance. Yet the relative satisfactions found in their work, games and leisure do little to offset their alienated and exploited experiences.

During the spring and summer the crew learns to cope with the strains of their life and work, and they do so primarily by creating their own standards for joy and fulfillment. Their work is made more palpable through their own fun and games and by viewing the money they earn as proof of their capacity to endure tough working conditions and to meet the challenges of earning their own money to help them go to school. The crew adjusts to the harsh realities of their lives by viewing their work through a male frame of reference, seeing themselves as enduring jobs which "skirts" and "baglickers" and "fudge packers" would be incapable of doing, and attributing to themselves the status of "hardworkers" and "achievers." Their own reinforced self-image of "tough, resilient, virtuous, frugal and dignified" is a psychological defense against their risky and low positions. Yet the crew make their economic situation tolerable by being entertained or interpellated by cultural structures. They do little to change their exploitive situations as their options are blurred by playing games, drinking beer and dreaming about women.

CHAPTER THREE

HIDDEN CONTROL

Introduction

The mood of many workers in our society is pessimistic and glum. The prospects for social advancement are dim. The hope for radical political change—the belief that organized collective action may mount a serious challenge to the power of capital and state—seems to be gone. The combination of the rise of the service sector, de-industrialization, mass layoffs and anti-union legislation, that are features of neo-liberal policies (i.e., Mike Harris' *Common Sense Revolution*), have drastically altered the condition of workers and undercut their capacity for mass political action. The fear of unemployment or of not obtaining a "good job" and the lack of security and union jobs have succeeded in placing workers at the mercy of unscrupulous, cost-cutting employers. Many workers are active in making their jobs more bearable, yet most do little to challenge the socio-economic fabric that constrains them. This chapter will analyse how a group of young males are surviving in these economically constraining times.

Working Conditions

The crew work in a non-standard job in the personal service sector. The work experience of the crew point to various areas of the transformation of work in the post-Fordist era. Billy, one of the crew members, explains the labour process in which he and the others of the crew were involved:

> The client pays Snake a piece-rate/per job contract and snake pays me. The clients usually pay on average, $25 a cut or $17 per man hour worked on their property. Snake then pays us $8 an hour. Snake makes $9 per man hour on the hourly rate without having to do anything. He is making good coin by just sending us out to work

sites. When he charges $25 a lawn, the lawn usually only takes four of us twenty minutes to cut. The lawns are usually situated in clusters, and thus we can cut three lawns an hour. Snake takes in $90 and pays $32 out in wage labour. In an average day we will cut twenty-four lawns and Snake will take in $720 while paying out $256 for our eight-hour day in wage labour. Snake makes more money off the other landscaping jobs like pruning, driveway sealing, and gardening where he charges the client $17 per man hour. Thus, if three of us are out on the job site for an hour, the client dishes out $51 to Snake, while Snake gives the three of us $8 each and he keeps $27. These odd jobs are done everyday by the four-man "odd jobs" crew and by the cutting crew when all the lawns are cut for the week or on a "as needed" basis. Snake is making a killing just sending us out while he relaxes at home or is in his truck.

Profits for Snake are built on the relative low wages he pays the crew. The cost advantage of low wages is at the expense of the crew's income and working conditions where there are no benefits or safety compensation packages. Snake's recruitment of the crew, who are so-called "marginal workers," is an example of the post-Fordist shift to sub-contracting and just-in-time flexible employees. This allows Snake, like it does other business managers, to maintain low wages and counter resistance to attendant conditions. Snake recruits workers through a social-cultural network of friends and relatives. Snake explains,

> There are hundreds of people calling me looking for work; times are tough out there, and the labour pool for this kind of work (outdoors and under the table) is huge. If you don't want to work or if the clients need a big job done, I can get others in here that I know in a matter of minutes.

The cost advantage for Snake and other companies in the post-Fordist era is accomplished through keeping wages low; eliminating benefits; reducing the labour force; cutting overtime, holiday and vacation pay; transforming administrative and accounting procedures; and minimizing equipment, training and supervision expenses. Through subcontracting and a just-in-time workforce

(workers who are not full-time paid employees, but instead are only paid an hourly or piece-rate wage for time worked with no benefits and security), the contractors/operators make a higher profit than they would if their flexible workers were "directly" employed. Snake pays all his employees (regardless of seniority), $8 per hour worked with no pay for lunch breaks. Benefits are non-existent, for if you "needed eye glasses or a cavity filled you were on your own." Snake cuts back hours as much as possible and sends the crew home early or before they start their shift, with no pay for showing up to his house, if there is not enough work for everyone that day. Overtime work is not rewarded with a pay premium and there is no health or safety compensation. As Snake explains,

> The business is all under the table and you guys are non-workers under formal definitions. If you lose a toe or fall off the roof while cleaning the eavestrough, you're on your own. I will just say I have never seen you before if you go to Workers' Comp.

Furthermore, Snake and his wife do their own administrative and accounting work and have no "management" fees to pay out. The equipment used is all low-maintenance, industrially sound and commercially tested, yet there are no "ride-on" mowers or high tech gadgets. Snake believes he is saving money by not buying the new computerized equipment as his "low-paid labourers can do the job for much less and besides Tax Canada would get suspicious if I bought lots of hard-core, high-tech equipment seeing this business is only registered under me as the sole employee." Likewise, training and supervision are very minimal and looked upon as cost-effective as Snake believes, "Any no-mind should know the basics of this industry; to become skilled is another story, but should come in time."

As will be shown later in this thesis, the crew became flexible on their own terms, taking their own breaks and clocking in for hours they did not work, yet were paid because of the low

supervision. Time was also consumed unproductively when the work was not done efficiently or accurately because of inadequate training (one day, workers were asked to build a brick retaining wall for which they had no experience in constructing). Furthermore, the crew justified their "unproductive practices" through rational arguments concerning the low pay, low benefits and strenuous intensive labour they were performing. As Billy explains,

> Snake is making a killing off of us, he can afford to pay us an extra hour that we didn't work. For Christ sake, we're only making 8 'bones' an hour. Besides, we're not getting paid overtime and fucking McDonalds' employees get more benefits than us.

These sentiments were commonly stated by all crew members and demonstrate that productivity is not always enhanced by paying low wages. Unemployment, underemployment, insecure employment are common experiences of youths in the Canadian labour market. So too are low earnings.

Working For Snake

Snake usually has two crews labouring in the outdoors six to seven days a week. The two "crews" consisting of four men each move from different clients' houses working on various yards throughout the day. Snake has owned and operated the business for eight years, and I have worked with him for all those years in the springs and summers.

The majority of Snake's clientele have been serviced by him and the crew for a few years and the clients "trusted and felt close" to Snake and the crew. The crew cut the clients' yards weekly from April to September and also performed other jobs for the clients like tree removal, brush cleanup and gardening.

Snake does not advertise as all his clients were gained through reputation and "word of mouth." Many of the clients seem to have a strong positive feeling about Snake and the crew, often based on their satisfaction with how the crew has handled the care of their lawns and other requests in the past. Many new clients are friends, acquaintances or neighbours of Snake's current clientele or of the crew members, and they have all heard "good things about the work that Snake does." Because Snake has been working as a landscaper for so many years in a small city, most of the people we meet recognize his company and trucks and know of people who have used Snake's services in the past. By all accounts, Snake is able to retain most of his client's throughout the years and garner many new ones as well. The ice storm of 1998 in eastern Ontario was also very beneficial to Snake's business as yard clean-up, tree removal or trimming, deck and roof repairs and other jobs related to the storm were acquired until the end of July.

Even though the crew's work is strenuous and monotonous, and the pay benefits and security of the job are all low, the turnover rate is also low. This is, according to Snake, "A new phenomenon of the past couple of years." More and more of the guys are sticking around because they can't find anything better, or enjoyable. You guys got it pretty good here! The work and money is consistent and the work isn't stressful," although the job can be frustrating and painful at times. For example, it is stressful when lawn mowers break down in the middle of cutting a lawn or when the chain saw kicks back at you while you're ten feet up a tree and you are sent tumbling to the ground. One of the crew spoke of "going through hell" after labouring on some yards. Yet the reality is that the crew enjoys some aspects of their work and they continue to show up every morning six days a week.

The Daily Work Of The Crew

The experiences of the crew are quite similar both in work and in leisure. The crew will readily tell anyone willing to listen that they experience the similar features of many service sector employees: lack of respect, low wages, poor working conditions and benefits, and limited job security. They will also explain the virtues of "working outdoors, on their own, with their friends, sharing laughs, choosing their own hours and days to work and working in an environment conducive to their own feelings and beliefs." The crew members gather at Snake's house at 7:45 a.m. (usually Monday to Saturday, although the crew may work Sunday if there is work). Two crews of four men are arranged and grouped as either the "cutting crew" or the "odd jobs" crew (that entails such things as gardening, pruning, tree removal and sodding).

The crews gather up the lawn mowers, weed eaters, gas, rakes, garbage pails, hedgers, chain saws, ladders, driveway sealant, soil, sod and other equipment and resources they may need for the day. All the equipment, including three trucks, is stored in Snake's backyard in a residential neighbourhood in the inner city. After the crew shares a few stories about their escapades of last night they hop in their respective trucks and proceed to their choice of the first work site of the day. The cutting crew will cut approximately 25 different residential lawns a day with the majority of them clustered in different middle- to upper-class neighbourhoods. The odd jobs crew usually only get to a few houses a day where they will proceed to do such things as cut down trees, plant shrubs and flowers or lay sod. The crews often "trade" members throughout the week enabling everyone to work on different jobs and with different people. This helps to reduce monotony and boredom which can originate in only cutting lawns every day.

The crew's interaction with the clients is minimal and they go about their jobs with little supervision or instruction. Most of the crew have been working for Snake for a couple of years and

have a general knack for knowing what to do once the instructions have been given by Snake or the client. When cutting grass Snake explained to Billy one day at the beginning of the season, "You must keep lines straight, cut diagonal, horizontal or vertical depending upon client; adjust mower blades according to appropriate height for different clients; mulch or bag grass; and water and tidy." The crew cuts the grass and manicures the landscape of the clients' yards, and choose when to have a coffee break. The heat and sun can take their toll on the crew especially when they are nursing hangovers and tender muscles in the extreme heat.

Games

The daily grind of mowing 25 yards or digging gardens and cutting trees--bending, lifting, stooping, pushing and pulling in the summer heat--affect the crew. Because of the monotony and intense conditions, the crew will play games to "make the day go by quicker." For example, the crew will try to cut a lawn in record time in order for them to enjoy a swim in the absent client's pool. Likewise, they will compete in the "fastest cutter" competition, where the first man to complete cutting the grass in his section of the yard garners the right to take the next yard off. They will also have "world strongman competitions" which entail such tasks as lifting mowers over your head ten times and tossing boulders and branches as far as you can. Furthermore, the crew will play the "heat game" in the truck while travelling to a client's house. This game sees the four men in the truck battle the elements of having the heater on in the truck full blast in the middle of a hot and humid day. The "lady" who gives in first to the heat and rolls down a window is forced to take on the worst job of the day--this could see the "lady" picking up dog excrement or having to weed a garden for half the day.

The crew will take tours down Main Street on sunny days. Instead of driving directly to the next client's house, the crew will take an extended detour and go on a "pelt crawl" (girl watching), viewing the many patios or city beaches on Lake Ontario just off Main Street. If the crew spots a beautiful "girl" tanning on a city beach, they will stop the truck, get out, "peel off their shirts," and "cruise the beach in hopes of catching the girl's eye and sparking up a conversation," which could lead to dating and "hammering the guts out of her." As Bill explains,

> We need to do this: we work hard and we need some incentives to keep us going. This doesn't hurt no one and it makes us happy and thus we will be more productive. Psych 100, I knew it wasn't wasted on me. A nice piece of ass or a game of water football in the 'ugly family's pool (one of the client's) or having strong man competitions, gets us all going and makes us forget how shitty this job could be.

The crew are active, physically fit, independent, outgoing and goal-oriented young males. As one crew member stated, "I love how you guys are all stubborn, cocky and tough. Fuck, otherwise, if you weren't the strains of the job would make you quit everyday at noon and none of us would make any money." Yet the heat and physical strains of working as a landscaper can drain their physical and emotional strength, as many of them debate loudly about what they are doing in this milieu at this point in their lives. By 11:00 a.m. on a hot and humid July morning and after cutting ten lawns, Karl yells across the lawn to the three of us loading a mower back onto the truck,

> My stomach's bleeding; I think its beginning to eat my back. Is this what life's about–cutting grass to starvation? Who knows if there's something better? My dad always said, 'The grass is greener on the other side until you hop the fence and have to cut the cunt.' I say we go to the ballet (colloquial slang term for strip club) for lunch, they have $2 meals and 50¢ drafts. That's what life should be about, eating food, drinking beer and watching snatch with the boys. Fuck it gives me goose bumps."

Thus, on this day, the crew take an hour off to enjoy some of "Kingston's finest daily entertainment" and to try to discover meaning and values. The "lunch call" is a central theme of the crew's day. It allows them to remove themselves from the job site and go to a restaurant, mall, park or house and interact with themselves and others. As one of the crew stated, "I live for lunch. It's what I look forward to all morning. It keeps me going some days."

Meanings

Before we move on, the above passage suggests a couple of points that need to be made. To begin with, the crew do not suffer from "false consciousness" in their labours. The guys know they are being exploited and also realize their "games" and diversions are just minor ways of dealing with their problems–they are not changing the overall conditions or revolting against the system. Secondly, these games are about expressing and reproducing masculinity and individualization. The crew revel in their "tough and manly" attributes. These two points illustrate how much this kind of work and the exploitation this entails requires both a "reserve army of cheap labour" and the ideology of masculinity to make it salient. In other words, the economic and ideological–although separable in analytic terms–in real-lived experiences are practised as an irresoluble totality.

The afternoons seem to drag on as the constant pushing of the mower or digging in gardens "numbs the brain." The change of scenery of the different homes helps as does the constant interaction with the crew. Breaks will consist of water fights or sports trivia contests. The crew talk about hockey or football, they relish in hearing stories about their friends who are professional athletes, but also about semi-pro athletes who can't quite make it to the big leagues because of structural constraints like being labelled lazy or a drunk, or because they don't quite have the height or size to be a "star." This relates to their lives where they have graduated or are close to graduating

with post-secondary degrees, yet they can't quite achieve the good job and are left to toil here. These tales help the crew forget about the lawns for a bit and seem to enliven them and give them that extra push to work till 5:00 p.m. These hours are beneficial. As Bill states, "I need the hours so I can make enough money to pay for Queen's and get my degree." Getting a degree in contemporary Canada means living the Canadian dream called by one member "The Promise." Graduate from a good university like Queen's or Western (where the crew attended) and you will learn all you need to know to land a good job, meet the right partner and enjoy the good life. Yet, as Bruno pointed out:

> For us 'lucky few,' being accepted is merely a prelude to working to find the bones to pay those ridiculous tuition costs. For most of us the only thing we can do is take out huge loans. University was supposed to make me more marketable, especially during difficult times. Yet, my first go around at Western mainly taught me how to get drunk, fuck and pass out. I learn more after work with you guys than I did in first year. A university degree is simply a signal to employers that you can be a bag licker—you can do what others tell you to do for four years.

The work day ends at Snake's house, usually around 5 p.m. The crews meet there to drop off the equipment and write down their daily hours for Snake who is out picking up his wife from work and his daughter from daycare every day from 5 p.m. til 5:45 p.m. The crew discuss the events that transpired that day and share a few laughs and make plans for that night. The crew does not disperse at the completion of the work day; in fact, many of them eat dinner with one another and participate in ball hockey games, poker and pub crawls at night, in their "leisure time." These events will be described in Chapter Three as helping the crew form an occupational community (Lockwood, 1971) and a cultural identity.

The crew's work activities entail physical exhaustion, risk of injury, low pay (and being paid monthly instead of weekly), low benefits, little job security or job advancement, and being treated as marginal by many members of society. Yet the crew often romanticize their labour as being fun, healthy and having outdoor appeal; it enables them to get a tan and stay in shape; it gives them some control, such as being allowed to go shirtless, picking the hours they want to work or the lawns they want to cut that day and being their own boss, for the most part. The crew is also able to discuss similar interests with each other things they feel they can't discuss with, say, their fellow students in university. The crew members enjoy what they call "shit talk." These are conversations surrounding sports, drinking binges and sexual exploits. The crew value masculine traits like strength, practical skill and perseverance. As one of the crew explained, "A real man will drink a box of beer and party till 2 a.m. and then go to work at 8 a.m. and work out that night at 6 p.m. and start the process again." The crew are not forced to manage a smile or to pretend to care about the client's well-being. They live in and through this environment which is continually constructed through their every day experiences. The crew create meaning and value through working together, through cruising the street on a "pelt crawl" or "peeling off the shirts for the skirts," or racing on the lawns with the mowers in order to get a longer break. Filthy explains,

> The work can suck, but so does reality. This gives me a release. I am able to act and to do what I want. I get to hear Rick talk about hammering the guts out of some dirty (having sex with a female) or make fun of pumpkin cunt Entwisted (a client). We're able to produce fun and enjoyment here; where else can you do that—not at Canadian Tire or London Life (where Filthy worked after he graduated with a BA from Queen's). Sure, it's not what I'm going to do for a living, but it is alright for the time being.

What the differing views of past work place integrity have in common among the crew is that they emphasize the style of work. It is taken for granted that everyone has to work to earn a living in our society. Yet the crew remains skeptical of this creed. Filthy explains:

> When I worked at London Life, I was told I could make my own hours, take vacations I wanted; the only thing that mattered was that I made money for the company. I was happy to work in a windowless, airless office, and thought myself fortunate to have a job with flex-time where nobody gave a damn what kind of suit I wore. Eventually I found I was wasting my time. And what's worse than squandering your life for five days a week, forty-eight weeks a year? Yet, there are bills and loans to pay. Where or what should we work at? The fastest growing jobs in this homo world are janitor, nurse and McDonald's slave.

The crew are coming of age in a society marked by an increase in lower paying, non-standardized jobs. The rising aspirations of the crew coming out of post-secondary institutions has collided with the realities of the post-Fordist economy, the uncertainty created by new employer practices, and the risk of frequent bouts of unemployment. The crew have faced an enormous range of social, cultural, educational, and financial pressures. In response, the crew do not challenge the severity of the problems affecting them; instead, they occupy, define, and decorate their immediate surroundings.

Autonomy And Control

Collinson's (1992) *Managing the shopfloor: Subjectivity, masculinity and workplace culture* examines male workers' subjective experiences of work and their practices of control: resistance, compliance and consent. His study is based on a deep ethnographic analysis (conducted between 1979-1983) of a production facility in northern England. The company had once been family owned

but was subsequently bought by an American transnational corporation in the 1970s which implemented post-Fordist techniques for a growing global post-Fordist era.

This study delves into the debate about workers' control in their work setting. Collinson's literature review explains his indebtedness to the works of Willis and Buroway and their analysis of workers' consent and/or resistance to managerial control. Yet Collinson criticizes Willis and Buraway for romanticizing workers' culture and exaggerating their control or overemphasizing consent and conformity. The issue of power and control is a central theme of his book as it is in this chapter.

Collinson explores workers' subjective experiences of control in their labour and how this control helps the workers to make sense of their social realities at work. Subjectivity, the ability of workers to obtain personal stability, is an important ingredient in (re)producing power asymmetries in the labour process. Without a theory of control and subjectivity, Collinson believes we cannot explain the consequences of workplace cultural practices of struggle or conformity. Collinson, unlike the work by Reiter (1996), Leidner (1992), and Ritzer (1992), does not see labour practices as merely structurally determined, but instead he views workers as actively engaged in a dynamic process of creating their world and themselves under conditions of domination. Many sections of his book are organized around the various discursive practices male workers implement to combat their commodification and subordination.

The active process of workers constructing themselves under economic constraints is very important to Collinson and to this thesis. Collinson believes we need to distinguish and comprehend the strategies and practices workers use to construct a dignified self in the context of their commodification. The self that Collinson elaborates upon is not a rational being as assumed by many functionalists. Instead, he develops a post-structuralist version of the self as fragmented,

heterogeneous and non-rational; much like the post-Fordist economy. Individuals in this milieu construct identities for themselves by investing in a multitude of available and contradictory discursive practices. This can be juxtaposed to my study where the crew had to make sense of their reality though non-standard work practices and the irrational experiences of post-secondary students in a mixed-up world. Collinson concludes that their strategies constructed indifference to their domination; the games they played did not confront their underlying problem of exploitation.

Collinson, like Burawoy and Willis, allows us to see how individuals cope and actively experience dominant structures. In other words, he shows that resistance and compliance usually exist at the same time, and the dominant hegemonic influences that permeate male working lives serve to keep subordination and objectification functional. Collinson's analysis resembles Dunk's (1994) examination of how working class males' jokes and ridicule operate both to maintain the status quo and to challenge it. Jokes which ridicule men as feminine or subordinate (like Natives) helped to develop work solidarity; but the competition and denigration that was part of the male culture also hurt male unity through individualizing workers and separating class distinctions.

Male workers in both Collinson's and Dunk's analysis did create and resist, but their confrontational struggles drew on and reproduced the dominant ideologies and corporate culture that had objectified them in the first place. The male workers' beliefs in their need for material consumption and symbolic security can have the contradictory effect of reinforcing these insecurities and driving individuals further into constraining circumstances. Collinson concludes that the workers' occupational practices, in his study, reproduced their own subordination and exploitation and that this function could not be defined by just money and resources.

Collinson's study can be expanded upon to relate to the analysis of the crew. Coming of age in the post-Fordist era is seen by the crew as gloomy and unpredictable, and there is an existential

need to search for a stable identity and predictable set of meanings. One of the crew members stated, "I don't know what I'm going to do when I graduate with a second degree in Phys. Ed.; everything just seems so up in the air. I'm glad all you arseholes are in the same predicament; it makes me seem almost normal. It's good we share the same circumstances." Through controlling some of their work circumstances–like choosing their own hours of work or who they will work with–the crew meets their own short-term challenges and are satisfied with the immediate results, but the long-term uncertainty remains as do their exploitative circumstances.

The crew found themselves already situated in a framework where they were constrained from being purposive agents. This situation sees the crew as reflective beings who are dependent upon resources. Thus, the crew believe they are able to construct local immediate control in their lives even though they are living within acknowledged constraints imposed upon their natural and social time-space settings. Before humans become liberal denizens of creativity, they have already been born into a structured world. Cognitive control and worth are limited within the context of existing formal and informal social laws. Karl stated that:

> The situation we find ourselves in today is a jobless society. Work is out of style. The only reason we work is to pay bills. We work at two or three jobs just to get by, yet society doesn't need us all to work. Government just wants 90% of us to work to keep us off the streets. Take the hint, computers are replacing us. Salaries and benefits suck today, work can be boring for most, and advancement is a joke. But we're contributing to this. We have to decide not to work in shit jobs and take some initiative to do what makes us happy. I just don't know if I want to be the guinea pig.

Working It Out

The content and significance of jobs entail a duality. To begin with there is the organizational requirements and the technology implemented in the job. Moreover, there is the social-subjective requirement of the workers. Capitalist organizations are concerned with the first aspect. The need to maximize profits and reduce labour costs is paramount. A broad literature exists on the capitalist imperative, the tenants of bureaucratic control, the technological control of jobs (Ritzer, 1992; Menzies, 1996; Postman, 1996). Technology is used to speed up production and reduce labour error and cost. The goal of capitalist organization is structuring work to meet the demands of technology, consumer "need" and corporate profit. The role of workers is seen as almost secondary to the technological imperatives of capitalist production.

As sociologists, union leaders and other citizens concerned about post-Fordism and the shift to a service economy are quick to point out, organizations like Burger King and McDonald's are a benchmark and symbol for jobs in our society. Not only have these organizations directly employed and influenced the lives of many workers, their impact has been extended by the efforts of many kinds of businesses in the service sector to emulate practices they see as central to their success (Leidner, 1992; Reiter, 1996; & Ritzer, 1992). Garson (1988) explains that work at McDonald's is so "systematized, automated, and closely monitored that all opportunity for thought, initiative, and human contact, let alone self development has been removed" (Leidner, 1992:47). In these organizations, doing things on your own or doing things different means doing things wrong. As Ray Kroc, the CEO of McDonald's explains, the key to success in the service sector revolves around the ability of management to "provide techniques of preparation that operators would accept because they were superior to methods they could dream up themselves" (Leidner, p. 48). Workers are seen as docile bodies in this process, and their thoughts and ideas are cast off as "non-productive."

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separate lives. By this I mean to say that as many loggers at the end of the 19th century were young "farm boys" who left the farm after harvest to work up north, logging for the winter to "get by"–the crew are post-secondary students who leave university and college in the spring to labour in the outdoors to "earn enough money to help supplement OSAP and school costs."

The crew are living at home and working for Snake, sheltering from economic reality. They have student loans and are continuing their education. Their courses cost $800 each. They are "economic refugees," crippled by loans and a low-paying job. Choices are limited and control becomes blurred and championed in the local, the long-term resistance is at the bottom of their tool box and these tools may seem foreign to the young crew.

The crew's actions and choices are limited to their surroundings. The crew also realizes their constrained choices are not resilient but guided. Bill explains, "we all have the knowledge and skills to cut lawns or weed a garden. It's not fucking rocket science–you would have to be a no-mind not to be able to assess and do what needs to get done. It's common sense stuff." Thus, the crew see that since they have the skills they should control the work. Likewise, Snake expects the crew to do their work without the need for strict supervision: "Don't be calling me on my cell phone every hour asking me to help you wipe your ass. Use your head (not the little one). That's what I'm paying you for."

There are times when Snake has goals and deadlines that may conflict with the crews' schedules and demands. Snake believes he has to manage and foresee what needs to be done and budget time and resources accordingly. This may involve asking the crew to work overtime or to increase their output, as for example cutting 26 lawns in a day instead of 20. The crew, however, lay stress on their needs and negotiate daily over output and "quality over quantity." Quite often the crew has other obligations or considers the working conditions too hot or strenuous, and they are not

hesitant to "pull the pin, and finish up tomorrow." Unlike their lives as students where professors demand output and deadlines with little room for negotiation, the crew as landscapers are able to dictate many immediate conditions which allow for fleeting satisfaction and fun.

Production Control

Reiter (1996) details how a deadly combination of Taylorism and information technology has resulted in a highly-controlled work setting at Burger King where workers are under constant pressure to produce as much a possible according to a highly regimented system. The crew are not subject to these visibly structured laws of output and demand in their local labour process. For the crew is given a loose set of deadlines for the week. For example, a given week could see that there are 111 lawns that need to be cut; 15 trees and bushes that need to be trimmed; one deck needs to be constructed and two driveways need to be sealed. But the term "need" is used very loosely by Snake as there are no absolute deadlines looming over the crews' heads. Snake explains, "The laws are unwritten regarding output." Yet without output the crew would not make any money.

The crew may have 111 lawns to cut that week but there is no law or rule stating that a certain number has to be done each day between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. The crew could work Monday from 8 a.m. till 8 p.m. and then work Tuesday from 8 a.m. till 1 p.m. As long as the majority of lawns get cut Snake does not dictate the hours or days they should be completed unless a customer requests a specific time and date. Furthermore, the crew can decide if a lawn really needs to be cut that week or if the grass is not that long and could wait another week. This is a production norm in the crews' lives. The labour output was negotiated by the crew.

Another feature of the crew that increases their control over production is the close-knit ties and familiarity between each other and with Snake, who is either a relative or friend to the crew

members. All the crew members, including Snake, know each other and share similar interests and leisure pursuits. They have all laboured on similar jobs and this allows them to assert their limited independence over work practices and ascertain production quotas. Filthy describes: "Snake knows the perils of landscaping, and he allows for lots of leeway because he has been there and knows we need our space. It's like a coach who has played the game; they are much more considerate and knowledgeable, and the team responds accordingly." The crew enjoy autonomy and independence in their work setting, yet this flexibility does little to change their circumstances. The crew become blurred by their local control. This is a great virtue to many of them, as Karl explains:

> Here we are able to make decisions and go with them, good or bad we are thrust into deciding on something that is new. This is unlike life, where on-campus everyone is wearing the same thing, listening to the same music. They are no-minds. No choice. What we are going to see is a lot of losers and no-minds cruising the streets because they can't afford the latest computer or Calvin Klein suit, because there are no good jobs to give them money to pay for their needs. They will have no-minds of their own to control their fucking rage and frustration. Here we are forced into thinking and controlling mitigating factors that are beyond our control. We think and do. This is becoming rare for those bag-lickers out there (pointing to a couple of men in suits walking down the street).

Making It

In Ontario we have witnessed attacks on workers and education by a government that, as one of the crew members stated, "is so noxious and loathsome in its fear-mongoring and crippling doublespeak that they make Goebbels look like an amateurish puppeteer." The future to the crew, which has been explained to them in humanities classes and liberal magazines, seems bleak and disheartening. The stories they have of working in retail and as telemarketers seem to have no solution. Yet through working in this job, the crew feel that although they are not able to escape the

"sea of changes" and economic constraints imposed upon them, their situation is relatively better than their falling alternatives.

It has been argued by sociologists like Mills (1959) that we cannot define a moment or place except through our own economic situation. Your work and job help you to make meaning, relieve you of in-depth thought and what it means to be human. This allows for the crew to, as Filthy makes clear:

> Push the body in extreme heat because we have a say, and this is still better than being told by some no-mind whose less intelligent than me to keep up and put on a positive demeanour–Fuck them–if I'm mad, I'm mad, I don't need this bag-licker telling me how I feel. Snake knows how I feel and he doesn't impose judgements on that; he knows our lives can suck and that's normal.

The close ties and shared experiences of the crew allow for each member to contribute some of their own skills and knowledge to the various jobs. Some of the crew are very skilled in fixing equipment while others are handy in construction or gardening. All the crew labour and help to complete the various jobs assigned to them. Sometimes a crew member will acquire new jobs and contracts for Snake through their own personal networks. Yet this person is no more important than the others who cut the grass or seal the driveway. Each crew member is paid the same wage ($8/hour); none of them receive any benefits or better working conditions. Because the crew are big sports fans, including Snake, they compare themselves to being "part of a team," and every man is expected to do his share and contribute. It is a real "lunch bucket brigade," where no one is seen as superior or special. Everyone has their turn shovelling manure or cutting 20 lawns in extreme heat or, in turn, getting to play golf with Snake while still "on the clock." Every one of the crew

members feels his jobs are menial and strenuous, yet he also feels they are better than other non-standard jobs of selling insurance or working in retail. John explains,

> I've got lots of friends who have graduated from Western and are now working with London Life or in marketing and they hate their jobs, they hate their lives. I'm going to wait it out, and I feel working with Snake is pretty good considering the other options. It's a means to an end with more perks than working at Chapters or Home Depot. Yeah, it's a mind-numbing shit job, but look at your choices.

Snake granted some autonomy and control to the crew members. Because of these circumstances, Snake tries to hire people he can trust--friends and family members. It will be shown later how these factors led to a tight occupational community and a convergence of work and play activities--drinking, ball hockey, poker and going out. The success of the business depends upon this loose supervision, and having a satisfied crew is paramount. Although materials, equipment and labour need to be organized, the labour process is not in a fixed setting. The crew and the tools and equipment move constantly throughout the workday to different clients' homes.

Snake is responsible for demarcating where the job sites are located, but he does not dictate the time or the exact direction of the work. Thus, on many occasions the crew could be taking a "fiver" (usually entails a 15-minute break) or doing a job that is not specifically listed, like cutting down a tree that is requested by the client when the crew arrives to cut his/her lawn. The crew is not subject to a strict routine. The crew does not respond well to Snake when he tries to be authoritarian, and the subsequent resistance usually breaks Snake's ardent rules. The supervision is not totally hands-off, but is more democratic, and the jobs are, for the most part, completed close to the weekly "goals."

Furthermore, the majority of clients whose lawns the crew cuts or gardens they tend, allow for the crew to decide how or if certain work needs to be done. In this sense the clients are comfortable with leaving the work to the crew's expertise. Billy conducted a personal survey during the month of July where he found that "91% of the lawns and gardens we manicured each week were left unsupervised by both Snake and the clients." The crew were happy they were able to influence decisions and control their work environment.

Theatre Of Control And Resistance

On a muggy July morning, Joe stated, "...have to know the blood and sweat of mowing 25 lawns in 35°C while suffering from three hours sleep and a hangover headache that would kill a small African child" to understand the crew's experience. In order to structure the work as a meaningful and non-degrading activity, the crew struggle and negotiate with Snake for control. It was stated by one of the crew members that "if Snake controlled the work process, this job would be as bad as any shit job. We would be reduced to no-minds and cutting grass would just be mind-numbing, monotonous, hourly work." The crew play out the work process with Snake. When Snake asks the cutting crew to mow 28 lawns in one day, the crew figures that they should only cut 24 because, as Kyle explains,

> Snake always overestimates our output. He tries to play with our minds, hoping to get us to think we're not doing enough and that he is not making any money off of us unless we cut some obscene number of lawns. It's a big game. He bids that we cut 28. We counter with cutting 24. If we cut more than this he would then expect us to be able to cut 30 lawns a day. That's not humanly possible with using only push mowers. Sure you could do it one day, but you couldn't keep that pace up. It's fucking draining.

Thus the crew try to reduce their outputs to what they feel is justified.

In comparing landscaping to other available work options printed in the local classifieds (i.e., waiter, vacuum sales, retail), the crew cited the flexible work schedule, autonomy, being outdoors, and working with friends as beneficial experiences through working with Snake. Most of the crew consider these features as major advantages to other jobs at which they have worked. For instance, Kyle states, "I like working with the boys, choosing our hours and not having some lick-bag telling me what to do all the time." The flexible work schedule seems inherent to this job as the crew does not have to negotiate daily with Snake over hours worked. Furthermore, the crew enjoys rain days as time to rent movies, sports games (like Sega-Genesis) or to go and play basketball at the YMCA. The crew uses the job flexibility to rearrange the work week to fit their needs. For instance, near the end of August many of the crew members will try to work as much as possible, up to seven days a week, to earn money for school. A few of the members would also work some nights as bartenders to earn extra cash.

The crew tries to block out that they are not helping to change their long-term conditions for the better. Instead, they revel in their short-term happiness and are subsumed by ideological and cultural structures of fun and entertainment. The crew know that if they complete most of their work at an "appropriate" pace, which they themselves negotiate, they will be able to work without Snake's direct supervision. Most people explain that they would love to be their own boss and to a partial extent the crew are. As stated above, the crew are veterans of landscaping work and share a general sense of confidence and knowledge about most of the jobs they do. For example, most of them know where all the clients live, at what height they like their grass cut; in what pattern they like their law cut (horizontal/diagonal, or mixture); how to remove a tree; or the proper techniques for seeding and topsoiling a lawn. The crew are all university and college educated, very articulate and social,

and are able to create an image of a "landscape specialist." Snake and many clients were impressed by the crews' academic standing. Yet their "status" did little to help alleviate their exploited positions within our capitalist system.

Crew Nepotism

Hiring by Snake is done through personal contacts. When Snake needs men he hires from the numerous friends and family members who have contacted him to work with the crew. Friends and family members do not need to give Snake a resume or personal references, yet endorsements from crew members are given extra weight by Snake. Snake says he looks for "guys who I know I can trust and I know will work hard when I am not around. They are independent, outgoing, fit and competitive. Free-thinkers, smart and active."

Snake becomes dependent on the crew in the spring and summer when clients' work demands are high. Although the job is in the "black market," many of the men feel Snake would not let them go or treat them unfairly because he is a friend or relative. In the same sense, Snake feels he can trust the crew and rely on them in times of need. It can be generalized that the hiring and firing process in an industry is an important clue to the level of autonomy of the workers in that industry (Applebaum, 1981:65). From that, we can see the crew are able to control some of their work practices because of their close-knit relationship to Snake. Their work is eased through a cooperative effort in an informal setting. The crews' activities are organized together and group membership and solidarity are important. Their cultural identity is a learned behaviour shared by the crew. It is learned through communication, both verbal and symbolic forms. It involves practical matters such as: where and what to eat; how to dress; or the tools and equipment that should be used at work. It involves their organization as a group so that each contributes to a whole.

It also involves customary usages for doing things, and the systems of belief that make these forms of behaviour–like playing ball hockey–seem like the right and expected thing to do. It permeates the crew's perception of society, each other and most importantly, themselves. Yet in this age of falling expectations, the crew are also happy just to have a job where they can work with their friends, and this in turn limited their demands for better pay or working conditions.

This thesis illustrates the necessity of thinking of structure (like the post-Fordist economy) in sociology. In understanding the position of youths who have or are in the process of graduating with a post-secondary degree, then, sociological sophistication demands that youths be seen as part of a structure of "reward" and "advantage" based on such things (but not reduced to) as age. This study illustrates one of the distinctive patterns in social life. It must be stressed that individual action does not exist in a social vacuum. Structures are existentially present in the experience of everyday life. Structures can play a central role in a person's happiness and are central to many daily judgments about life, work, politics and play. This in turn has implications for sociological analysis, indicating again the need for discussions on structure. When structures become a reality for individuals then their consciousness of it must be accounted for within sociological explanation. The crew in this study incorporate historical knowledge of structure (i.e., socio-economic and political) into their reasons for acting in their cultural realm. Within this, the crew share structured meanings (for example, leisure practices or job opportunity) which are required to have existed in order for their actions to make sense.

The work crew are angry and displeased with governmental actions and capitalist practices toward work in contemporary society. Complaints towards "no good jobs being created in the economy" and standardized and routinized jobs as being the only options comprise their fears and bitterness. They feel there is little respect shown towards post-secondary graduates in the Arts and

Science field and that government and big business do not respond to their concerns. Suspicions and uncertainty about their futures are a central theme around which their lives are constructed. In one sense the work crew are struggling to link their work experiences with a culture of resistance, but this resistance is silent and underground and carries little political weight. They do not identify with the many economically successful—those for whom they cut grass and tend gardens. Yet they still exploit themselves doing this in order to survive and make money. They feel that many older people have fallen prey to the manipulation skilfully engendered by Mike Harris' Common Sense Revolution: self-righteous scapegoating of the poor and underemployed, cynical blaming of the deficit on spiralling social welfare costs, and attacks on "cheats" and "shirkers," whereas the crew block out their own exploitation in order to make things more bearable or less stressful. Yet many of the crew pursue middle-class stability. In fact, the crew are growing up in a different world to that experienced by previous generations, including their parents. These changes are significant enough to allow us a reconceptualization of youth transitions. It is apparent the changes happening in the labour market which persuade some youths to labour as landscapers also force young people to negotiate a set of risks which are largely unknown to even their parents; this is true irrespective of social background.

The crew live the great paradox of competing values regarding work. They are dependent upon wage labour for their maintenance of human life and identity, yet they wish to be active agents who colour their own perceptions of labour and leisure. Instead of reacting against the structural constraints they feel the government and capitalists impose upon them, the crew have bought into the ideology that they must work to create their own circumstances and practices. This is shown through their working in the "shadow economy" and through their leisure participation in a ball

hockey league that is also run informally and "under the table" (which will be discussed further in Chapter Four).

The idea that employers and government officials should have to try to find a job in contemporary times with their qualifications is frequently cited by the crew. The only people who truly understand their predicament are the crew themselves. They have shared similar hardships and setbacks and feel they must rely on each other to help empower themselves. The application of their own informal barter exchange system exemplifies this reliance and value, but it does little to alleviate their doleful situation. It is believed that the culture of the crew can only be understood on their terms and in their words, through their real lived experiences. The "adult world of work" does not recognize these experiences and the crew's struggles remain silent in "underground networks."

The crew have been born and raised in a system where work is of the utmost importance. Jobs in our society help to define who we are and illustrate to others the values, beliefs and meaning that we hold true. For example, when someone asks you the common question, "What do you do?" it is assumed they are asking you what kind of work you perform. If you are not working it is assumed you must be in school, retired or disabled. If you are not in one of these categories, you are looked upon with disdain. Yet the crew also believe "there is more to life than your paid work." Your leisure pursuits, family and friends offer a way of life in which you can share and enjoy. The crew are uncertain and pessimistic about the future. They doubt they will find a good job, one that will not only have good pay and benefits but also allow them to work in a friendly environment and which allows them control and autonomy over their work process. Yet the crew are also hesitant to join in workers rallies or Day of Action campaigns as they question the importance and value of such events. As Filthy explains,

> Strikes and walkouts are futile, workers always bear the costs of these things and, for the most part, nothing is gained by them. Look at what Reagan did to the air traffic controllers. That set the benchmark; don't screw the system or you'll get squashed. What can you do? It's every man for himself.

It is valuable to conceptualize the rise of individualization at this point (Beck, 1992), for subjective feelings of uncertainty and risk are a significant feature of the crew's lives. With traditional social divisions having become more obscure, subjective risks stem from the perceived lack of collective tradition and security. Where subjective understandings may have been shaped by class in the past, today it is up to them individually to make their own decisions. Whatever choice is made involves risk, and it is you who is the author of your own misfortune. As the forms of social insurance in our society have collapsed—the social safety net, unemployment insurance and stable employment contracts—the crew feel they are exposed to a variety of insurable risks which they tolerate but rarely challenge.

CHAPTER FOUR

BELONGING IN INFORMAL LEISURE

Identity And Belongingness Through Leisure

What follows in this chapter is the recognition that the crew is not entirely "silent" in their experiences in a world without foundations and without guarantees. Yet their actions in response to this only celebrate the local and informal, and fail to give the crew long-term stability. It is the goal of this chapter to show that the crew, through their leisure pursuits, gain an identity and sense of belonging together, that may go beyond neo-liberal capitalist and hegemonic rule, but it does little to change their constrained economic conditions. This chapter will discuss how operating a recreational sports league, playing ball hockey, or drinking beer allows the crew to make their situations more tolerable and enjoyable, but it does not help them to actively resist the capitalist system which they find oppressing and unjust.

The crew's leisure time is relatively free and their activities demarcate what is important and meaningful to them. The rituals and representations of their leisure activities reveal what the crew believes is important and valuable to them. The crew, in both their work and leisure pursuits, interact much of the time with each other. Through this they develop a world of symbols and meanings which is expressed in rituals and play and which motivate the crew in all aspects of their daily lives.

This section will outline the importance of leisure activities to the crew and how these activities are played out. As Geertz (1973) points out, leisure allows for a time out from suppression of affective behaviour. The outcome of play reinforces sentiments of social unity and is both a template and a parable of life itself. People perceive some meaning and purpose in life through

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games. The study of leisure, therefore, can lead us into the deepest recesses of a group's culture (Geertz, 1973).

The Work Community

As was explained in Chapter Three, wage labour is a central feature of the crew's lives. The crew's culture is partially defined through their work experiences. The close-knit grouping of the crew allows them in work to organize how their leisure time should be spent and the kinds of cultural activities that, being both fun and meaningful, should be pursued. It was also shown that the crew actively filled the work day with play and games, constructing their definitions of value around their labour. These cultural practices converge from the work setting into the leisure activities of the crew.

With this in mind, I feel it is necessary to describe and reiterate the group identity and commonality that the crew share with one another. This is important because the attributes the crew share give meaning, language, limits and power to the crew. The crew forms a type of occupational community during the summer months. An occupational community represents a convergence between work and leisure activities among a group of workers. This implies that members of an occupational community are affected by their work in such a way that their leisure activities are permeated by their work relationships. Moreover, many people in our contemporary society relish their leisure time. It is looked upon as "free time"; it is the time of the day when we are not under direct control of the labour or training process, and we are better able to express and pursue our own wants and desires.

The crew view themselves in a similar fashion. When asked to explain the image they share of one another, the common responses were: competitive, motivated, strong, rugged, possess

knowledge and common sense skills. Snake's recruiting practices for the crew reinforce that the crew remains highly integrated, for he only hires from a "friends and family labour pool."

Because of this integrated work setting, the crew find themselves spending much of their leisure hours together in ball hockey games, restaurants, bars and each other's homes. The crew are good friends. This closeness is evident in their reciprocity, based on lending their trucks and time to help each other move; helping to landscape all their parents' yards; working on each other's vehicles; or being there to talk and communicate. For example, a barter exchange system goes on throughout the summer among the crew. On one occasion, Filthy, who is very skillful in the electrical and plumbing craft, worked at Karl's mom's house on the lighting and bathroom fixtures. It was informally accepted that Karl, who is a "good mechanic," would in exchange install a battery and alternator in Filthy's truck. These exchanges are common occurrences among the crew and are seen as both practical and expected.

The crew share their problems and experiences with one another. Strenuous landscaping work, dogged educational setbacks, uncertainty in their future, and watching and participating in sports are all common elements among the crew. The men love participating in "shit talk" which involved telling stories in a humorous manner of common experiences in which several of the men join in with their own variations. These stories help to cement the feelings of togetherness among the crew. It creates a sense of cohesiveness and belonging, articulating values and ideas which they unconsciously share. This identity and belongingness can best be brought out in the leisure activities of the crew. It must be underlined that their leisure pursuits are not costly and are often considered "informal," but these local pursuits also limit the crew from organizing with others to resist or strike against the capitalist system about which they often talk.

The Leisure Of The Crew

The necessity of wage labour is always present, yet the crew routinely interrupt their work to pursue leisure. The crew have a number of leisure pursuits. In terms of value and hours spent on a given activity, watching and playing sports, gambling and going to pubs or bars are the most important. As among many young male adults, these activities help symbolize their identity and constitute deep emotional and intellectual commitments.

For example, the crew will postpone or quit working on a given day in order to play a game of pick-up basketball, lift weights or go for a swim. It is not unusual for the crew, after they stop working for the day, to go out for an inexpensive dinner together. They will frequently go to a local sports bar and grill to eat cheap "two for one" meals and watch The Sports Network. After dinner, if the crew is not going to play ball hockey (as I will explain later), they may go to Karl's or Bruno's house (whose parents are at their cottage for most of the summer) to play poker and gamble. The TV is usually turned on and left in the background of the poker game. The crew will watch WWF Wrestling, baseball, football, boxing and even soccer. As one of the crew says, "Ah, for Christ sake, just leave it on TSN. Any sports are better than those homo programs they always show on TV." Willis (1984) can help explain the crew's behaviour in trying to obtain identity and meaning in their environment. He states (1984:13):

> The disappearance of work and the wage is likely to produce a very
> particular crisis for the traditional masculine sense of identity and
> meaning....One way for young men to resolve their gender crisis may
> be an aggressive assertion of masculinity and masculine style for its
> own sake.

The crew are not serious in their poker games but use the time to interact, relax and enjoy themselves on their terms. They do not play for "big money" but instead set five dollar limits on the

games and usually quit before any one person "goes too much into debt," for most of the crew share similar economic constraints and do not enjoy losing money or taking too much from their friends. The crew will not consume alcohol on these nights or on the other "off nights" where they just "hang out" watching TV or renting movies.

Social drinking is an important part of their life though, as the crew are single and have free time to "go out." Their drinking activities follow a regular pattern which is related to their social activities. Monday, Wednesday and Thursday nights the crew play ball hockey and the majority of them go out to a pub and then a bar afterwards. The majority of the crew also go out on Saturday nights as many of them take Sunday as their day off from work. Alcohol consumption was a social activity for the crew' none of them would sit at home by themselves drinking a box of beer. The crew do not drink to enjoy the aesthetic quality of beer and liquor or the healthful benefits of drinking a glass of red wine daily.

Going out drinking on a Saturday night is a group activity for the crew. Although there are a variety of bars in Kingston, the crew usually only frequent a few establishments. After leaving one of the guy's parents' house, the crew will attend an informal pub to "quaff" and "pile back" booze for a few hours. Between 1:00 a.m. and 1:30 a.m., the crew will venture across the street to a more formal dance bar to "scout out the snarf" and see if they can pick up a girl that night.

The most popular and talked about leisure pursuits of the crew is participating in sports. The crew have all been considered jocks or athletes most of their lives and the thrill of competition and being with the boys strengthens their identities. All eight members of the crew participated in organized high school sports and competitive sports leagues. Furthermore, they all were or are active members of a varsity sports team in university or college. Their lives have always revolved around playing games, symbolizing the importance of sport to the crew.

Yet it should also be noted that the crew's activities are constrained by budget realities. For example, most of the crew were involved in golf quite seriously (six had club memberships as children) when they were younger. But as they have come of age, gone off to university/college, and incurred debts; and their parents have divorced, retired, or been victimized by "de-industrialization"; the crew can no longer afford to participate in this costly activity. As Filthy explains,

> We used to golf five days a week during the summers of grade nine, ten and eleven. Me, Rickey, Joey, Karl and Dan. Shit, those were good times. But look, I haven't golfed more than twice a summer for the last three years. It's too expensive. I can't afford it; none of us can at twenty bones a round.

In other words, the crew's leisure pursuits are limited and they must construct their own activities around what they can afford.

Ball Hockey

From the beginning of May until the end of August the crew participate in playing ball hockey. The league in which they play is organized by me and another crew member. The league has six competitive teams consisting of between 15 to 20 men on each team, all 19 years of age or older. Every Monday, Wednesday and Thursday throughout the summer The Jock Harty Arena on Queen's University Campus hosts three games a night, and the rink becomes alive with "ball hockey fever."

The Limestone City Senior Men's Ball Hockey League was formed a few years ago by three crew members with the hopes of providing the city with a competitive six team loop. They manage and run the league through charging each team $1,200 to play and help each team obtain a local bar or pub to contribute $600 towards the team fee. Thus, if the team has fifteen players, each man has

to pay $40 to participate. Furthermore, the three crew members obtained a formal sponsor for the league. The sponsor contributed $1,000 to the league. In return, the sponsor's moniker was incorporated in the league's name which was listed in the local sports page's box scores and twice weekly on the local AM-radio station.

The league, like the crew's jobs, is run informally. All money collected is not reported as income earned by the operators. Likewise, the refs and score keepers are informally paid and are usually members of the crew. The system of networking is also very valuable in this setting; such things as balls, the arena and team sponsors are obtained through friends; they are also subsidized through these networks and are paid for informally.

The Game

Ball hockey models itself after the game of ice hockey. Both games are played inside a hockey arena. The major difference between the two games is that ice hockey is played on ice with a puck, while ball hockey is played on concrete (what is underneath the ice when it is removed for the summer) with a hard orange ball. The game features many of the competitive ice hockey players in the city who return to Kingston for their summers off from their professional or semi-professional hockey careers. Thus, the game is very competitive and draws mostly skilled hockey players.

Some minor rule changes in ball hockey help make the game quicker and higher scoring. The game consists of two, 23-minute periods with running time, except for the last three minutes of each period. There is no red line, thus two-line passes are permitted. The blue lines are floating. This means that once a player brings the ball over the opposing team's blue line, the red line becomes the blue line—giving the offensive team half of the rink to use without the constraints of

being off-side if the ball goes outside the offensive blue line. Also, if players are involved in a fight they are thrown out of that game and required to pay a $20 fine if they want to play again.

The rule changes have the overall effect of making the game quicker while reducing rough play and fighting, but this does not mean the game is not intense. The players strive to win and arguments with opposing players, teammates and referees are common each game. The players become quite serious and combative and quarrels do ensue. One night, a crew member was involved in a fight in which he received a gash above his left eye. This prompted him in the parking lot after the game, to state, "Well, at least I don't have to go into an office tomorrow and explain my cut to the boss. Fuck, I think it makes me look mean... pass me another beer." The teams sometimes construct a rivalry with other teams but, overall, most of the players come to know one another and they are there to enjoy the game and not the "skull duggery."

The game is looked upon as competitive but fun. There is body contact but no body checking and, generally, the men respect the rules of sportsmanship and good cheer. Players are expected to give 100% yet they know the unwritten rule of the difference between "giving your all and being a pest." Being a pest is frowned upon and these individuals must carefully judge their behaviour if they wish to avoid being castigated. If a player does break the unwritten codes of sportsmanship and the game, like for instance hitting a goaltender, this player should expect to get hit or become involved in an ensuing fight.

The pub that sponsors the crew's team in the league is well attended by the crew after the games. On top of providing half of the costs to enter the league, the pub also gives the crew one free pitcher of beer for every two pitchers they buy. The pub also gives out free nachos, chicken wings and french fries in return for their good weekly attendance. After each game, one member of the crew's team is responsible for bringing a "box of beer" on ice to the arena parking lot. When the

game is completed, the team members gather around the back of someone's car or truck, drink beer and discuss the game or their day's events. These events usually centre around the crew's work day, as all eight members and Snake play on the team. The team consists of fifteen players which usually allows a crew member to obtain the "speaker role," and many of the other team members enjoy the crew's stories. For example, Jeff, who worked as an electrician, stated one night, "Your guys stories seem unbelievable. I love telling the boys at work about you crazy cunts. Your stories are legendary at the shop."

If one of the men forgets to bring a case of beer on their designated night, he is responsible for bringing two cases to the next game and is chastized by the team. This also maintains their motto "win or lose we still booze." On most nights after the beer is finished and the mosquitoes get too irritating, the team pile into their vehicles and drive to their sponsor's place. Most of the time, the crew go to the pub as well as a few of the other team members. Because Snake is the only one on the team who has a wife, most nights he heads home after the beer is gone in the parking lot. He is ridiculed for this.

All teams in the league have a bar or pub sponsoring them. Most establishments provide $500-$600 cash for the teams plus drink and food specials. With sponsorship, participation in the league is rather inexpensive for the uniforms consist of only a T-shirt. Other than that, most players wear a pair of shorts and running shoes. Some players use hockey gloves, wear a jock and use a mouth guard, and a few wear protective eye-gear, yet no one wears a helmet. Thus, the only other expenses are the beer fund and money spent at the pub and bar after the game. The game and how it is played symbolizes a slice of the crew's cultural existence. On the one hand, competition and strength are warranted; while on the other hand, being too eager or too much of a "hero" carries a stigma. The culture of the game requires players to know when "digging in and giving it your all"

is called for or to accept that at some points and against some players and teams "you have to relax" and be more casual. The game is fast and requires skill to be competitive so those who are not adept are encouraged not to play. For it is one thing to be casual and good, but it is a different story if you are casual and bad.

The crew's game plan and play resemble their outlook on life. They believe to win you need skill, knowledge, patience, determination, strength, resilience and a nurtured structured enrollment. They also believe the team has to control their emotions, and they have to work as a team, everyone contributing and utilizing their own unique gifts to the game. To be smart, knowledgeable, skillful, lean and mean is the ideal asset for a player. Just as in life, the crew believe you have to obtain credentials and respect to succeed. It is also agreed upon that ball hockey is a team sport and no prima donnas are required. Likewise, when one of your teammates is hit, you step in for him and "take one for the team."

It has been argued that the ideal man in our society is someone who is strong both physically and emotionally (Dunk, 1994:76). This rings true for the crew who struggle all day in the outdoors, but are frowned upon if they "whine about physical injuries or personal troubles." The masculine traits of control, strength and self-reliance are triumphed by the crew in ball hockey as in work and other pursuits. They feel the system has let them down, and the only way they are going to get ahead is through their own hard work and through networking with their friends. Working under the table; making money informally through operating a ball hockey league; or by saving money through a barter exchange network with friends enable the crew to obtain control and identity in their lives. The game exemplifies this.

The Pub

Going to the pub is a true cultural experience for the boys. Like the ball hockey game, the pub represents the crew's interests and captivates their beings. The pub is a true working man's bar--from the decor and atmosphere to the clientele itself. The owner and operator is a friend of the crew and is on a first-name basis with most of the patrons who enter the establishment. He is an ex-junior hockey player who was forced into "early retirement" because he sustained a brain hemorrhage during a fight with a goon who has since gone on to NHL fame. The crew enjoy what Joe states as "the atmosphere, ambiance and the feel of the place; we're comfortable here, it's our own little element, we get what we expect and like it here."

The pub was established in a real working class section of the city. It is surrounded by church and union halls, national and charitable societies, and claustrophobic row housing. The pub has a central location with the local nylon factory, the penitentiary, and the local college and university. In spite of numerous sports bars and pubs in the city, this establishment has an atmosphere and a reputation which is unique. The pub houses a fantastic assortment of the wild and the commonplace. One of the crew describes it as an "urban jungle, with people of all walks of life. The place is confusing, disturbing and hard to figure out, yet it has a welcoming appeal and an odd attractiveness that makes you want to go."

The bar is located as an island in the middle of the room. Around the island bar are stools that always seem occupied by men telling work or sport stories. The room is crudely furnished with a cluster of picnic tables and long wooden benches. The floors are littered with empty peanut shells. At the east end of the room there are two pool tables which are always in use. The island bar is rectangular and has four TV screens on each side. A big screen is set up on the wall at the west end

of the pub. Most of the patrons who are not playing pool can be caught glaring at the hockey, baseball, football, boxing or wrestling that is constantly on the screen.

Behind the island bar a general assortment of beer and hard liquor surround the quick-witted and popular owner. A giant bottle of pickled eggs is a centrepiece. The owner will allow any man, woman or child to drink free for the night if they can match his record of eating four eggs in under twenty seconds. He is an imposing figure and few patrons ever get out of line.

The pub has a special type of patron. It is aptly referred to as "the old boys club." The clientele is made up of mostly sports-oriented, working men. Prison guards, general tradesmen and factory workers are the main occupants. The pub also attracts the "grubs and riff-raff" of the city who live a life of poverty and casual employment. The patrons trade labour stories, sports gossip and trivia with each other. They also come to network and find out about work and new jobs opening up. The pub is often the butt of the more self-respecting conservative people of the city and rarely has a "professional" entered this domain.

For the crew, the pub holds "attractions" beyond the comforts and bargain-priced food and drink. The pub is rich in recreational activity. Gambling, pool tournaments, sports trivia and drinking and eating games are all exhibited in the pub. Sports memorabilia and local sport celebrities' pictures hang from the walls and two waitresses, wearing male-crowd-pleasing outfits, also keep the men busy. The patio is also popular among the many sports teams who are sponsored by the pub. More long wooden tables are set up out there and large teams clutter the deck in hopes of wetting their thirsts with cheap beer and catching a cool breeze.

The crew seem driven by the urge to feel at ease in space, even if only fleetingly. This desire to be in accord with the group rather than exposed among total strangers, to feel an affinity with a place and the people within it, though not necessarily a sense of unity—to feel an identification with

them and the social situation–is seen as integral to the experience of other social situations. Moreover, one can think of numerous spaces where this togetherness might be experienced–sporting events, festivals, concerts–and the pub can be construed as one of these places for the crew. A shared definition of the situation–an ethos–has developed for the crew. The emergence of this crew ethos, in and through the experience of the public, highlights the notion that when the crew come together they feel they have temporarily lost their individual identities and are instead part of a collective subject. The pub offers an escape route (albeit an ephemeral one) from the stresses of the post-Fordist economy which offers no guarantees and provides few opportunities.

The crew quest for a release from "civilizing influences"; a temporary escape from obligations–both self and structurally imposed. For example, after downing several pitchers of beer and plates of nachos and wings at the pub, the crew engages in dressing room behaviour and talk and tries to take in as much of the atmosphere as they can. At the pub after a ball-hockey game in mid-July, the crew were all howling over a now legendary story about Filthy, which demonstrated the crew's furtive appeal. The past weekend, Filthy drank so much that he passed out in a park while walking to his brother's house from the pub after it closed. Filthy awoke to a police officer shaking him and asking him his name. It seems that while Filthy was unconscious, someone stole his wallet, his ring, the shoes he was wearing and his baseball cap. Others found this story sad and frightening, yet the crew found it hilarious, and it was a symbol of their existence or it provided a focus around which group boundaries can be drawn.

Stories of control and self-triumph are echoed throughout the pub by men who all seem friendly and familiar to one another. The patrons come here to share in a mastery over the forces which dominate their lives outside the pub's doorway. Inside, the rights of the working man always win. The men all complain about Mike Harris, Chretien and their local bosses. Many of the patrons

are severely affected by downsizing and deindustrialization in this post-Fordist era. The unwillingness of the public and private agencies to provide them adequate jobs and relief systems attract the attention of the pub's clientele. All of them share a common understanding of the social problems of contemporary times.

Some of the crew members, like many of the patrons of the pub, obtained casual employment through their networking with everyone in the place. Many of the patrons need different work done and they look to each other first and foremost. For example, two of the crew members laboured at one of the patron's house for two consecutive weekends helping the man construct his basement into an apartment that he could rent out to students for extra income. The pub is the "resting place" for all types of labourers and is an ideal place to learn and obtain casual employment.

Further, on occasion, the crew will attend a "club" for a post-pub experience, usually between the hours of 1:00 and 2:00 a.m. The club experience is a total experience--an encounter of mind and body. The practices of attending a club involve specific ways of doing things, skills, customs, and competence with respect to certain bodily practices (dancing, dress, poise, and so on). In addition, attending a club involves massive stimulation of the senses and emotions. The consumption of the club experience is socially performed and both exceptionally sensuous and sensual. The experience of attending a club can be seen as a performance. The lights (or darkness), the music, the alcohol, the practices of dancing, and the proximity of the audience all add to its intensity.

The darkness in some club situations is an important variable. An individual's use of space changes as they lose sight of others (Goffman, 1971) and while the visual is essential in the club experience, the illegibility of darkness functions as a kind of inverse form of visuality--facilitating escape. Thus, although in some ways "clubbing" resembles other less lively social spaces, associated with notions of the crowd, regimes of bodily practice and rules of interaction, it can also

offer respite from these same structurings—"an-other" space in between the ordering of the outside and that of the club itself.

Moreover, the loud music present in some club experiences can effect the obliteration of the aural outside of the music. The central notion seems to be that the clubbers temporarily (though semi-consciously, intentionally) forget aspects of their arduous existence and experience a state of inward emigration. Their individual senses of identity become (temporarily) less significant than the nature of the situation in which they immerse themselves. The following short vignette traces how the crew experience a club.

On a breezy August night around 1:00 a.m., the crew pounded back their last drinks at the pub and headed down the street to the dance club that sponsored the league; 1:30 a.m. was the start of the bikini contest and the crew were excited. One of the crew stated, "Look at us, we're grown men, yet we're giggling like ten-year old boys who are just about to read their first skin mag."

When the crew entered the club they began their ritual of playing the odds/even game to see who buys the round of drinks. The odds/even game entailed a group gathering in a circle and at the count of three they would open up their fists and extend one to five digits. The "odd man out" would have to buy the round of drinks. At the dance club, the crew received free rounds of drinks and bar shooters. The drinks were always only a $1.50 on week nights. One of the crew stated, "You're forced to drink here, not only do they give us free drinks, but when they charge us, it's less than what you pay for bottled water." The crew experienced the laser light show, dry ice, dark setting and ear-pounding dance music of the club. In addition, they continually find themselves here at last call because of their desire to see the opposite sex. As Rick explained, (as we were all eating poutine in a diner after the bar),

...the fuck-ups that ooze into the 'puss dome' make me sick. But I gotta admit, I love the girls. Did you see that one wearing the black bra top? Man would I like a piece of that. I mean we work all day with each other and sure you guys are cute, but I do need to see some tits. I guess you have to bite the bullet and take the good with the bad. Take one for the team in hopes of getting lucky. It's a pretty spooky place but it's what we make of it that counts. You gotta make the best hand out of the cards you draw.

Sexism is enlivened through the crew's experiences. Sexism as a concept highlights the overlapping, juxtaposition, and contiguity of the crew's ideologies. The central characteristic among the crew's sexist behaviour and ideas is the mistaken postulation of natural divisions between men and women which are seen as inherent and universal. These divisions are presented as inevitable determinants of social organization. Therefore, certain institutions and processes are presented as timeless and unalterable, and those who advise the contrary are seen to wish to reverse the irreversible, or worse. This is a secularized version of divine will: the idea of God is replaced by the idea of Nature. A power independent of human beings is represented and believed as a determinant of social relations.

Real biological characteristics are identified as absolute differences by the crew. These differences are associated in a deterministic manner with a number of additional (real and constructed) biological and cultural characteristics in order to identify two different categories of human beings—men and women. The differences of sex satisfy the construction of gender. Femininity and masculinity are represented as a collection of essentially different qualities inherent in women and men, from which conclusions are then drawn about their respective, differential participation in economic and political activities. Moreover, gender is a social construction (Barrett, 1980:84) by which men and women are represented as naturally different categories of person. Sexist arguments additionally claim that these constructed differences explain and justify the

different and inferior treatment of women. This helps to explain some of the sexist experiences of the crew.

The crew have developed ideas about jobs and the role of women, both formally and informally. Informal information has been obtained through family, friends, teachers, and their own observations. Formal information is gained from career advisors, courses, and the media. The crew have developed gender expectations about the kinds of work men and women are "suited" to and the kind of characteristics they will display as workers. For example, the crew believe that only men can perform their occupational duties.

Moreover, sexism is articulated through the biological capacity of women to bear children. The significance of this capacity has served to exclude women from a wide range of economic and political activity. One consequence of this exclusion has been to represent women as sexual objects and breeding machines. In particular, the crew enjoy and reproduce this notion through participating in "pelt crawls" and female bikini contests.

In addition, the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production depends upon the continuous and successful allocation of people to the various sites within economic relations, the number and nature of which are determined by the accumulation process. This is the context in which sexist inclusionary and exclusionary practices occur.

The crew, with only their labour power to sell, feel they have few choices other than to enter the labour market within which they attempt to seek out the most favourable conditions. The demand for labour power is the central structural determinant of this allocative process, determining the scope for signification and exclusion. Thus, wherever the supply of labour exceeds demand within the labour market, exclusion occurs.

Furthermore, the insecurity of under/unemployment for the crew breeds fear which spawns them to do almost anything to avoid the horrors of joblessness. With joblessness rates for youths remaining high, there is always the fear someone will take your job if you do not make the grade. (Who can forget the 25,000 lined up when a couple of possible new jobs were announced at the Oshawa GM plant.) Competition for jobs generates exclusionary sexist dialogue and banter enabling the crew to feel they are superior to certain segments of society.

Conclusion

As young seasonal workers in the post-Fordist era, the men in this thesis performed tedious and low-paying work. Yet at the same time, they proved resourceful, exhibiting a tremendous capacity for tough work and a talent for enjoying life and each other's company even in adversity. In moving from the university and college classroom to the lawns and gardens of clients' homes, the crew encountered different social, political and ideological structures. The crew feel compelled to reorder their lives in this milieu and often are limited in the choices they could make. Their encounter with contemporary capitalism has involved a series of compromises; the crew's response has included both an acceptance of the unfamiliar and a very limited resistance to economic change.

In other words, a degree of personal freedom is involved in coming of age, but it is constrained by the range of choices available, and there is a risky price to be paid for it. For example, the crew are young single males who feel obligated to gain money to become semi-independent and to feel productive in our capitalist society. The urgency of this aim is heightened by increased post-secondary tuition hikes (Statistics Canada; *University Tuition Fees*, 1997/98; *The Daily*, August 25, 1997). As governments have cut back funding for universities and colleges, they have allowed tuition fees to rise, shifting a larger percentage of the cost of education away from the

public purse and onto individuals. Students like the crew are forced into borrowing from the banks to continue their academic pursuits (about half of all post-secondary students have to borrow money to pay these costs), and they carry this debt with them into an uncertain labour market; periods of unemployment are common, and the incomes of the graduates are much lower than they were a generation ago (Statistics Canada, 1996; *The Class of '90 Revisited*; Beaudry & Green, 1997).

Consequently, the crew seek the quickest ways to make money under the table in the summer and the cheapest ways of getting by through networking among themselves and other friends. Also, the crew live at home in the summer. The consequence of low incomes, long years of schooling and rising tuition fees has prolonged dependence on parents for housing during the summer months. This means that for many youths, like the crew, the new realities mean a longer period of semi-dependence on their parents. Some have to practice a more ascetic lifestyle while they combine low-wage work with post-secondary studies. Many youths seem like economic refugees, distressed by their predicaments and willing to take on hard jobs just to get by in the short term.

In the spring and summer months the crew come together working and playing as an occupational community. The concentration of the crew in the work place and in leisure pursuits acts as a buffer against the constraining economic demands, and plays a major role in networks among other young people. While the inside of a Home Depot or telemarketing office becomes the work place site for many young adults, the challenge of heavy, outdoors jobs make up the experience of the crew. The seasonality of landscaping work means that the jobs open up just as the crew's final exams in school are coming to an end.

CHAPTER FIVE

ETERNAL YOUTH

Implications

Common sense is what many people think youths coming of age amounts to. In one way this may be true. For everyone is passing through a life course and we become conscious of this from within. This life course consists of growing up, becoming a "productive" adult and aging graciously–we hope. However, Descartes spoke with irony when he examined common sense. He wanted us to be skeptical, not commonsensical. The crew's stories have displayed that it is a mistake to discuss coming of age for middle-class youths as if it hardly merits a second thought. For each individual coming of age is dynamically unique. As youths, uncertain of their futures, the crew, like many other young individuals, must make choices while adjusting to the structured impediments which surround them. I have outlined some of the socio-economic factors (mainly the post-Fordist economy) that help shape the course of coming of age for many youths. It was also shown through ethnographic research with the crew how some individuals make sense of their contemporary environment. At this point it is necessary as sociologists to analyse the implications which arise.

Beck (1992) writes:

> ...a transition is occurring...from a uniform system of lifelong full-time work organized in a single, industrial location, to a risk-fraught system of flexible, pluralized, decentralized underemployment. The relation between family and individual biography loosens....Each person lives through several family lives as well as non-familial forms of life...and lives more and more his/her own biography.

The bully optimism of neo-liberals in our era spews myths that we live in a classless society and that if you "get an education" you will be rewarded. Yet for youths and, more specifically for the

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individuals in the crew, their parents' class positions may or may not shape their lives. This point is not a simple one in which past decades are judged preferable to the present. Youths clearly have benefits and rights today that would have astonished early 20th century individuals. Youths today may take for granted many answers to economic woes for which earlier generations struggled. Yet the consequence of various changes and transformations in our society have spun new and contradictory layers of consequences; the implications of this layering on youths of the declining middle class have never been clearly foreseen. The concept of "progress" is clearly problematic. Youths have come to face uncertainties and stresses that could hardly have been imagined by those before them, including their parents and university professors.

Between 1981 and 1993 the real annual earnings of men in the 17 to 24 age group, who were working full-time and full-year, declined by about 15% (Betcherman & Morissette, 1997). The differences between generations is greatly brought out in a 1997 study by Beaudry and Green which reveals a consistent pattern among male university graduates. Over the last thirty years, each successive group of 25 and 36 year olds, called a cohort, have average earnings considerably less than previous cohorts at the same age. For example, those aged 32 in 1993 earned about 20% less than those aged 32 in 1971 even after adjusting for differences in the business cycle. Moreover, the rate at which earnings increase with age declined with each successive cohort. What workers who are young today will earn when they are older cannot be deduced by using statistics. These are the discouraging trends and, if they continue, the current generation of young males can expect to have much lower lifetime earnings for their level of education than the generation which preceded them. When we concentrate on employment prospects in our service economy we see a lack of jobs paying a decent living wage.

The changing awareness of what it means to be wealthy or poor demands a rethinking of the sociological picture of social inequality. Declining earnings and incomes of not just parents but especially of youths have altered the coming-of-age experience. Almost two-thirds of people under the age of 25 who lived on their own in 1996 had incomes below the poverty line, compared to less than half in 1980 (Statistics Canada, *Income Distribution*, 1996, December 1997:180). For many youths, like the crew, this means they have to re-enter their families' homes for the summer months away from their university and college living quarters. Many young adults, like the crew, feel they have to stay in school and better their first post-secondary degrees in order to obtain a good job. Furthermore, many youths also delay romantic relationships, marriage, home ownership and families of their own while they stay in school longer and then are forced to pay off large student loans.

Understanding the causes of this uneven distribution and its worsening in recent years is inadequate. In the 1990s many theories are explored but few are synthesized. The standard anecdote to unemployment and low wages is prophesized to be education, which presumes (as does workfare) that the structure of the labour market is infinitely expendable towards good "middle-class" jobs—that increased years of education produce better paying jobs. Yet the nagging fear of the crew and many other youths seems to be that general economic and educational growth is accompanied by more jobs at McDonald's than at Nortel.

How can the genuine battles which the crew face over identity, happiness, and the "good life" be fought and, possibly, won in the midst of such pessimism? This volume of bad jobs and bleak prospects produces a sense of deep restlessness or anxiety. In our era of coming of age, many youths have a pervasive feeling of being left behind—either by the simple weight of the information that is out there or by only taking part in "mental masturbation" in classroom and "mind rot" while cutting grass. We are active beings but we are not free of all structural constraints. Economic conditions

can only tell so much. The crew feel they are being left out of the economic rewards and good jobs they once hoped for, and their actions are doing little to rectify their situations.

Many people in our capitalist society have goals and aspirations etched in jobs and callings which will in turn bring them intended satisfaction and maybe joy. I have sketched out a somewhat general terrain and journey that young people endure today as they struggle to attain "adult" status. I wanted to write this thesis, not only to obtain a Master of Arts, but also because it illustrates some of my thoughts about the pursuit of becoming a full-fledged citizen in our materialist world.

Since graduating with an HBA, I have, in common with many of the crew and other youths of my generation, sent out applications for numerous jobs, sometimes for just temporary work, sometimes sending out 50-60 resumes in hopes of obtaining secure employment. The year I took a "sabbatical" from university before pursuing my MA, I probably mailed out more than 100 applications to different firms. I have applied in Canada, the United States and even Europe. I have sought employment from restaurants to cruise lines to marketing firms I have never heard of until the day I sent out my applications, pleading with them to accept me as a worthy employee.

After receiving countless rejection letters my optimistic employment outlook was quickly deflated. Now, it is accepted that failing to obtain a secure job and feeling compelled to go back to school and earn another degree matters little if at all. In a world where people are homeless, starving and dying for want of food and shelter, having to work selling life insurance may not seem that terrible. Furthermore, few people may feel terribly sorry for a group of youths who are angry and frustrated because a particular kind of employment does not come their way and who spend their summers playing sports and drinking beer. Yet this anger and frustration is real. It may not be recognized by older generations or parents of today's youths who experienced very different transitions from school to work. Today's youths often perceive this process as filled with

uncertainty and risk. Many fearing the consequences, stop sending out resumes and shelter themselves from the labour market by furthering their education. Yet it is important here to stress that perceptions of risk were present among the crew–among a group of white males who appear relatively safe to an outside observer–even young people from middle-class backgrounds and with excellent academic credentials (from Queen's and Western University) frequently worried about failure and about their murky options.

The reality of the underemployed, overeducated young people of Canada is that the non-standard job is their future. As the middle-aged population continues to occupy all the "real jobs," as the universities continue to hike tuition prices (forcing students to work and prolong their education period), as the government continues to shore-up employment with make-work and "retraining," there will be more non-standard jobs than ever, and these low-paying, insecure jobs will not be reserved for the uneducated and poor. The fertile growth of non-standard work is already reaping a crop of middle-class youth whose education and upbringing have, somehow, given way to (supposedly) stalled prospects and uncertain incomes.

This uncertain part of coming of age is depressing enough in its own right to exemplify something essential about the risks of goal attainment and ambition. It must also be noted that although it may be comforting to the crew that they all seem to be in similar circumstances, it does little to change their perceived misfortunes. New forms of post-Fordist work have reduced ambitions, job security has diminished, and many young people have become locked into the service sector and are vulnerable to temporary employment. The crew, like many other youths, are not technically qualified nor experienced to become the "skilled" workers which the information society creates.

Sociological Vision

Capitalism and neo-liberal policies have engulfed the present apparently unimpeded by efforts to destroy them. Yet it is still important to analyze our experiences and to be concerned with the relationship between social analysis and practical life in the real world. There are no common sense solutions to the problems I have synthesized for the appeal to reason does not necessarily produce agreement or social order. While consensus may be obtainable on forms of logical discourse, we soon discover that what is accepted as "reasonable" depends upon one's world view. What roles can sociologists play in the coming-of-age challenges of youths? Obviously, more qualified research contributions than this thesis are important. The quality of basic *Statistics Canada* data is inadequate and we need to be more forthright about the consequences of their limitations. Attitudes about equality and inequality as well as class concepts require much more exploration as well.

One of the problems in analyzing the crew's circumstances is the uncertainty of their class location. This thesis has provided evidence of processes of individuation and uncertainty which characterize our post-Fordist era and which have implications for the lived experiences of the crew and other youths. And although structure such as class continue to shape life's chances, class structure becomes increasingly murky as rigid traditions weaken and neo-liberal values intensify. As a consequence of these changes, young people have to regard the social world as unpredictable and filled with risks which can only be negotiated on an individual level, even though "chains of human interdependence" remain intact.

Mills' idea of "sociological imagination" allows us to see some of the implications of my study. Mills similarly characterised his own historical epoch as a time of "uneasiness and indifference"–a characterization that has much in common with the ways in which the crew and

other youths in our society would characterize their lives today (1959:12). Mills' "sociological imagination" is pertinent here because he reminds us that if we want to discover the human process of defining and creating meaning, it is necessary to examine the interrelationship between the individual and society. In other words, we should not only be concerned with situations or only with action or only with institutions but with change involving all three.

Harris goes further to explain, "The aim of sociology as an intellectual practice is, through the study of social situations, to exhibit the relation between social situations and their outcomes" (1980:22). Thus, a mere description of the post-Fordist economy is not sociology. Neither is a collection of youths' accounts of what life is like for them in their summer jobs. Sociology is more than that. This thesis explains why the post-Fordist economy is so important to today's modern society and what this means for the crew in terms of their aspirations and uncertainties. The process of coming of age in the post-Fordist era is not smooth nor predictable.

Like most social experiences, youth experience is affected by both wider socio-economic, cultural and global changes and how each new generation of youths reacts to these. The crew's stories have represented a challenge to common sense perceptions of middle-class, white, male, university/college-educated youths coming of age, especially images of a linear, functional passage to adulthood. The crew's transition to adult status has been delayed and their circumstances are fraught with working-class anxiety and ambiguity.

For example, when viewing the once undisputed "rite of passage" to adulthood–leaving your childhood home–we see this transition is not as straightforward as past folk-images suggest. The crew face a murky future where housing and jobs are not guaranteed to them as they graduate from post-secondary institutions. Thus, the crew, like many youths today, are forced to live in their parents' homes during the summer or throughout the year. This becomes a safety-net feature for the

crew who are fortunate enough to have families who can give them some, albeit moderate, support. Many youths from the underclass or other marginalized groups do not have this safety net and are in turn doubly disadvantaged—females', ethnic minorities', and poor youths' lives are much tougher.

The crew have grown up in an economy that has prophesized "de-regulation," "downsizing" and "flexibility." The once rising aspirations of the crew have collided with the realities of the post-Fordist economy, risky employer practices, the uncertainty of unemployment and the growing "bad" service jobs. The long-term issue is not the prospect of a classless society but more deeply entrenched class divisions, for fewer good jobs are becoming available and many post-secondary graduates face the pressures to labour in non-standard service jobs just to get by.

Sociological Consequences

The crew recognize that their diplomas do not guarantee them good jobs. Because of this, they do not feel it is rational to plan ahead in the sense of pursuing personal goals. The crew are confronted with an outlook that includes a high incidence of unemployment and underemployment, difficulty gaining entry to career jobs within the next few years, and low incomes. They felt that the next couple of years will be fraught with disappointment especially if they tried to benchmark their career achievements against their parents'. The crew shied away from discussing long-term plans and celebrated the ephemeral instead. Moreover, they view collective action and resistance as an impotent tool to draw from their tool box.

For youths to overcome unemployment/underemployment and low wages, the standard antidote proclaims they should strive for more education. This presumes that the structure of the labour market is infinitely expendable towards good jobs. Yet more education does not necessarily equal obtaining a "standard" good job. Moreover, as the market for graduate labour has become

flooded through the rapid expansion of higher education, a degree may unlock but may not open doors especially into highly paid organizational positions which remain "earmarked" for those with the upper-class cultural capital and new info-tech skills, which are difficult to acquire without obtaining an engineering, business or commerce degree (Brown & Scase, 1994). This is not to argue that university education is worthless and that those from lower or middle class backgrounds do not benefit or enhance their market value by obtaining degrees. Clearly, the great majority do gain. Yet compared with only a couple of decades ago, universities have lost their positions as monopoly providers of knowledge in a number of areas, especially within the humanities and social sciences (Brown & Scase, 1994). For general economic and education growth is happening in Ontario, but it seems this growth is accompanied by more jobs as telemarketers than as human resource managers at Bell Canada (Swift, 1995). The crew, like other youths, continue to pursue higher degrees as, after all, what is important to students in the competition for jobs is how an individual is judged relative to others. Hence, although a university or college degree can offer the prospect of a middle-class "career" to a reduced proportion, there is little to suggest the demand for higher education will decline in the coming decades. The decline of bureaucratic careers and the absence of relative employment security tell the crew that a higher degree offers a better opportunity to avoiding long-term unemployment or a life in a low-skilled job.

Opportunities for youths to find paid work are linked closely to the post-Fordist economy. In periods of downsizing a significantly higher proportion of youths find themselves unemployed/underemployed. The drop in job opportunities for youths has been particularly marked in the 1990s and it has remained poor through the latter part of this decade despite claims by neo-liberal politicians that our economy is "healthier." Youths, like the crew, become frustrated and uncertain and fail to gain a positive resistance against these ambiguous conditions. They search for

relative satisfactions and, in this instance, "masculine" traits to gain a form of stable "identity," yet this is often done informally and is not recognized as legitimate in the adult world. If these trends continue there are both short-term and long-term implications for youths. In the short-term, through working in low-paying, non-standard jobs, their ability to earn money and pay off student loans is reduced. In the long-term, their ability to find legitimate employment and move into the "independent adult middle-class world" may be weakened by a lack of formal work experience, thus aggravating an already tough situation.

It is not a great surprise to conclude that the increased power and mobility of capital highlights the need for greater collective organization among youths. Although the resistance of past craftsworkers seems foreign to many youths, similar action is necessary today if young people are to mediate the "bad job" prospects contained in the post-Fordist economy. What has been analysed above gives us a deeper understanding of the dynamics of work, and the wider relations between labour and capital inform us that there is no blueprint for change but resistance is always possible.

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APPENDIX

Throughout this thesis I have used ethnographic material in an ad hoc and piecemeal fashion. My intention in this appendix is to produce brief pen-portraits of the individuals of the crew in order to provide the reader with the minimum background information against which to set the de-contextualized quotations of the main text. All the personal names are pseudonyms. Moreover, a major theme should be re-made here; over two-thirds of the crew came from familial households where the family income grossed over $82,000 yearly.

John, 24 years

Received B.A. at Western University. Currently living at home; completing MA in History at Queen's. Father is Director of Human Resources at a local firm; Mother is an Administrative Assistant at a local college.

Rick, 23 years

Received B.A. at Queen's University. Currently living at home; completing B.Ed. at Queen's. Stepfather is employed as a Plant Operator; Mother is a self-employed Designer.

Kyle, 26 years

Received B.A. at University of Toronto. Living at home; currently enrolled in Nursing program at St. Lawrence College. Father retired; Mother is a Social Worker.

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Billy, 27 years

B.A. completed at Queen's University. Currently enrolled in Phys.Ed. at Queen's University. Father is a Medical Doctor; Mother works part-time at nursing home.

Karl, 22 years

B.Sc. completed at McGill University. Currently enrolled in Education at York. Mother employed as a Community Development Worker.

Bruno, 25 years

B.A. completed at Western. Currently completing M.A. in Sociology at Queen's University. Father employed as a Grocery Store Manager; Mother is a Veterinarian.

Joe, 25 years

Completing B.A. at Queen's University. Father is a self-employed Financial Consultant; Mother works as a retail sales clerk.

Filthy, 24 years

Completed B.A. at Queen's University. Father is employed casually as an Electrician; Mother is employed as a Correctional Officer.